



Walk With Me



The Story of Mahavir: A Remarkable Revolutionary

Acharya Chandanaj
Vastupal Parikh, PhD

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**The Story of Mahavir –A Remarkable
Revolutionary**

Narrator:

Ganadhar Indrabhuti Gautam

Authors:

***Acharya Chandanaji
Vastupal Parikh, PhD***

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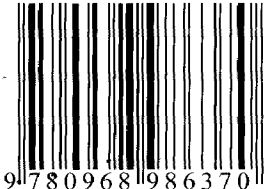
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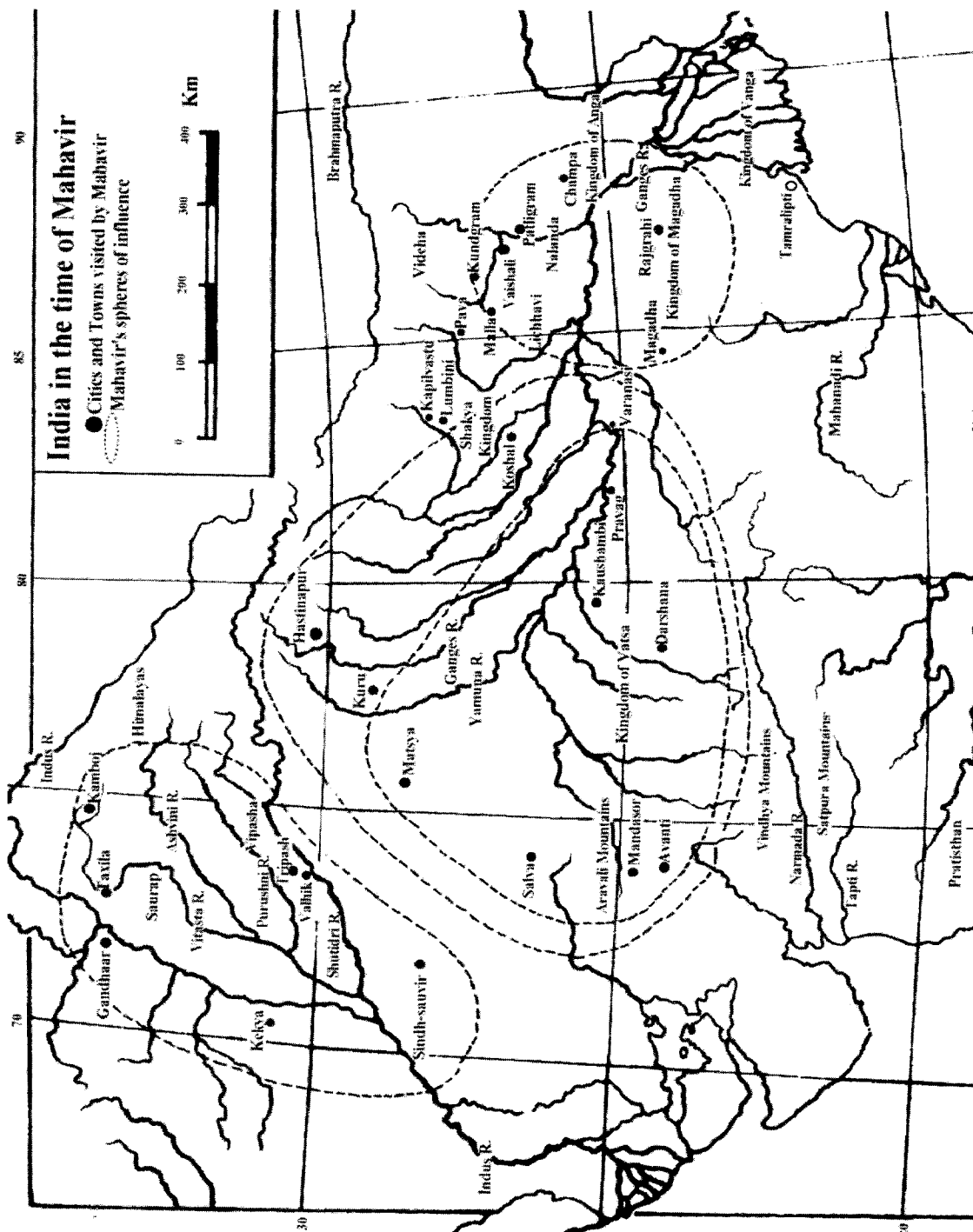
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Who's Who in Mahavir's Life

Achalbhrat	One of the eleven <i>Ganadhars</i> appointed by Mahavir.
Agnibhuti	Indrabhuti Gautam's brother. He and his disciples were
Gautam	ordained by Mahavir. He too was appointed a <i>Ganadhar</i> .
Anand	A businessman seeking advice on ethical business practices.
Anathi	A young monk in Mahavir's <i>sangh</i> .
Chandana	Original name Vasumati; daughter of King Dadhivahan and Queen Dharini of the kingdom of Anga and niece of Mrigavati; later her name was changed to Chandana. She was the first woman to be ordained by Mahavir, and later became the head (<i>Acharya</i>) of a group of 36,000 nuns.
Chandkaushik	A vicious cobra who in former life was an angry monk.
Chandrapradyot	A ruthless king who wanted to marry Mrigavati and attacked her kingdom.
Dadhivahan	King of the kingdom of Anga.
Dhanvaha	A wealthy merchant of Kaushambi. He purchased Vasumati from the slave market.
Dharini	Queen of Anga; Wife of King Dadhivahan; sister of Mrigavati, mother of Chandana.
Indrabhuti	First disciple of Mahavir. He was a learned Brahmin pundit.
Gautam	Mahavir appointed him (and ten other pundits) a ' <i>Ganadhar</i> ' (group leader) immediately after he was ordained.
Keshiswami	A sraman monk from Parshva tradition.
Mahashatak	A <i>shravak</i> . Mahavir helped resolve his marital problems.
Mahavir	Sraman reformer and the 24th <i>Tirthankar</i> of the Jains.
Meghkumar	A young prince renamed as Meghmuni after ordaining.
Mrigavati	Queen of Vatsa; wife of King Shatanik, and sister of Queen Dharini of Anga.

