

Tirthankar Mahaveer  
A Biography in Verse

Mukesh Chhajer

Title: Tirthankar Mahaveer – A Biography in Verse  
Author: Mukesh Chhajer

Please send any comments, corrections and suggestions to  
[mchhajer@hotmail.com](mailto:mchhajer@hotmail.com)

Other books by author:

- Random Reflections (2006)
- On Life and Liberation: Essays on Jain Practices and Philosophy (2007)
- Silent Voices (2008)
- Samay Ke Rang (2010) (in Hindi)

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## PREFACE

The story of Bhagwan Mahaveer's life is well-known and generally agreed upon by scholars and followers of various sects of Jain religion with minor variations. It is described in Jain texts and many scholarly biographies of Mahaveer Swami are available in Hindi, Gujarati, English etc. Most of these biographies are in prose form. Episodic events of Mahaveer Swami's life have been described in poetic form in various Indian languages however, I am not aware of any such attempts in English language.

An abridged account of Bhagwan Mahaveer's life in a poetic form in English language is presented here. Only major events of his life have been included, most of which are universally accepted by followers of all sects of Jain religion. Where there are differences in the story between different sects, the story as told in Shwetamber tradition has been followed since I am mostly familiar with this tradition. To tell a coherent story, one has to make a choice. I hope this will not discourage others from enjoying the presentation.

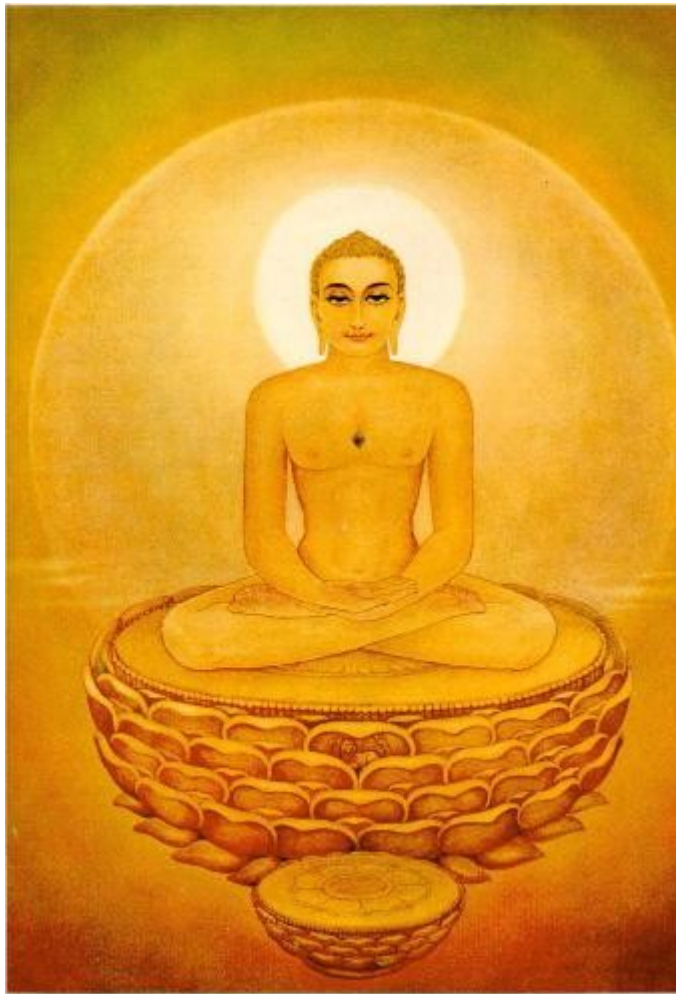
I would like to thank Jainworld.com for making available the graphic arts depicting the life of Bhagawan Mahaveer. The primary source for the story used here is "Bhagwan Mahaveer Swami" by A. P. Jain (posted on [www.jainsamaj.com](http://www.jainsamaj.com)).

Danville, VA  
June 16, 2010

Mukesh Chhajer



To  
the followers of  
Ahimsa



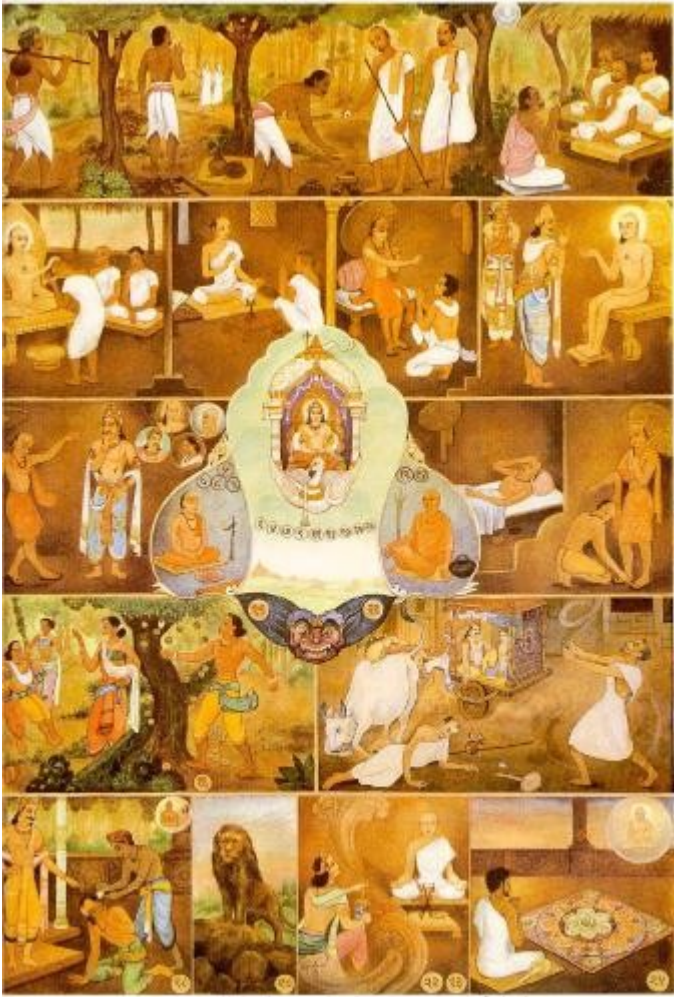


## **Tirthankar Mahaveer**

Suffering and pain is not new in this world  
Ego, jealousy, hatred and anger are just as ancient  
Passions grip and man surrenders  
But the desire to be free is also ever-present

