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French, Swiss doctors to study health secrets of Jains

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Ahmedabad: Jain community members don't eat after sunset, refrain from meat, fish and poultry or roots (potato, onion, etc). Ritualistic fasting is ingrained in Jain practices. What impact has such a lifestyle made on the community's well-being? Can such a lifestyle be healthy? These are some of the questions that have driven a team of French-speaking doctors from France and Switzerland on a study tour to Gujarat . The organisation usually studies local medicines and healing cultures across the world, but this is the first time that they have chosen to study lifestyle practices of a specific religion.

The team of 20 doctors, primarily from Société de Formation Thérapeutique du Généraliste (SFTG) (Society of Therapeutic Education of General Practitioners) in Paris, France, and Institut universitaire de médecine de famille (Institute of Family Medicine), in Lausanne, Switzerland, would visit Palitana, Patan, Porbandar, Santalpur and Jamnagar, apart from Ahmedabad in Gujarat, and Mount Abu and Udaipur in Rajasthan. For two weeks they will interact with Jain monks and experts and study in libraries of scriptures.

Dr Patrick Ouvrard from SFTG told TOI that the organization had earlier taken various medical practitioners to countries in Africa and even to some parts of India such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Sikkim to understand local cultures of healing and traditional medicines.

“This is for the first time that we have focused on a specific religion for the study, as we wanted to understand Jainism's philosophy on food, way of life and concept of health. The religion has a number of ethos such as respect to life, vegetarianism and practices such as always consuming filtered water that would have its impact on the followers. We wish to

understand the phenomenon as general practitioners,” said Ouvrard.

Dr Sophia Chatelard from IUMF added that in globalized world, it is better to get exposed to diverse cultures and practices. “Many a times, a patient wants to consult us whether it is good to also go for alternative therapy while the treatment is on. For me, it would be a peek into Indian practices and its health implications,” she said.

Jitendra Shah, director of LD Institute of Indology, said that the team had visited the institute on Sunday where various experts had talked about Jainism in terms of anthropology, philosophy, science, architecture and practices. “Impact of Jain practices on health have been studied by scholars in India, but it is for the first time that a team has come to visit us on the subject. They had a number of questions about antiquity of various practices and their impact,” he said.

He added that the team would visit a Jain monk in Junagadh who has conducted extensive research on the topic, and would also visit Gujarat Ayurved University to interact with their counterparts on practices such as ayambil and chovihar.