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Mula	Dadhivahan's wife.
Nandivardhan	Mahavir's brother.
Parshva	Twenty-third <i>Tirthankar</i> . At the time of Mahavir, people and royal families in Bihar followed Parshva's Sraman <i>Dharma</i> .
Prabhas	One of the eleven <i>Ganadhars</i> appointed by Mahavir.
Prasannachandra	A <i>sadhak</i> having difficulties coordinating his rituals & desires.
Puniya	A poor <i>shravak</i> who taught a valuable lesson to King Shrenik.
Shatanik	King of the kingdom of Vatsa.
Siddharth	Mahavir's Father.
Sudharma	One of the eleven <i>Ganadhars</i> appointed by Mahavir.
Taamali	A <i>sadhak</i> undertaking extreme penance.
Trishala	Mahavir's Mother.
Udayan	Mrigavati's son.
Vardhaman	Mahavir's original name.
Vasubhuti	Indrabhuti Gautam's father.
Gautam	
Vayubhuti	Indrabhuti Gautam's brother. He and his disciples also were
Gautam	ordained by Mahavir. Vayubhuti was also appointed a <i>Ganadhar</i> .

Gratitude

This project started as Acharya Chandanaji's vision. Wanting to make Bhagwan Mahavir's achievements readily available to today's generations, she organized a series of sermons at Veerayatan, Rajgir in India. Professor Vastupal Parikh was invited to render these lectures in the book format.

The sermon series soon turned into a discussion forum in which all the learned *sadhvijs* of Veerayatan readily participated. We acknowledge the contributions to this forum by Upadhaya Yashaji, *Sadhvi* Sadhanaji, and *Sadhvi* Shilapiji. With their profound knowledge of the Agamas, they offered unique perspectives on how *Ganadhar* Gautam might have perceived actual events. Furthermore, *Sadhvi* Shilapiji repeatedly checked and edited the manuscript to ensure scriptural accuracy.

Success of this type of book depends heavily upon its readability. Nalini Parikh read the original manuscript and the subsequent rewrites to ensure clarity, relevance and readability. Chimanlal Shah, Madhuri Parikh, Rita Parikh, Dr. Manoj Jain, Dr. Sagar Parikh, and Dr. Chandrakant Shah also checked the manuscript and made valuable

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suggestions. Wonderful photographs in this book were given clarity by a very skilled artist - Marji Rohla. Our sincere thanks to her.

The final draft of the book was sent to Professor Gary Francione of Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey for his review. His response as a reader who is not born into the Jain tradition was immensely gratifying. He wrote, "The book is so engaging that I could not keep it down until finished. My only regret is that, like *Gurudev* Indrabhuti Gautam, I too did not know Mahavir until I was in fifties." We are grateful to Professor Francione for his generous remarks.

This book is the outcome of *Acharya* Chandanaji's vision and the dedicated contributions of all these well-wishers. We express our heartfelt gratitude for their efforts. We are particularly indebted to Upadhya Yashaji for her scriptural guidance, *Sadhvi* Shilapiji for her editorial help and Rita Parikh for her journalistic talent. We sincerely hope that you will enjoy and appreciate this work.

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Preface

Mahavir, who was born and lived in Bihar, India 2,600 years ago, was a remarkable revolutionary. Remarkable because he preached a philosophy that was steeped in thousands of years of tradition, yet through his actions he revolutionized hundreds of generations that followed. In fact, his message is timelier now than ever before.

This is the story of Mahavir's enlightenment as well as of his stunning achievements. He revolutionized not only the spiritual world but also his contemporary society. He challenged an oppressive caste system, uplifted the status of women in society, and saved millions of animals from cruel, sacrificial slaughter. His was the first peace movement, the first movement for social justice, the first environmental movement*, and the first movement to recognize the dignity and equality of every living being. His is a story of transformation, one that continues to inspire all who hear it.

Millions revere and worship Mahavir because of his spiritual vision and achievements. Mahavir challenged the wide-spread practice of sacrificing animals for spiritual gain. Instead he preached that the path for liberation is through the purification of the soul. He proved that

* 2600 years ago Mahavir preached: "Water, Air and Earth are living systems therefore we must treat these with care and respect."

an ordinary human being can be transformed into a divine state of bliss and omniscience through absolute purification of the soul. Mahavir believed that all living beings have a soul which, like his own, is trapped in painful and prolonged cycles of death and rebirth. He perfected and taught a path for purification of the soul.

Mahavir preached that all trapped souls go through several rebirths in different forms - be them human, animal, plant, or microbial – but have the potential to be free. Therefore, every living being, in any form, is worthy of respect and reverence. Liberation can be achieved by purifying our entrapped soul through self-discipline to eliminate passions such as ego, greed, anger, deceit, hatred, and attachment to worldly things. Mahavir's path to liberation, therefore, is essentially a technique to live a disciplined life free from passions and to guard ourselves from passionate actions (karma). One can gain self-discipline through conscious and focused practice.

Mahavir's parents also followed the ancient Sraman path for soul purification, and Mahavir knew this. From his early years, he focused on attaining liberation. After years of determined effort, he mastered self-discipline to such perfection that he attained enlightenment and ultimate liberation. He was so confident with his path that he told the masses, "You too can achieve the goal of liberation if you apply your complete attention and absolutely determined, unwavering effort to your goal. The path to liberation may not be easy, but it is simple. You may have to climb many mountains, cross many valleys, and swim many oceans. Come along; hold my hand and *Walk With Me.*"

Preface

Who can tell Mahavir's story better than Indrabhuti Gautam, a learned Brahmin pundit who became his first disciple? Gautam was honored as a 'Ganadhar' or Group Leader, by Mahavir. He walked in Mahavir's footsteps for 30 long years. This is a first hand account of the significant relationship that evolved between Mahavir and Gautam, and offers us the opportunity to see Mahavir through Gautam's eyes.

This book was made possible by the loving encouragement, support, unstinting patience and understanding of the Parikh clan – Nalini, Sagar, Madhuri, and Rita. We thank them. Our thanks also to Professor Gary Francione, Chimanlal Shah, Dr. Manoj Jain, Professor Chandrakant Shah, and Marji Rohla for their comments and generous assistance.