Since the time immemorial, man has sought escape  
From the life of misery, bondage and unhappiness  
From time to time, we have been fortunate that  
Just such souls have appeared, on this blessed earth  
To show us the path, to set an example  
To inspire us to seek, complete freedom  
This is the story of one such soul  
Who showed us a path to enlightenment  
Through Ahimsa, Asteya, Aparigraha  
Through Satya and Brahmacharya  
By compassion towards all living beings  
Even those that cannot be seen with naked eyes

The story begins in the darkness of time  
But the light of compassion was still evident





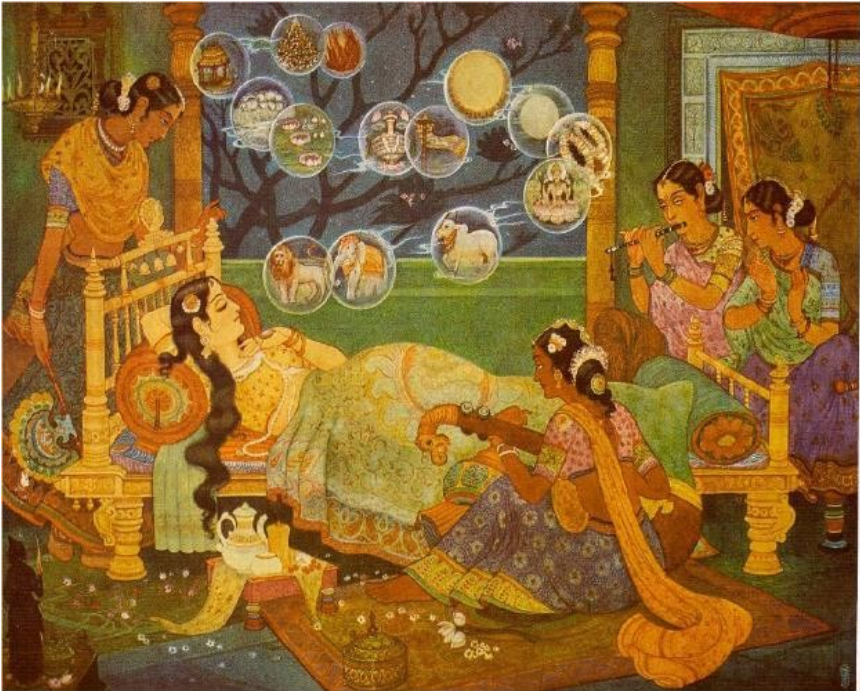
In a simple act of providing sustenance  
To wandering and hungry, forlorn ascetics  
Barefoot walking through the parched land  
In return, received the message of enlightenment

Hereafter, it will be twenty seven births  
Before crossing the threshold of supreme knowledge

After a stay in heaven Saudharm Kalpa  
The soul was born in an auspicious gotra  
Prince Marichi, son of Bharat Chakravarti  
Grandson of Tirthankar Rishabhdev  
First among the twenty four of this era  
Who brought back for suffering souls  
The science of liberation, long forgotten  
The Omniscient One foretold his destiny  
The young prince puffed up, with pride and vanity  
Thereafter he followed a circuitous path  
To start a cycle of karmic evolution

In the process, he traveled through many worlds  
As human, tiryancha, deva and even as infernal being  
The laws of karma are ever, unforgiving  
Before being born as Triprishtha Vasudev  
Brave and courageous, scourge of enemies  
Conquering three continents of the Bharat-kshetra  
To become the first Vasudev of this time cycle

Later born as Priyamitra  
Completed the conquest that was unfinished  
The world bowed to his wishes  
As he was hailed, Chakravarti



Birth in the bhava of Nandan Muni  
Provided the opportunity for severe austerities  
To purify the soul through the fire of penance  
As the time was ripe for the final appearance

Eons had passed since Prince Marichi walked the earth  
Society was in the throes of declining moral values  
Religion had become a way of livelihood  
Controlled by a select few, for their own benefits  
Rituals became ends in themselves  
Knowledge of the self, lost in the scriptures  
Women and shudras, reduced to mere possessions  
A darkness engulfed all around  
As everyone cared only for himself  
A soul to lead the way descended  
To show the path of liberation

In the town of Vaishali, in the clan of Rishabhdev  
King Siddhartha and Queen Trishla reigned, with even-hand  
Following the path of Tirthankar Parsva  
One night, as the Queen was asleep, being of heavy feet  
A sequence of dreams followed, a total of fourteen  
A Lion, an Elephant, a Bull  
Goddess Lakshmi, a Garland, the Full Moon  
Bright Sun, a Flag, Golden Vase  
Lotus Lake, Ocean, Celestial Plane  
Heaps of Jewels and Smokeless Fire  
Surprised and elated, she awoke the king  
In the court next day, the wise ones hailed in unison  
“O King, blessed are you and the Queen  
For you will beget an ideal son  
Fearless, mighty and strong  
Virtuous, courageous and full of compassion



Endowed with the supreme knowledge  
Who will one day rule the entire world”  
Overjoyed, the king and kingdom awaited  
When such a one will set foot on the earth

In the month of Chaitra on the thirteenth day  
As the moon was racing towards its zenith  
Nature awaited with belated breath  
And overjoyed earth filled with intoxicating fragrance  
The moment was right, at the stroke of mid-night  
Even the thrones of the heavens, danced with joy

The mighty Indra immediately pronounced  
“The Lord of the world has been born  
Let’s make haste, to pay our respect”  
The baby was whisked to the Mount Meru  
To be worshipped and anointed  
By devas of various heavens

As the birds sang the songs of welcome  
And the Sun emerged to banish the darkness  
The morning breeze announced the auspicious news  
King and commoners all joined in celebrations  
To embrace the dawn of a new age  
Arrival of the new born brings prosperity and happiness  
Appropriately named, Prince Vardhaman

