

Sowing Seeds of Spirituality in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Spirituality in early childhood is less concerned with ritual observance than with the gradual cultivation of ethical awareness, emotional balance, and compassionate relationships. This paper examines how toddlers develop spiritual sensibilities through observation and imitation of everyday conduct demonstrated by parents and grandparents. Drawing upon Jain philosophy—particularly the principles of right faith (*samyak darśana*), right knowledge (*samyak jñāna*), and right conduct (*samyak chāritra*)—the study emphasizes early exposure to core virtues such as non-violence, truthfulness, forgiveness, self-discipline, and non-attachment. Through routine family interactions, mindful engagement with nature, and emotionally regulated responses to daily situations, children begin to internalize ethical values that foster empathy, inner peace, and moral clarity. By highlighting the complementary roles of mothers, fathers, and grandparents as primary spiritual guides, this paper proposes a family-centred framework for nurturing spirituality that transcends ritualism and provides a foundation for lifelong ethical, emotional, and spiritual development.

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Early childhood spirituality, Jain philosophy, moral development, virtues education, non-violence, mindfulness, parental guidance, ethical living, inner transformation, compassionate action

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, spirituality is often misunderstood as adherence to religious rituals, external observances, or the pursuit of divine favour. Jain philosophy offers a profound corrective to this misconception by emphasizing that true spirituality lies in the purification

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of the soul through ethical living, inner discipline, and conscious awareness rather than conforming to societal expectations or pleasing God. *“In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.” — Lord Mahavira*

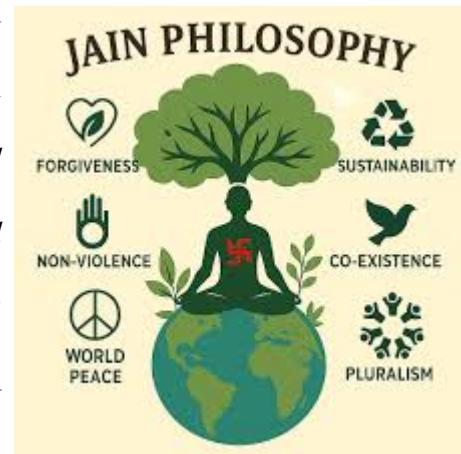
While rituals and temple visits may foster discipline and communal identity, they alone cannot transform the soul

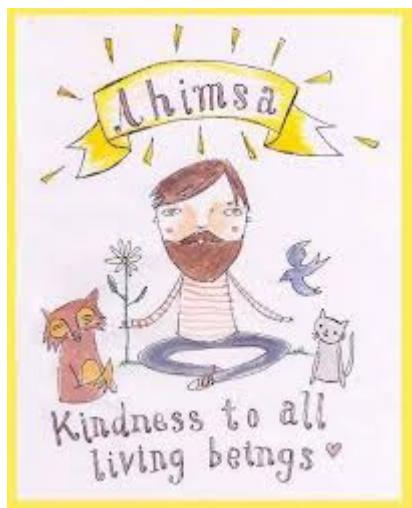
if one’s intentions and actions remain rooted in violence, deceit, greed, or harshness. Jain thought asserts that spiritual progress arises from inner transformation guided by the threefold path: right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. These principles align spiritual growth with everyday behaviour and moral clarity. For young children, particularly toddlers, spirituality begins when seeds of goodness, sharing, love, and kindness, are sown early. The Jain concept of *Das Lakshan* highlights ten virtues, such as truthfulness, non-greed, forgiveness, and self-control, which purify the soul, leading to peace and ultimately liberation (*moksha*).

“Attachment and aversion are the root cause of karma, and karma originates from infatuation. Karma is the root cause of birth and death, and these are said to be the source of misery. None can escape the effect of their own past karma.” — Lord Mahavira. This paper adopts a qualitative, philosophical, and reflective approach, drawing upon classical Jain texts, virtue ethics, and observational insights from family-based early childhood environments to explore how spirituality may be nurtured organically in the earliest stages of life.