Acharya Chandana

Vastupal Parikh

January 6, 2009

Prologue



Indrabhuti Gautam

My name is

Indrabhuti Gautam. I was born in the village of Gubbar, near Pava⁽¹⁾. I am a leading scholar of 'Brahma Dharma'⁽²⁾. My father Vasubhuti, my grandfather, and my great grandfather all come from a distinguished Gautam *gotra* (family) of Brahmin Vedic scholars (high caste scholars of Hindu scriptures). In keeping with our family's tradition, I memorized the Vedas and the

¹ It was also known as Apapappava. Presently known as Pavapuri in Bihar, eastern India

² Two spiritual thoughts have co-existed in India for centuries. The aboriginal philosophy is called *Sraman Dharma* or *Arhat Dharma* whereas that developed later by Aryan migrants is called *Brahma Dharma*. Hinduism evolved out of *Brahma Dharma* and Jainism and Buddhism are the products of *Sraman Dharma* reforms. Concepts such as soul, karma, rebirth, and non-violence appear only in later Hindu scriptures (Upanishads), perhaps due to the influence of *Sraman Dharma*.

Upanishads⁽³⁾ during my childhood, and gained recognition as a great pundit and a scholar.

I was deeply attracted to Mahavir's ideas of compassion and love for all living beings, his philosophy of atma (soul), and his path for attaining liberation. I became his first disciple. My two brothers, Agnibhuti and Vayubhuti, also joined Mahavir's ever-growing spiritual movement.

I joined Mahavir at the ripe age of 50 and for 30 years, until his *nirvana* (death), I walked in his footsteps like his shadow. I was his closest confidant and was able to know Mahavir probably better than anyone else. I am glad that you are now curious about my great master. I can share with you interesting stories about this remarkable guru. Come, *walk with me*, and listen...

³ Hindu scriptures are generally grouped into three periods. (1) **The Vedas** – ca 1300 to 1150 BCE, (2) **The Brahmanas** and **Aranyakas** - ca 1000 to 700 BCE, (3) **The Upanishads** – ca 800 to 500 BCE.

1. The Disciple - Indrabhuti Gautam

*P*lease allow me to introduce my self. I am Indrabhuti

Gautam, an eminent Vedic scholar and ritual specialist. Today I am fortunate to be in Pava, a beautiful city on the south bank of the river North Ganga. Just west of us is the mighty kingdom of Maghad. Pava is lush, fertile, and filled with peace. I am joined by my disciples to officiate a *yagnya* ceremony organized by Somil – a rich Brahmin. Thousands of other learned Brahmins from the nearby villages, towns, and cities have also arrived here with their disciples.

People are scurrying about in anticipation of the upcoming activities. Ritual specialists are busy preparing to launch the *yagnya*, and the fragrant smoke of the *yagnya* fire gently fills the sky. Its plumes spread news of the great ceremony far and wide. People are jostling to obtain seats with the best view. The air is filled with the loud chants of Vedic mantras. Hundreds of sacrificial animals, goats and cattle are bound in nearby fields awaiting slaughter. It promises to be a grand sacrificial *yagnya*. The chanting is so loud that I can hardly hear the animals. Sometimes, I feel sorry for them, but they will be silenced soon. They will be offered to the Lord of the *yagnya* for his blessings and afterwards there will be a grand feast.

When I was growing up, my parents – Vasubhuti and Prithvidevi - sent me to the nearby Varanasi city (also called Banaras). There I learned the meaning and the philosophy of Vedic sutras. Varanasi was an exciting place where Vedic scholars from across India came to learn and participate in philosophical debates. I honed my intellect and began participating in these debates, winning one after another. According to our tradition, the loser accepts the winner as his Guru and becomes the disciple. I never lost a single debate. As a result, I now have 500 disciples.

I can confidently say that I am the greatest guru. No one is as bright and learned as I am. Many have challenged but no one as yet has surpassed my intellectual supremacy. Still, I readily admit that I do not understand everything. Although I am well conversant in the Vedas and the rituals, sometimes I am uneasy about certain things in our scriptures. Our early Vedas say that, for instance, “like every thing else, atma originates from five elements of nature (fire, water, earth, air and sky) and disperses into the same elements upon death.” Are Vedas saying that atma is destructible, and that hence there is no rebirth? If so, why do so many of us believe in life-after-death? Why do our early Vedas repeatedly mention that the Arhat’s achieve a better life in their next birth by observing vows to purify their atma?

Who are these people anyway? Why are we prohibited from speaking with Arhats? This perplexes me. If Arhats are outcastes, why does our Padma Purana warmly describe the Arhat *dharma* as good, the Satpath Brahmana describe the Arhats as superior beings, and Vishnu Purana mentions 'Arhat *dharma*' as the one that opposed Vedic practices. I do not understand why the Arhats are

Jain Terminology

➤	<i>Arhats</i>	Sraman <i>Dharma</i> followers
➤	<i>Atma</i>	Soul
➤	<i>Dharma</i>	Spiritual philosophy
➤	<i>Ganadhar</i>	Group leader
➤	<i>Gotra</i>	Family class
➤	<i>Karmakand</i>	Rituals
➤	<i>Nirvana</i>	Death
➤	<i>Purusha</i>	God; Man
➤	<i>Samosaran</i>	Religious conference
➤	<i>Sraman</i>	A spiritual philosophy
➤	<i>Tapa</i>	Penance
➤	<i>Vratya</i>	Arhats, Vow keepers
➤	<i>Yagnya</i>	Sacrificial fire ceremony

opposed to our *yagnya* rituals; do they have a better way to seek God's mercy? If so, shouldn't the Vedas have written about it? The Bhagwat Puranas talk about two ancient Arhat yogis, Rishabha, (the son of Nabhiputra) and his son Bharat. While there are so many references in the Vedas to these great yogis, there is hardly any mention of their yogic philosophy. All we know is that they reject the Vedas, but worship *atma*!