Brave and courageous  
With wisdom and compassion  
Even as a child, he was fearless  
The fragrance of the virtues  
Spread through the earth and the heavens  
Even the Lord of the Heavens, once, opined



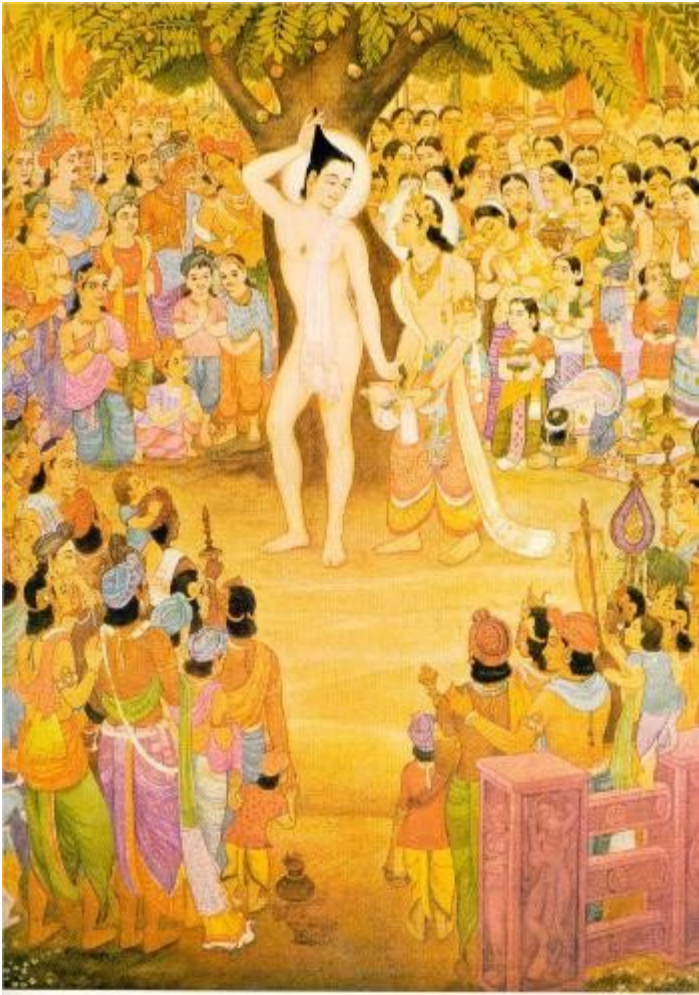
“There is no one better  
Than the young Prince Vardhaman”

That was a high praise for a boy of eight  
It did not sit well with one of the devas  
Who decided to test young prince’s mantle  
At once, he appeared in the form of a poisonous snake  
To frighten the prince and his playmates  
While other boys ran to save themselves  
The prince calmly picked up the snake, by the tail  
Later, he appeared in the guise of a boy  
Losing a race, to carry the prince on his back  
Suddenly to attain a giant’s form, only to be floored  
By the mighty fist of Vardhaman

As a boy, he was well versed in knowledge  
Even the teacher bowed to his wisdom  
Such was the perfection  
Of his understanding of the laws of life

With the bounties of the world at his feet  
And comforts of the universe, at his finger tips  
Even in the fullness of his youth  
The prince remained a mere bystander  
Obedient son and a loyal brother  
His thoughts firmly set on a distant goal  
Without parents’ permission though, he could not embark  
On the path that was destined, so he bid his time  
In meadows, in quiet contemplations

He sought permission from his distraught brother  
At the moment of their parents’ earthly departure  
With tear-filled eyes, the brother entreated





Stay for two more years, to lessen my sorrow  
Respectfully acceding to the elder brother's request  
Though his life increasingly resembled  
That of a perfect monk

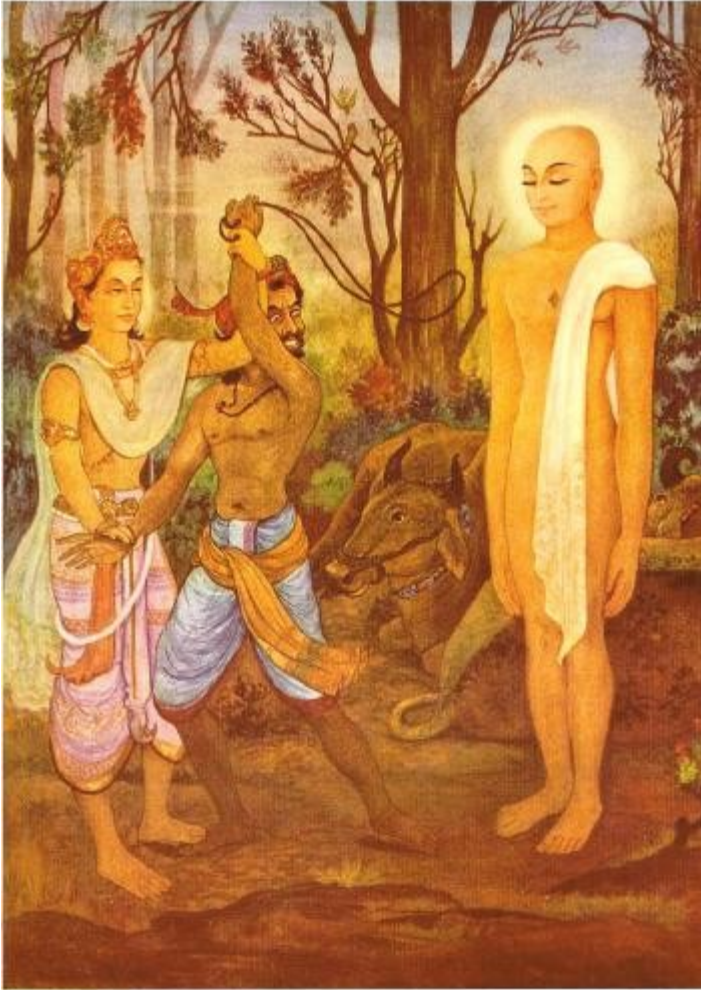
The time, at last, was upon him  
For which the prince had been, eagerly waiting  
Devas of the heavens arrived in great numbers  
To remind the prince of his, awaiting destiny

