

The Biographies of the *Tirthankaras*

The life stories of the *tirthankaras* of Jainism conform to a pattern. In Jain literature they provide the following information:

- Details about the *tirthankaras*' former existences
- The five religiously significant moments of their lives: conception; birth; renunciation of material life; attainment of omniscience (*kevala*); and physical death, which results in complete liberation of the soul (*nirvana*)
- Their parents' names
- The number of followers they had
- How long they lived
- The colors of their bodies (not restricted to typical human skin tones)
- Their heights
- The identities of the divinities that guard them
- The time elapsed since the previous *tirthankara*'s physical death and attainment of final *nirvana*

The stories of the *tirthankaras* also include unique aspects of their lives that especially demonstrate Jain teachings such as *ahimsa* and other ascetic ideals.

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