The Upanishads, written during the past few hundred years, have mentioned the concept of *atma* and its purification. The Mundaka Upanishad even states,

"The fools who delight in the sacrificial rituals as the highest spiritual good go again and again through the cycle of old age and death. Those who practice penance (tapa) and their faith in the forest, the tranquil ones, the 'knower' of truth, living the life of wandering mendicancy - they purify their atma and depart, freed from passion, through the door of the Sun, to where dwells the immortal Purusha, the imperishable param-atma".

Is this the same concept that the Vratya people practiced for centuries? Are the Upanishads finally accepting the Arhat idea of purification of atma and rebirth? If so, why do we still perform *yagnya*? Such questions always fill me with both curiosity and sadness. Despite being the greatest Pundit, even I cannot ask my fellow Brahmins to abandon their old ways and practice purifying their atma as described in the Upanishads! Such is the pitiful burden of being the greatest Pundit! Where can I seek help? Who or what will give me courage?

Many questions about our own rituals, our treatment of others around us, and the life after death, plagued me as I came here this morning for *yagnya*. Often, I attempt to console myself by the notion: 'I am famous. I am the best scholar. Kings and Emperors seek my advice. I am their pillar of strength. How can I betray their trust by showing my weakness? I must remain solid as a rock.' As I was absorbed in such thoughts, a festival organizer came running to me. I greeted him, "Bless you my son! What is the matter? You look disturbed."

"Yes *Gurudev*, I am rather disturbed because I have some serious news." He was panting. "I came running to give you the news that an 'Arhat' Guru has come to Pava. People call him 'Mahavir' (The Great Victor), but he does not look like a warrior to me.

Instead of joining our ceremony, he is about to give a sermon in the Mahasen garden on the outskirts of the city. He is calling this sermon, *samosaran*. I have heard people say that he is a very learned and powerful guru. People are leaving our ceremony and are rushing towards the garden. This is a very serious matter *Gurudev*!"

"Oh, that's why we have such poor attendance today! Who is this Arhat guru?" I was disturbed, but curious.

"*Gurudev*, do something! Our *yagnya* grounds are fast emptying. Everyone is flocking to the *samosaran*. This new word *samosaran* is on everybody's lips. Everyone is getting ready to attend the *samosaran*. *Gurudev*, we must do something to stop them! Can you help, *Gurudev*?"

This news gripped me with mixed emotions. My rock-solid resolve started melting away. "Could I stop people from going to the *samosaran*? Should I stop them? I wasn't sure, but my ego was raging. "Who is this intruder? Who has dared to come here to give a sermon during our grand function?" After a quick meeting with my associates, I decided to go to the *samosaran* grounds and tell this guru to either join our *yagnya* ceremony or face me in a religious debate.

My intuition, however, was telling me something different. It was telling me to be polite and not to challenge the intruder. "You are about to meet a great person," it was prompting. I wondered, "Is he the guru I am looking for? Can he give me the courage I need? Could he be the person to whom I can look for guidance? Can he answer the questions that have long distressed me?" I had to see for myself.

Before I realized it, I was in front of the magnificent *samosaran* gates. Its grandeur made me feel small, and I watched my ego melting away. As I stepped inside the gates, a strange feeling overpowered my total self. Never had I experienced such calmness and serenity. Though no one had noticed me, I was already feeling bliss. Dumbfounded, my eyes were glued to the ground.

Suddenly I heard the sweetest words ever. "Welcome Goyama", Mahavir was actually welcoming me from the podium! "I know that you are puzzled about the permanence and impermanence of atma, but the real confusion is in your interpretation of a *sloka* in the Vedas. Can it not be interpreted as, 'Everything is impermanent, changeable, as well as permanent'." *

Mahavir called me "Goyama"? He – a stranger - called me by my favorite name – the name my mother had for me! How did he know? Without my asking, he has answered all my questions. How did he read my mind? I feel tremendously overwhelmed by his wisdom. I was soaking up his knowledge full of kindness and love. Suddenly, I was free of all egos, free of the burden of being the greatest pundit. No more babbling of meaningless mantras! I was free of my shackles. I was in the presence of a divine being! I was already experiencing a continuous flow of infinite wisdom and courage!

As I looked up, a bright, divine light from the podium miraculously flooded my soul. "Is this the intruder? What a radiant personality! What a divine figure! How brilliant are those eyes!" I was bathed in his radiance. Indeed, all my questions were answered. He had already empowered me, and given me courage to abandon the sacrificial ritual ceremony. What a serene sight! What a loving embodiment of kindness! I could not take my eyes off of this man. I wanted nothing but

* Mahavir first corrected Indrabhuti's misinterpretation of the Vedic *sloka* – "विज्ञानधन એવૈતેભ્યો ભૂતેભ્યઃ સમુત્થાય તાન્નેવાનુ વિનશ્યતિ ન પ્રેત્ય સંજ્ઞાસ્તિર્ઠતિ, and in the end said ઉપન્નેઈવા, વિગમેઈવા, ધુવેઈવા". (Everything is impermanent, changeable, as well as permanent.)

to fill my heart with him. Time stood still and I stared at him. I was witnessing wisdom personified.

He started the sermon. "I am not this body, I am Atma! Every living being is a divine atma trapped in a material body." The wisdom was flowing towards me like the flow of the river Ganga, so simple and so effective. Kings and queens, rich and poor, men, women and children, even the birds and beasts had lined up side by side and were quietly listening to the sweet sound of this great man.

I wanted to remain forever in the presence of this great guru; I did not want to leave his divine wisdom. I felt he was my future, and my present. I, the greatest pundit, had found the courage to proudly ask my 500 followers to join me in surrendering to this great man. I knew I would follow his footsteps, soak up his every word, breath the same air, and be his shadow.

2. The Sraman *Sangh* Brotherhood

I imagine venturing to swim across a vast ocean, unaided and all alone. Rarely, if at all, would anyone ever achieve, never mind attempt, such a feat. Yet that is precisely what most of us foolishly do – try to cross, all alone, the ocean of *samsara*, or the endless cycle of death and rebirth, and to get to the other side where peace and enlightenment lie. If we suddenly find a lifeboat in this lonely struggle, our hope is rekindled and our goal feels attainable. That is how I felt as I stood listening to Mahavir on the *samosaran* grounds. I was ecstatic with joy and was already dreaming of reaching my goal of liberating my soul. Suddenly I was riding a wave of hope that was carrying me to divine freedom. I was about to ask Mahavir to be my guide.