On the tenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Margshirsh  
The prince set foot in a palanquin, for the last time  
Followed by the relatives and citizens of Vaishali  
To arrive at the Jnatkhand, under an Ashoka tree  
Giving up all his princely possessions  
Pulled out his hairs in five fistful strokes  
With a single robe, an offering by Lord Indra  
And the utterance of the sacred mantra, "Namō Siddhanam"  
The prince assumed, the life of a wandering monk

From here on, he will adhere to the five great vows  
Of non-harming, non-possession, non-stealing  
Of truth and celibacy, in their strictest sense  
Life of an ascetic with no possessions  
The young monk now travels from place to place, bare-foot  
Undertaking arduous penance, undergoing many hardships  
At the hands of the nature and ignorant human beings

The boiling pot of karma was ready  
To test the resolve of the young monk, immediately

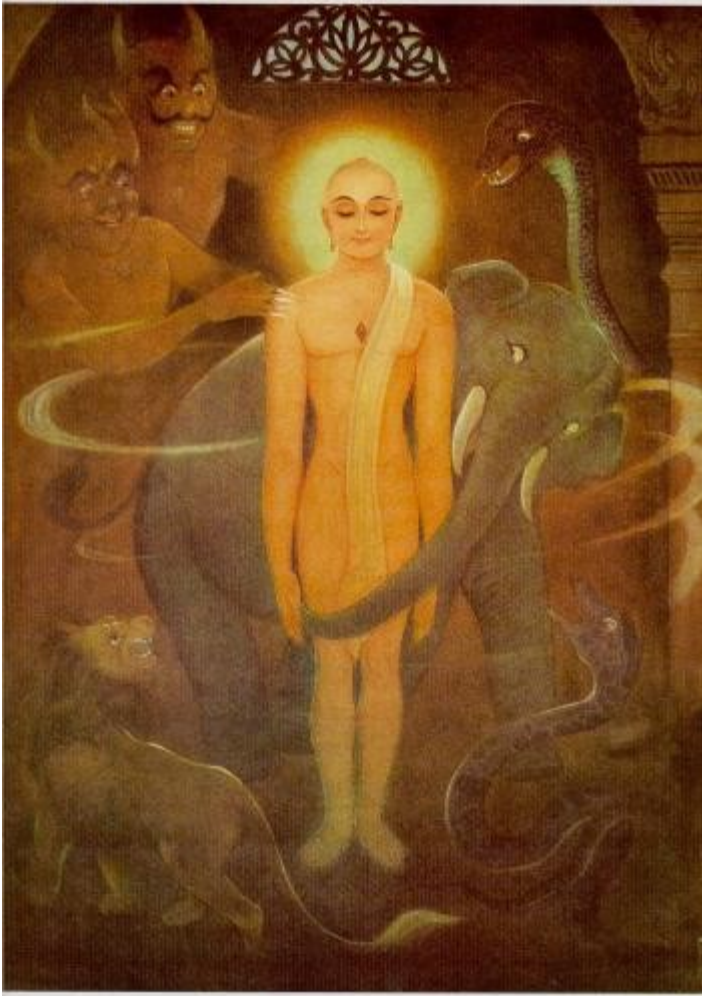
As he arrived near the town of Kurmargram  
A cowherd with an oxen, approached the monk  
Asking the monk to take its care



Off he went, without waiting for an answer  
While the monk was lost, deep in meditation  
Upon his return, with his oxen nowhere in sight  
And no replies to his incessant enquiries that  
Infuriated the cowherd beyond any measures  
As the monk was still unaware of his surroundings  
Eager to teach the monk a lesson  
The cowherd readied himself, with a rope  
A booming voice, though, froze him in his tracks  
“Stop, O fool, don’t make such a grave mistake  
He is not a thief but the Prince Vardhaman himself”

It was the Lord of the Heavens himself  
Who had come to the rescue of the young monk  
Realizing his error, the cowherd sought forgiveness  
That was duly granted, without any ill-will  
“Let me provide you with protection, O Lord”  
Indra entreated, “To save you from the foolishness  
of ignorant people. So you may proceed, uninterrupted”  
To which, the young monk replied, with a smile  
“Liberation cannot be attained, O Lord of the Heavens  
With the help of others, be they gods or demons.  
The laws of karma do not bow to anyone.”

At another time, the young monk arrived  
In a small town, that had been devastated  
By Shulpani, the lance wielding demon  
Anyone who dared to stay in his temple  
Was reduced to bare bones before the daybreak  
Undeterred by the entreaties of the village folks  
The monk made temple his nightly abode  
Already lost in deep meditation, even  
Before the demon returned