2. Mother as the First Spiritual Guide

A mother is a toddler’s first guide in spiritual and moral development. Through her love, patience, and calm demeanor, she shapes the child’s inner world. Rather than enforcing complex rituals, she demonstrates values through her own conduct, living with fairness,





kindness, and respect for all beings. For instance, when a mother carefully guides an insect out of the house instead of harming it, the child witnesses *ahimsā* (non-violence) in practice. Over time, such small yet meaningful acts teach the child to value life and act thoughtfully, cultivating empathy, independence, and confidence. As the child begins to feel secure in both self-worth and moral grounding, Toddlers rarely respond to moral lectures; instead, they absorb behaviours through observation and imitation. When a mother consistently practices honesty, generosity, and emotional regulation, responding calmly to stress and sharing without expectation, the child absorbs these virtues naturally. Because young children are keen observers, it becomes essential for a parent to align deeds with noble intentions, creating a living example that shapes the child's character for life.

3. Father: Strength with Compassion

The father's role in early spiritual development lies in demonstrating how strength and kindness coexist. His fairness, respect, and calm demeanor set the tone for ethical living, reflecting core moral values. Fathers teach virtues like patience, forgiveness, and humility through everyday interactions, fostering deep inner growth. When a father responds to difficulty with composure rather than anger, he teaches *samata*, maintaining balance in all situations. By showing forgiveness, even when wronged, he imparts *kshama* (forgiveness), encouraging children to let go of grudges and cultivate compassion. When he humbly acknowledges his own mistakes and corrects them, the child learns that true strength lies in humility and self-awareness.

Everyday actions, helping a neighbour, expressing gratitude, or practicing restraint, demonstrate *dāna* (charity) and mindfulness. These lived values show children that

spirituality is woven into everyday life rather than confined to formal teachings. A father's example encourages the child to develop a peaceful soul rooted in kindness and self-discipline, illustrating how spiritual values guide everyday behaviour with sincerity and grace.



4. Grandparents: Continuity and Calm

Grandparents provide peace and reassurance. Their gentle lifestyle and storytelling connect toddlers to life's cycles and the virtues behind rituals. Through stories illustrating truthfulness, compassion, and forgiveness, grandparents help toddlers understand the deeper meaning behind ethical behaviour rather than merely following rules. Acts such as caring for animals, offering prayers, or practicing kindness in daily routines enable children to perceive spirituality as a natural way of life.

5. Creating Harmony in the Family

A child's spiritual development flourishes most effectively within a peaceful and loving home. Frequent conflict, emotional tension, or unresolved anger disrupt a child's sense of safety and inner calm. When family members practice respectful communication, emotional regulation, and mutual understanding, the home itself becomes a sacred space where virtues are cultivated effortlessly, beyond formal rituals. Nature walks and simple interactions with living beings teach respect and compassion, which is one of the core Jain principles. Observing ants, caring for plants, or feeding birds fosters coexistence values early on. Quiet outdoor moments, breath awareness, and mindful observation cultivate attentiveness and inner stillness.

6. Conclusion

Practical spirituality for toddlers should be joyful and manageable. Families may incorporate:

- Expressions of gratitude before meals
- Virtue affirmations: Phrases like “I am kind” or “I speak the truth”
- Small good deeds: Helping, sharing, caring for animals
- Silent reflection: Moment of quiet together

These practices reflect the Jain path of joyfully cultivating virtues rather than merely following rituals. When mothers nurture with compassion, fathers model respect, and grandparents share wisdom, toddlers naturally grow spiritually. They learn that happiness comes not from pleasing others or performing rituals but from keeping the soul pure and peaceful. Early spiritual nurturing establishes a strong foundation for lifelong resilience, empathy, and peace. “There is no enemy outside your soul. The real enemies live inside you, anger, pride, greed and hate. Avoid these and you will be free.” — Lord Mahavira