By now, the entire *yagnya* grounds had become surprisingly empty. My brothers Pundit Supreme Agnibhuti and Veda scholar Vayubhuti, had already arrived with their disciples, and were standing behind me. They too wanted to know more about the Sraman concepts about karma. Mahavir, they hoped, will explain.

When other Vedic scholars heard the news that we three brothers have joined Mahavir's camp, they came to see Mahavir with their

disciples. They wanted to confirm the unbelievable news and to seek answers to some of their own questions. As Mahavir resolved their dilemmas, they too readily joined his camp, like a river merging seamlessly into the ocean. The residents of Pava were in awe of the fact that we, the great Brahmin pundits, had readily accepted the leadership of an Arhat monk. Indeed, even for those of us embracing this new movement, this was an unexpected, unbelievable, and surprising event.

Mahavir continued his sermon, and, like a swan, I was gently floating with ecstasy in the wisdom of his words. These experience-based words directly touched the heart of every listener. People were excited

We alone have the power to extricate our self from miseries, not by begging for mercy, but through our own determined efforts.

and were ready for total submission to Mahavir. It was easy to read their faces, which said, "We were groping in the dark, unable to find the path. Until

now, we believed that accurately performing our rituals was true *dharma*, but how misguided we were! Empty rituals can neither be spiritual nor divine." Every face in the crowd was visibly expressing these feelings. Enlightened by Mahavir's thoughts, people were now awaiting further directives from him, truly anxious to follow his path.

I was listening carefully to Mahavir, "The soul is eternal. No one has created it, nor can anyone ever destroy it. Every soul is independent and an architect of its own fortune. Our soul is imprisoned in our bodies because of our karma. It is struggling to be free. We shape our future by our own deeds. Our good acts lift the soul to great heights, while bad deeds can cause it to slide into despair." Mahavir was empowering the masses by telling them that they are the masters of their destiny.

Mahavir's every word was enlightening. "We wrongly believe that someone else controls our destiny and makes us happy or unhappy. No one else but us, not even any imaginary supreme power, is responsible for our destiny.

We weave our own misfortune and become entangled in it; and remain entrapped in this painful cycle of death and rebirth. We alone have the power to extricate our self from miseries, not by begging for mercy, but through our own determined efforts. Becoming

aware of such power and freedom is self-realization. When we begin to experience this freedom, we start understanding the difference between the Self (soul) and its entrapments. Once we know that 'Me' is not my physical body but it is the soul trapped within this body, we truly begin our journey on the path to freedom. Such freedom is Bliss!"

Mahavir continued, "Misguided by the notion that a physical body is defined by 'Me', we unwittingly carry the burden of this body and every thing else we possess. We cannot experience freedom as long as we carry this burden. True freedom is to be free from this burden. It means being free from our sense of oneness of soul with our possessions.

We can be free only through self-discipline, which enables us to control and eliminate our ugly passions (*kashaya*) such as anger, ego, deceit, lust, and greed. A life without these passions is a life free of sins

Jain Terminology

- *Bhagwan* Same as 'My Lord'
- *Chaturvidh* Four-fold
- *Gurudev* Honorific term for Guru
- *Sadhak* Spiritual traveler
- *Sadhana* Spiritual exercise
- *Sadhu* Monk
- *Sadhvi* Nun
- *Shravak* Lay man
- *Shravika* Lay woman
- *Samsara* Cycle of birth and death
- *Sangh* Brotherhood; Congregation
- *Tirthankar* Enlightened spiritual guide

and without any bondage. Sin sinks our soul in more bondage. Violence is a sin; theft is a sin; lying is a sin; and destroying another life or even encouraging to hurt others is also a sin. At the root of all sinful acts is our passion for possessions. Cultivate forgiveness to eliminate anger, humility to control ego, fearless straight forwardness to avoid deceit, and self-satisfaction to be free from greed”, he stated.

As a Vedic pundit, I have been busy advising people on how to please gods whose mercy alone could absolve all of their sins. I used to lecture them on how to chant mantras, how to please the gods by offering animals in *yagnya*. I have advised them regularly that a periodic dip in the holy River Ganga would cleanse their souls. However, here was Mahavir telling us that the gods have nothing to do with our happiness or misery! Instead, he was saying that our eternal happiness will come when we are able to purify our soul by winning over our passions. This sounded logical, but difficult.

We cannot achieve happiness if we are making another life unhappy, directly or indirectly.

Mahavir had more wisdom than any other human being that I had ever met, and I listened to his words intently. “We cannot even hope to liberate our soul if we put another life in danger,” he was saying. “Know that every living being has a soul. It feels happiness and pain as we do. Every living being wants to live peacefully. It loves its life as we do ours. We have no right to destroy another life, or to cause its destruction. We cannot achieve happiness if we are making another life unhappy, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally. This is the truth.”



The First Wave of Disciples – Formation of the *Sangh*

Mahavir continued, “We can experience this truth. Sometimes, people kill animals for the excitement and pleasure of killing, but their conscience tells them otherwise. Their feelings of guilt and sadness soon overtake their joy. This is because the basic law of happy living is ‘*Ma Hanno*’ – ‘Do not hurt another life, even indirectly.’ The one you hurt is none other than yourself. Violence cannot make anyone happy.”

“Our spiritual journey begins only when we cease inflicting violence upon others. This is true *sadhana* (spiritual exercise). This is reality and also our ultimate goal! Attempting to win favors from a supreme power through sacrificial offerings or chanting mantras is futile.

Abandon such notions. Stop depending on others for your freedom, the power to liberate your soul rests within yourself!"