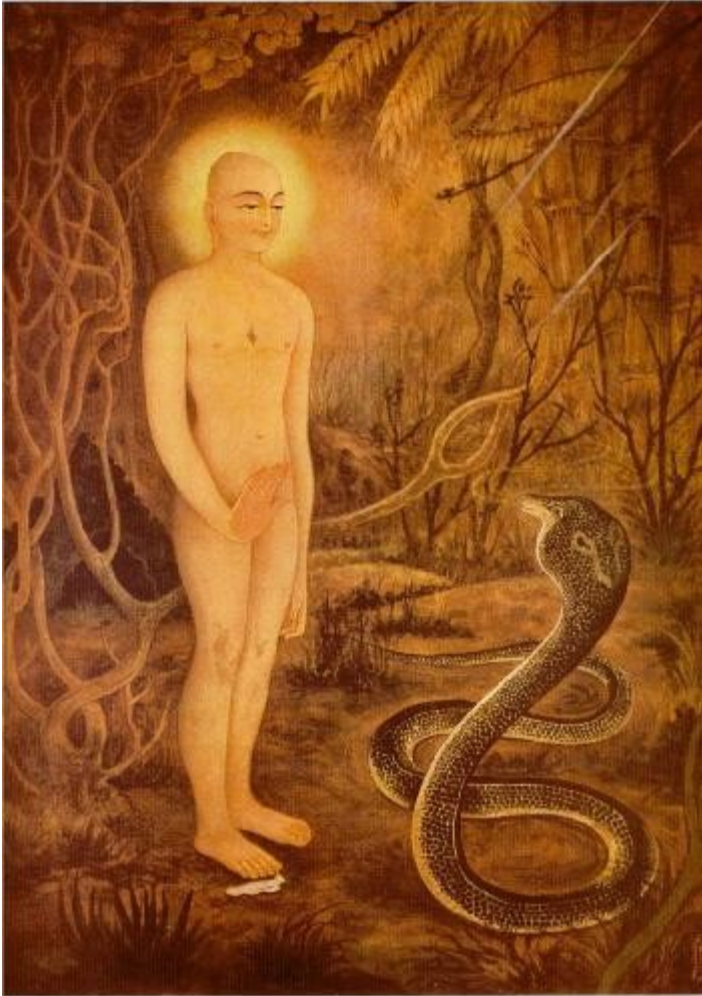


Bemused by the presence of a mere human  
The demon resorted to his usual tricks  
Goading, clawing, creating frightening noises  
It appeared as a serpent and a mad elephant  
Tossing the monk high in air  
Then proceeded to pierce through his body parts  
That the monk bore all without any irritation  
At last exhausted, the demon realized  
He is not dealing with an ordinary being  
Filled with a new awareness, his anger subsided  
Prostrated before the Lord, seeking forgiveness

Eyes filled with loving compassion  
The young monk raised his hand, in forgiveness  
Counseled the demon to be rid of the anger  
Be filled with love and compassion towards all

Later, the young monk moved toward  
The town of Shwetambika, the road to which  
Passed through the path of Chandakaushik  
A venomous cobra with deadly poison  
Even its hissing was enough, to kill plants and animals  
The young monk, for whom fear was an alien word  
Proceeded towards the cobra's abode  
Through the animal and human remains  
With calm and without ill-will  
For it was his wish to bring it, to the path of love and peace

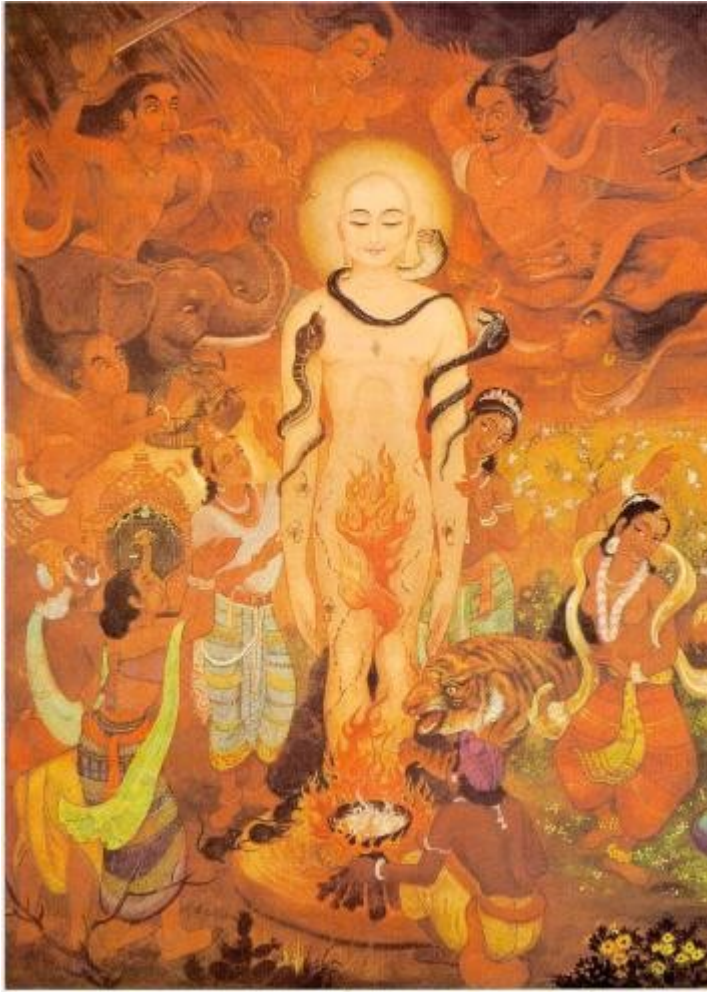
The serpent, surprised at the presence of a mere mortal  
So close to its abode yet perfectly calm, in deep meditation  
Hissed furiously, at first, but to no avail  
Next, it buried its fangs deep, in the young monk's feet  
As if paying respect



Three times it repeated and every time it was surprised  
As milk oozed out of the monk's feet  
Who still stood completely undisturbed  
With a compassionate smile like a blooming flower  
Confused, for the first time it was forced to realize  
The power of love over the power of hatred  
The monk looked at it with benign smile  
"O Chandakaushik, Rise above your venomous-self"  
Memories flooded past the serpent's mind  
Opening the storehouse of its past lives  
Revealing the source of its anger and pain  
At last, it achieved tranquility and peace  
It vowed to change its ways from the day  
Born as a deva in Sehasrar heaven, in next life

As the monk moved from Shravasti  
Gaushalak decided to follow him along  
Under the cold and wind of the night  
He had trouble keeping up with the Lord  
At night, they stopped under a banyan tree  
While the monk busied himself with meditation  
Gaushalak joined other wayfarers  
Burning wood to keep themselves warm  
The fire spread as they slept  
That quickly reached monk's feet  
Who was engrossed deep within himself  
After testing his resolve for a while  
The fire bowed and then retreated

In the fifth year of his peregrination  
He ventured into Vajrabhumi, with Gaushalak by his side  
Harassed, abused, tortured by man  
He continued his journey all the same