The sermon was not quite finished yet, but I was impressed enough by Mahavir's insights to accept him as my guru. "Your destiny is in your hands... No imaginary external power can help you... Every living being wants to live and be happy... Do not hurt or kill other living beings... Devote yourself to liberate your trapped soul ..." I was impressed by the Sraman way of thinking. Is this why their monks give up everything and go in the forests for *sadhana*? I decided to give up the sinful sacrifices and become a Sraman monk.

All my disciples were also great scholars. I talked to them about my decision. They too were anxious to leave the *karmakand* (rituals) and accept the Arhat path. All we now needed was Mahavir's guidance. We approached Mahavir and asked him to ordain all of us as Sraman* monks. Mahavir readily ordained us and hundreds of our disciples. He immediately gave us, the three brothers, the responsibility to look after our respective groups (*Gana*) of disciples and appointed us as '*Ganadhars*' (group leaders) in the Sraman order. Other pundits who followed us with their disciples were also honored with the title '*Ganadhar*'.

The crowd on the *samosaran* grounds included many ordinary men and women. They too wanted to follow the Sraman path. However, some were not yet ready to become monks. Mahavir explained that laypersons can also follow the Sraman paths. He said, "It is possible to

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The Sanskrit word 'Srama' means to work for achieving a goal. Therefore, *Arhats* later became known also as Sramans.

meet your household responsibilities and still walk this path, but you must first understand this path, and be ready to change your lifestyle and your outlook." Many were ready for such a change. Mahavir signaled me to come near him, saying, "Let us welcome all who want to follow the Arhat path. Let us create two groups, those who wish to be ordained (monks), and the laypersons that are not yet ready to live like monks.

I asked, "*Gurudev*, many non-Brahmins are also in the line waiting to be ordained by you. How can they be admitted in our *sangh*?"

Mahavir gently smiled and said, "Goyama, the differences in their karmic bondage cause souls take different births. However, they all are potentially capable of attaining liberation, and are therefore to be equally respected and revered." Obviously, I was still not totally free from my ego. Mahavir's broad vision opened my eyes. Mahavir's decision to split the *sangh* into two groups was quick; probably because he saw the need to set up some structure for our rapidly expanding *sangh*.

A few days later, we were in Kaushambi, the capital of the Vatsa at the invitation of Queen Mrigavati. On the very first day Mrigavati attended the sermon with her niece - *Maharaja* Dadhivahan's daughter, Chandana. Chandana was dressed surprisingly in a simple white sari. She was completely absorbed in Bhagwan Mahavir's lecture and rushed forward as soon as the lecture was over. And the unbelievable happened. Chandana, the royal princess, came forward and asked Mahavir to ordain her into our religious order. I could not believe my eyes when Mahavir promptly ordained her – a woman - as a *sadhvi* (nun) in our *sangh*.

Mahavir's revolutionary decision to ordain a woman sent shockwaves in our *sangh* as well as in the community. In our male-dominated culture, treating women with such respect and honor was beyond belief for they were possessions, not persons! We believed that, at birth, a woman is a burden to her father; after marriage, to her husband; and in old age, to her children. She was incapable of independent thought and therefore unable to make any decisions, and lacked the right to participate in spiritual or religious activities.

Though I was momentarily somewhat uneasy about a women being ordained in our *sangh*, I soon realized that Mahavir's revolutionary step was very timely. The ordination of Chandana opened the floodgates. Mahavir appointed *sadhvi* Chandana – the first *sadhvi* (nun) in our *sangh* – to head the group of women joining the *sangh*. Women everywhere, from royal families to rich and poor commoners, were elated by the news and were welcoming the event with the cry of freedom. Thousands were now coming forward to be ordained in the order of Arhat *sadhvis* under the leadership of Chandana. The Arhat community was expanding rapidly.

Mahavir promptly suggested some codes of conduct for the entire Arhat community and reorganized it into four groups. Ours thus became known as the Chaturvidh (Four-fold) *sangh*. Those men and women who have given up everything – their wealth, family, and even identity – to be in full pursuit of their liberation are grouped into two groups namely,

- (1) Ordained men, i.e. monks or *sadhus* and
- (2) Ordained women, i.e. nuns or *sadhvis* respectively.

Though *sadhus* and *sadhvis* live in separate quarters, they are treated as equals in all respects. All our time is devoted to meditation,

contemplation and study to cultivate self-discipline and purify our soul. We possess nothing and are celibate. Mahavir bestowed upon us the responsibility to educate the public about the soul and its need to be liberated. For this we travel on foot from place to place and explain how people can work towards their liberation.

Laypersons who want to follow Arhat path, but not on the full-time basis are also welcome in our *sangh*. The two lay groups are:

(3) Lay men are called *shravaks*, and (4) Lay women are *shravikas*.

The primary responsibility of laypersons is to their family and community. They also have additional responsibility to look after our food and shelter when we are in their town.

Our guru is Mahavir, whom we respect as a *Tirthankar* (an enlightened one who having achieved liberation is showing us the path to liberation). We address him as *Tirthankar* Mahavir or Bhagwan Mahavir. This is the highest honor we could bestow on our beloved Guru.

Our ordaining process is very simple. Bhagwan Mahavir asks the would-be *sadhus* and *sadhvis* (monks or nuns) to take vows to live a simple and pure sin-free life; avoid impure, sinful thoughts and actions; and be dedicated to liberation. Everyone gladly pledges:

Karemi Bhante Samaeeyam Savajjam Jogam Pachhakami.

(Bhagwan, I resolve to live in harmony with my soul by renouncing all sinful activities.)

Our vows may appear to be simple, but are difficult to live by. A determined truth-seeker (*sadhak*) may soon learn to avoid impure and sinful actions and thoughts, but to remain uninfluenced by the world is difficult. Spiritual progress requires that one must forget the past, avoid

worries about the future, and live only in the present as a mere observer and knower. To live like this is extremely difficult.

A traveler on this spiritual path (*sadhak*) often needs a guide to pull him out of human weakness, and uncertain moments. Even a determined *sadhak* is sometimes tired and may want to take a break, or feel like quitting. It is an emotionally challenging and slippery path. Sometimes, the emotions and passions become too overpowering. After all, a *sadhak* is also a human being!

Bhagwan Mahavir has recognized this and has recommended atonement - a self-improvement technique - rather than punishment, for those who are unable to keep their vows. It involves the errant himself reviewing his faults, seeking pardon of those affected by his fleeting weakness, reinforcing his determination to avoid such weaknesses, and undertaking harsh penances. True atonement reopens the doors for the *sadhak* to continue on his path. External pressures are ineffective in spiritual journey. Everyone in our order has full freedom of will within the limits set for the smooth operation of the community. One who joins the *sangh* accepts the responsibilities of respecting, obeying, and helping each other. As it is, life is a crooked path full of slippery and dangerous curves. One needs capable co-travelers who can help navigate that path.

This is how an organized, four-fold *sangh* of truth-seekers was formed in which Mahavir, the lone *sadhak* himself, blossomed into the *sangh* - the community of *sadhaks*. He who had once left behind his royal lineage in search of the ultimate truth and happiness now became a source of ultimate truth and bliss.

3. *Ajja* Chandana – Women's Liberation

A lone under a tree on the banks of the Yamuna river, I was admiring the beauty of the rapidly flowing current. Like this river, years have swiftly gone by since I first saw Bhagwan Mahavir in Pava. I was counting my blessings in being able to join the *sangh* as *Ganadhar* Gautam. I have progressed well in my *sadhana* under Mahavir's guidance. My daily meditation enables me to concentrate and focus my thoughts, appreciate the beauty of nature, and quietly contemplate any topic. I am lucky to be close enough to Mahavir to be able to ask questions on any topic and receive thoughtful responses.

Soon after joining the *sangh* I asked him about *Ajja* Chandana, who was ordained shortly after I was. Her ordainment bothered me because it was not in keeping with my Brahmin culture. Women were never permitted to assume such a role in Brahmin culture. I asked Bhagwan Mahavir about his reasons for ordaining a woman. He said patiently, "You will soon find out why, but remember that gender or caste does not determine a person's greatness. A soul becomes great by its actions."

Gender or caste does not determine a person's greatness. A soul becomes great by its actions.

Now that I know *Ajja* Chandana's background and leadership ability, I admire her more. I am amazed by Mahavir's ability to judge her so accurately. While I was thinking about this I looked up and noticed *Ganadhar* Sudharma standing by my side.

Sudharma is a quiet, meditative person. He hardly talks to anyone, yet is so charming that everyone loves and respects whatever he does say. Though quiet, he knows everyone and everything that happens in the *sangh*. He is always aware of everyone's spiritual progress, achievements, and difficulties. Nothing escapes his sharp, penetrating gaze. He obviously knew what I was thinking about when he spoke.

"*Ganadhar* Gautam, perhaps you are aware that *Sadhvi* Mrigavati has successfully reached the pinnacle of her *sadhana*. Her pure soul has just reached the 'Arhat' stage.*"

"Yes, I know about *Sadhvi* Mrigavati," I replied.

Sudharma continued, "Bhagwan Mahavir honored womanhood by ordaining women in our *sangh*. He gave them the hope to soar sky-high with their *sadhana* and the freedom to aspire for moksha (liberation). Mahavir has understood women's miseries, heard their cries for help, and felt their call for freedom. Ordaining them was a bold step, for in doing so, he announced to the entire world that women are our equals. *Sadhvi* Mrigavati's success in *sadhana* has shown that our mothers, sisters and

* The Jain path of purification requires 14 stages of spiritual progress. The *Arhat* stage is the 13th stage, at which the soul becomes free of all karma and the *sadbhak* achieves absolute consciousness and knowledge, *kevalgyan*.

daughters can and do achieve as much as any man can. Tirthankar Mahavir has set women free to scale the heights of spiritual and intellectual achievements and to lead others. Do you remember Gautam, how ordaining the first woman, *Ajja Chandana*, opened the floodgates? So many women wanted to join that freedom movement and follow in her footsteps that Mahavir had to create a separate group of *sadhvis*."

"What a surprisingly pleasant event!" I said.

"Surprising indeed! I don't know about you Gautam, but at that time I was wondering why Mahavir picked *Ajja Chandana* to lead the group. Didn't many older women join the *sangh* at the same time? In hindsight, however, I realized that Mahavir's choice was wise. I have been watching *Ajja Chandana* all these years, but have never heard a complaint about her leadership. Her group is happy and efficient. I don't recall *Ajja Chandana* ever coming to me or to Mahavir seeking guidance for managing her group. I wonder how Mahavir knew that she would be the right leader."

"You are right *Ganadhar Sudharma*." I said. "Frankly, I too had my doubts. At that time I was not in favor of her being ordained and given leadership. After all, she was a woman, and not a pundit like us! However, I now have no more doubts about her abilities."

"I too have no more doubts, *Ganadhar Gautam*, but I am curious. What makes her such a great leader? Who is she? What is her background?"

I decided to tell Sudharma everything that I have been able to learn about *Ajja Chandana*.

“I am sure *Ganadhar* Sudharma that you have heard of the famous king, *Maharaja* Chetak. Chandana is his granddaughter, and the only daughter of King Dadhivahan, of the kingdom of Anga, and his wife Dharini. Her original name is ‘Vasumati’. Being the only child, she was raised with great love and was trained like a prince to look after the kingdom. As a child, she also knew Mahavir. However, life has its vicissitudes, and one never knows what turns it might take. Little Vasumati’s life was no exception.

While Vasumati was still a little princess, perhaps about ten or twelve years of age, King Shatanik of Vatsa, attacked the kingdom of Anga. The attack was unexpected, as the two Kings were close relatives. However, lust and greed know no relatives. It was a vicious attack, and Vasumati’s father -King Dadhivahan had no choice but to escape, leaving his family behind. As soon as Anga’s army learned that their King has abdicated, one of Anga generals went to the palace and told the queen that the king has gone into hiding and has asked him to take the royal family to safety away from the city. He asked Queen Dharini and the young Princess Vasumati to leave with him immediately.