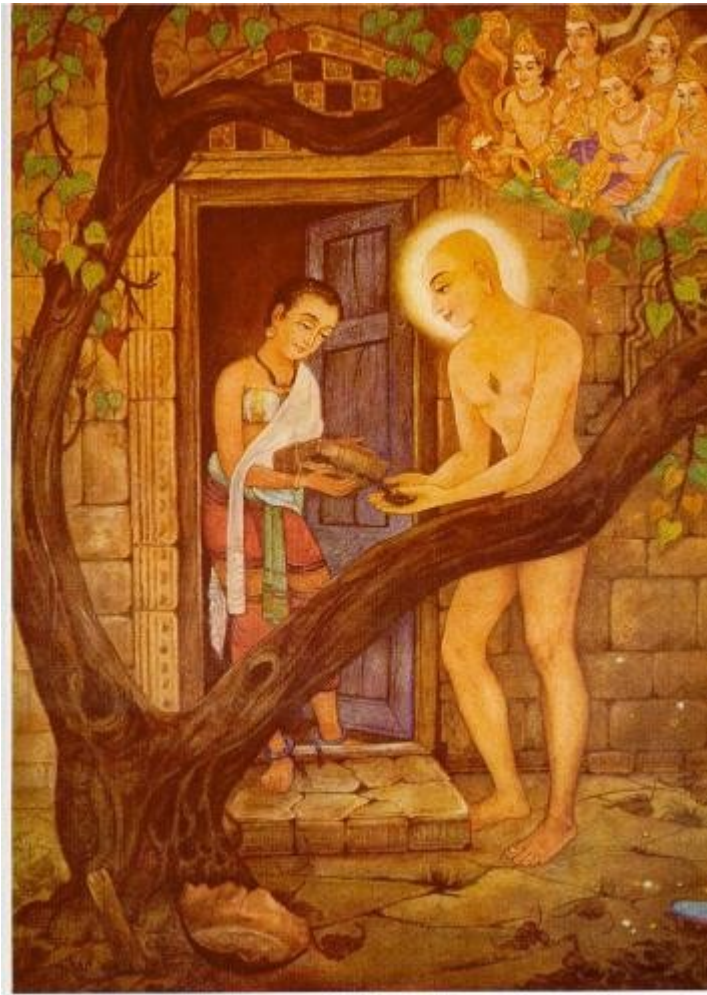


On the way, they encountered a Tapas ascetic  
Who performed penance in fierce ways  
Angered by Gaushalak, Tapas issued a fire  
That followed him as he cried for help  
As the Lord issued a pacifying glance  
The surprised ascetic immediately realized  
Seeking Lord's forgiveness, he bade goodbye  
"Don't disturb others" turning to Gaushalak, said the Lord

Tortured by Kataputna in the sixth year  
Only to be humbled by the peace of Mahaveer  
She accepted her defeat with humility and grace  
And so followed many others

A god by the name of Sangam, felt jealous  
as Indra praised Mahaveer's virtues  
In an attempt to disturb Lord's calm  
He assumed many forms  
Wind, rain, storm  
Stinging ants and biting mongoose  
Cobras and rats circled, followed by mad elephants  
He even tried, heavenly damsels  
None though could shake Mahaveer's resolve  
As his goal was to attain the Supreme Truth  
Sangam left with his head bowed down

There was a demon named Chamarendra  
Desirous to take on the Lord of the Heavens  
He sought refuge under Lord's feet  
Quickly then rushed to challenge the Indra  
When faced with the prospect of approaching death  
He ran towards the Lord to save himself  
A strange situation has now arose  
Vajra approaching the target, hidden under Lord's feet



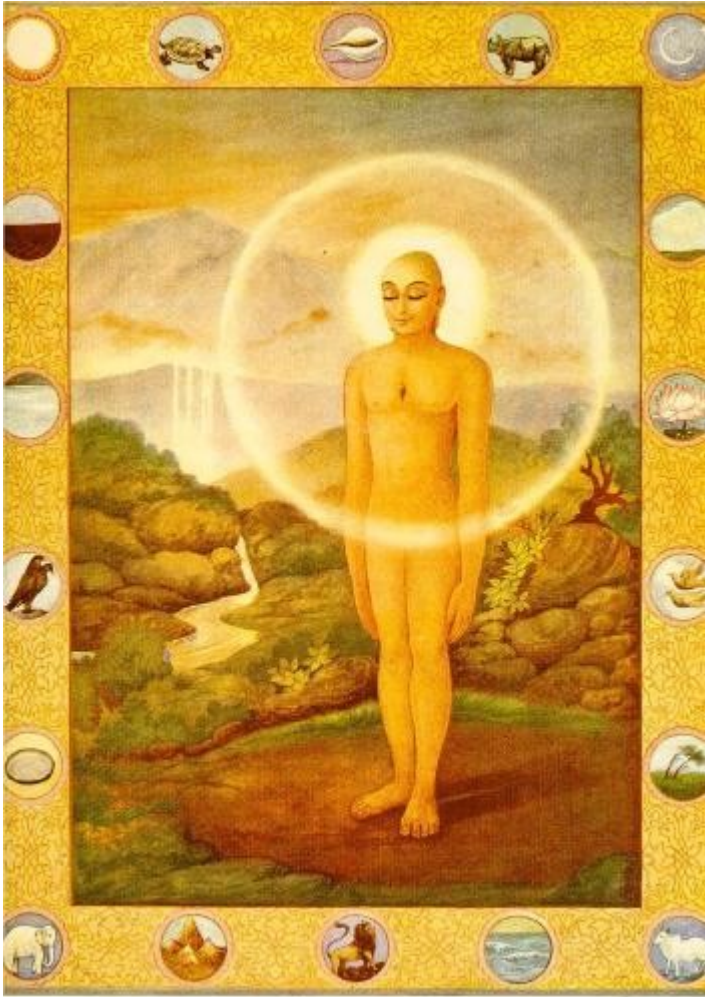
Hurried, the Indra ran after it, barely avoiding a catastrophe  
Begging for forgiveness, the demon prostrated  
As Lord did, so did Indra  
For how could he follow any other course

Incident after incident in his life  
Of forgiveness to those who had erred  
For it's not in man's hand  
Karma has its own way of extracting the price

Following a path of intense austerities, the monk moved  
Constantly through the forests and the cities  
Through places that people were afraid of  
For he was not to be cowed down by fear  
Observing upvaas for days, weeks and months  
That could be broken, only if all his conditions were met  
In the long penance of twelve-and-half years  
He took food only 349 times

In the twelfth year of his penance, he took a vow most difficult  
To break the fast, only when an enslaved princess  
Chained with shaven head, offers alms with tears in her eyes  
Of course, the vow was known only to him  
Keeping everyone in great suspense

Searching for a suitable alm's giver, the monk  
Would wander through the streets of Kaushambi  
Every day, only to return empty-handed  
With equanimity and without remorse  
Days passed and it was weeks and still later months  
The whole town was eager, to see monk break his fast  
Wondering if it would ever be possible  
It was almost three seasons, before he encountered

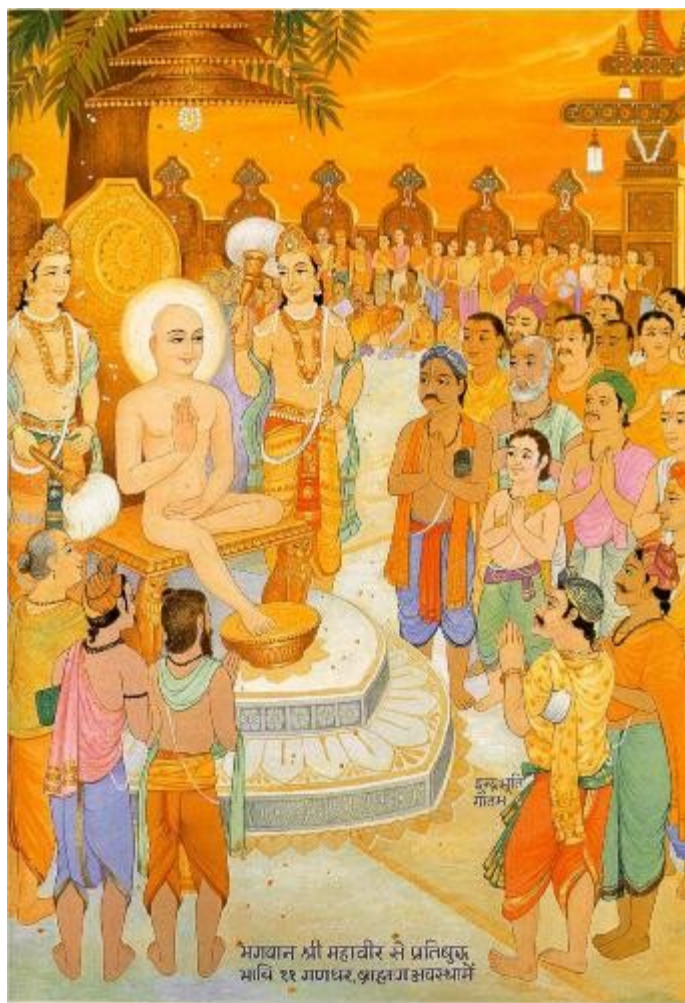


Just such a person: A princess, enslaved and in chains  
Waiting at the door with alms in hand and shaven head  
As the monk approached, she felt elated  
*How fortunate, that the Lord should come my way*  
Filled with joy, tears started trickling down her cheeks  
With all conditions, finally, fulfilled  
The monk accepted the alms, to end his upvaas  
Longest of his long penance, lasting six months  
Bestowing upon Princess Chandanbala, the honor  
Of being amongst his foremost disciples

In the last days of his penance, the Lord  
Encountered another hardship  
He was accused of theft and hypocrisy  
Thorns were hammered in his ears  
Paying the price for an earlier transgression  
The Lord bore all with perfect calmness  
Without a feeling of anger or ill-will  
As the time was approaching for the fulfillment  
Of the long cherished dream

In the month of Vaishakh, on the tenth day of bright moon  
The journey that lasted for more than twelve years  
Moved in its final phase  
Under a Saal tree on the bank of river Rijubakula  
The Sun made haste to hide itself  
Before being outshone by the approaching dawn  
More powerful and more magnificent  
The likes of which were not to be seen again, for a long-long time

As the blissful universe eagerly awaited  
The last threads of ghāti karma quickly disintegrated  
With the sounds of conches, shells and dumdubhi  
Devas of heavens arrived in great numbers



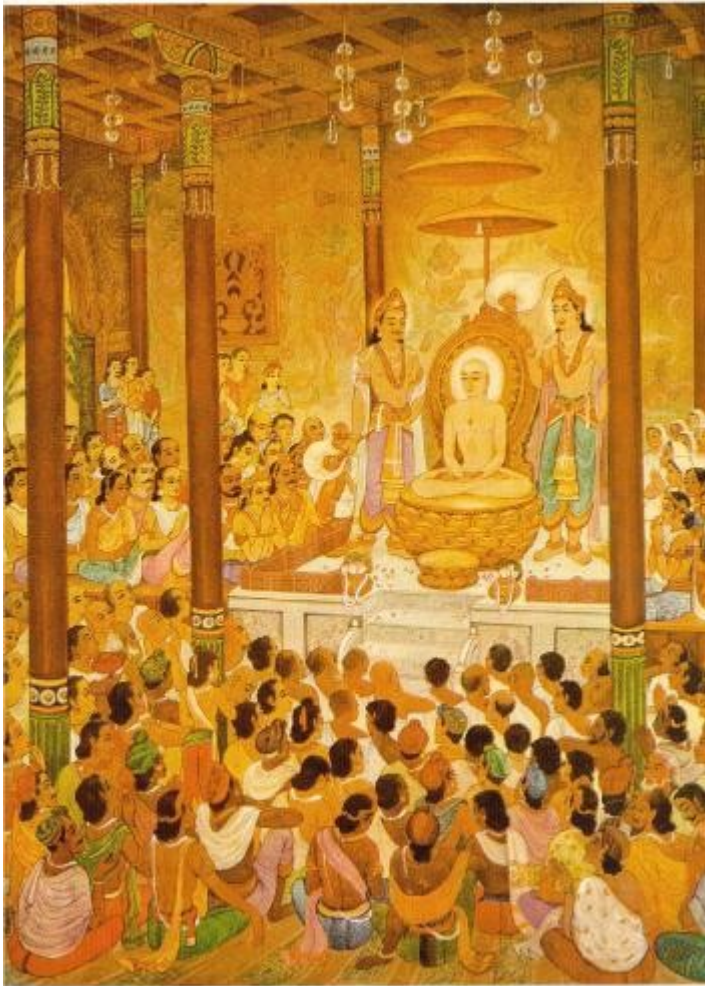
To worship and eulogize, to have Lord's darshan  
For it is an event, rare in the world  
Mahaveer was now a Kevali, a Sarvajna

The task of reorganization began without delay  
As Jina was confronted by eleven scholars, on the next day  
Each learned in his own right  
Vedas and scriptures flowed from their tongues  
Each commanded a strong following  
Yet harbored a nagging doubt

Foremost amongst them, Indrabhuti Gautam  
Decided to challenge the Kevali Bhagwan  
Walked towards the tree with head held high  
Followed by a long and curious retinue

“O Indrabhuti, come my dear  
Soul exists, as you and me  
Vedas provide ample proof  
But only to those with the real experience  
To the senses though, it remains elusive”  
To the amazement of all, Indrabhuti surrendered  
Accepting Him as the guru, leaving behind the ego

The news traveled like a blazing wildfire  
Created commotion in the assembly of scholars  
Next to arrive, Agnibhuti Gautam  
To rescue his brother from a grave danger  
“O Angibhuti, come my dear  
Just as the soul, karma is real  
Soul suffers due to the bondage of karma  
Intertwined together since eternity”



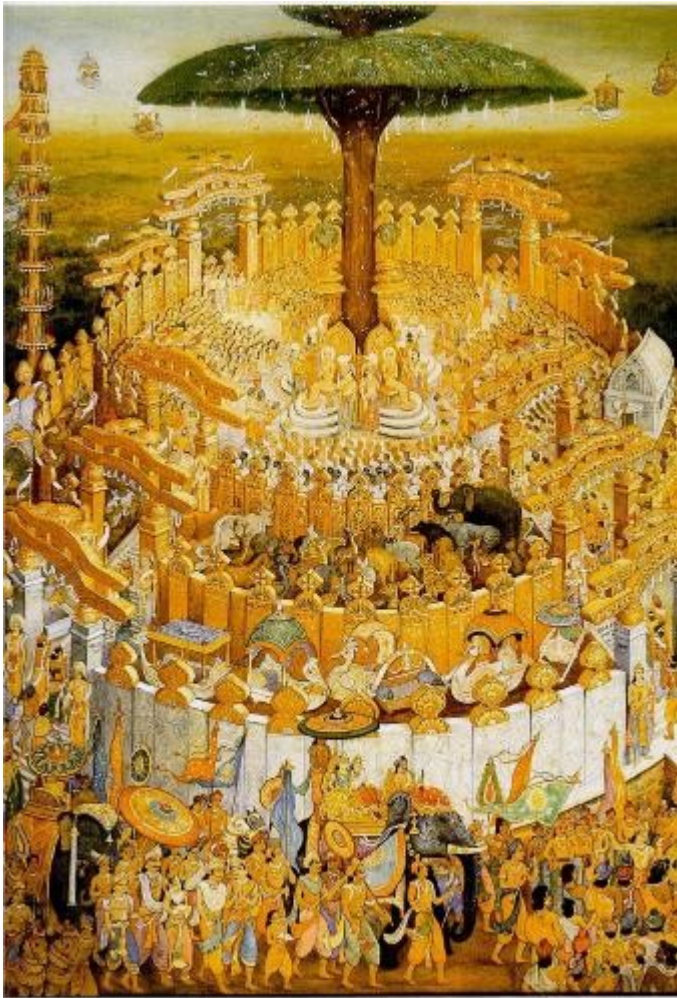


With doubts removed, Agnibhuti prostrated  
The entire entourage followed his example  
One by one, they all arrived  
With flags flying high and certain of victory  
Only to find refuge at the feet of the Omniscient

All scholars with the knowledge of the scriptures  
Got cleansed in the river of real experience  
Came to be known as Eleven Ganadharas  
Hold a place of immense importance, in Jin Shashan  
Indebted are we to their services  
For bringing to us, the words of the Jinendra

And so came many other  
Brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudras  
In His eyes, there were no differences  
Constantly traveling for next thirty years  
Touching lives of millions in the process  
Establishing an order with four pillars  
(Sadhu, Sadhvi, Shravak and Shravika)  
Set on the foundation of pancha mahavrata  
Upholding the supremacy of Anekantavad  
Reaching the goal aspired by all  
Leaving behind a trail for others  
For His compassion knew no bounds

As the time of departure was approaching close  
The Lord delivered his last sermon  
That lasted for forty eight hours  
On moonless night in the month of Kartik  
As His words enlightened all corners of the world  
Last traces of karma fell from the soul  
Forever free, straight it arose to the Siddhaloka



Lamps are burnt in His honor  
To dispel the darkness and embrace the light  
On the day, we now celebrate as Diwali

Lessons of His life are easy to remember  
Putting them in practice though, is the real challenge  
Harm none even if they are enemies  
For hurting others will bring manifold miseries  
Speak truth but with compassion  
Otherwise, it will serve no purpose  
Keep only as much as necessary  
Otherwise, it is theft and robbery  
Passion leads to bondage of karma  
Sinking soul to the bottom of a pond  
Covetousness is a significant hindrance  
If one wishes to follow, the path of Jinendra  
Ego, jealousy, hatred, and anger  
All lead to greater bondage  
Protection of the weak, help to the needy  
Feeding hungry, service to the sick  
All accrue beneficial karma when performed  
Without any ulterior motives  
Yet one has to go, beyond these measures  
If the goal is to attain, the Sparkling Diamond

This is the story of Prince Vardhaman  
Recited through the generations  
For the benefit of the mankind