The queen did not suspect the motives of the General, and did not even question why the General himself drove her chariot unaccompanied by soldiers at such a dangerous time. Once away from the city, as the chariot entered a thick forest, the General stopped and attempted to molest the queen. The Queen was shocked and tried to resist, but she was no match for his strength. Vasumati likewise tried to defend her mother, but the situation was hopeless. ‘Run, and save yourself Vasumati!’ shouted the Queen. Vasumati did not want to leave her

mother alone, but the mother repeated, ‘Vasumati, evil men turn into demons when they see helpless women. I will manage, but you should better run and save yourself. Go... Run!’

“Before Vasumati realized what was happening, the Queen pulled out a hidden dagger and committed suicide. Vasumati ran back to her mother but the General pulled her away and said, “What an idiot! I would have married your mother.” He tossed the Queen’s body out of the chariot and drove away with Vasumati.”

Evil men turn into demons when they see helpless women.

Sudharma, listening to this tale, was in a state of shock. “How terrible,” he said. ‘I didn’t know that *Ajja Chandana* had lived through such an ordeal.’

I continued. “Suddenly, the princess found herself an orphan. Lady luck had dealt her a terrible hand, but the brave princess kept her poise. She decided to face her fate as it came. The general was now a frightened man. The woman he wanted had committed suicide and he was left with a young girl. He wanted to get rid of Vasumati but did not know how. He was rattled by the Queen’s death, and now lacked the nerve to kill the princess. His only option was to take her to the slave market in the city of Kaushambi – the capital of Vatsa and sell her off. He disguised himself as an ordinary farmer, and bought some dirty rags for Vasumati. The princess was now a pauper! The general brought Vasumati to Kaushambi. He would be in trouble if anyone recognized him or her, for he was now in the enemy territory.

This was a market where young girls, often abducted from good homes or villages, were sold like animals to reckless drunken men and ruthless prostitutes. Sometimes wealthy men also came here looking for a '*Dasi*,' a household slave. A peddler made Vasumati stand on a platform and the auction started. A prostitute was the highest bidder.

Sudharma, could you imagine Vasumati's state of mind at that time? A beautiful, innocent, young princess now about to be sold to a prostitute! Vasumati must have been extremely depressed, but she was a brave soul. Like an angry lioness she roared, 'I don't care who else buys me, but I will not be sold for prostitution.'

Her roar attracted the attention of a kind-hearted rich man named Dhanvah, who was looking for a good '*Dasi*'. Vasumati's roar convinced him that she was not an ordinary girl, but rather an unfortunate one who may have been forced into this situation. He took another look at Vasumati, and he was sure of his judgment. He significantly raised the bid and succeeded in purchasing Vasumati.

Dhanvah asked her who she was, but there was no reply. He asked her name, but was met with silence. The poise and firmness of this little girl impressed him. He named her '*Chandanbala*,' which means the girl who, like fragrant sandalwood, maintains her poise, purity, and determination through any adversity.

Chandanbala became an ordinary house cleaner in Dhanvah's home, and quickly came to win everyone's love and admiration. She worked hard but amazingly never revealed her identity or her past. She never brooded over her misfortune, and always maintained a cheerful

and pleasant poise. Hiding her royal past was not easy; she could have easily spilled her story and been sent to the palace in Kaushambi. Even though King Shatanik had attacked her father’s kingdom, his Queen was none other than Chandanbala’s aunt, Mrigavati.”

Sudharma could not resist reacting. He said, “To say that one should forget the past and live in the present, or gracefully accept what fate has ordained for them, is easy; but to put that into practice is not. A princess, once used to royal banquets, was now surviving on meager leftovers. One who was once served by the entire palace staff was now herself a servant. She could once command any luxury in the world, but now waiting for some one else’s command was her luxury. What a life! Yet, she never uttered a word of protest! *Ajja Chandana*’s behavior, at such tender age, shows how self-disciplined she must be. Even a seasoned *sadhak* would find it difficult to show such discipline. *Ganadhar Gautam*, please do continue and tell me more about her. I am beginning to understand her capabilities.”

I continued, “By now, Chandanbala had grown into a beautiful young lady. Her radiant skin, royal poise, and beautifully flowing long, black hair made Dhanvah’s wife, Mula, envious of her. Mula was afraid that, ‘Some day this girl would trap my husband and snatch him away from me.’ So, when Dhanvah had to leave town for business, Mula decided to get rid of Chandanbala. She dressed Chandanbala in rags and had her beautiful long black hair shaved to strip her of her beauty. Mula ordered Chandanbala to be handcuffed and locked up in the dark, cold dungeon in her house. Innocent Chandanbala could not understand the reasons for her punishment. She had seen men being cruel to helpless

women, but could not figure out why a woman would be so cruel to her. She had survived the bleak past, but now both the present and the future also appeared bleak and dark to her.

On the fourth day, when Dhanvah was to return, Mula went to her mother's house to avoid facing her husband. Dhanvah returned to an empty home. He was surprised to see no one around. Suddenly he heard a faint sound coming from the basement. As he opened the basement door he heard the muffled sound of a woman. He grabbed a lamp and rushed down the stairs. There, in the dark was Chandanbala, gagged and tied to a post, with hand-cuffs, leg-irons, and shaven head.

"Chandana, is that you? What happened"? Dhanvah could not believe his eyes. He quickly removed her gag.

"Yes master! I don't know why, but soon after you left the servants brought me down and tied me up. "*Baiji* (Dhanvah's wife) and the servants then left home." Said Chandanbala

"You mean *Baiji*" ... He stopped short. He was shocked. He cut her loose from the post.

"I have to get an ironsmith to remove these handcuffs and leg-irons. Meanwhile, you must be hungry. Can you walk up the steps with me and I will try to find some food for you." Dhanvah said.

Chandanbala had not eaten for three days, and there was no food in the house to give her. Dhanvah found some urad lentils that had been cooked earlier for the animals. He asked Chandanbala to eat the lentils while he left to find an ironsmith to remove her handcuffs and leg-irons.



Mahavir at Chandanbala's Door

Chandanbala always shared her food with someone needy before she ate. Therefore, with the pan containing the lentils, she waited near the entry of the house hoping to see a needy person.

Sudharma was getting increasingly restless with *Ajja Chandana's* story. He said, "*Ganadhar Gautam*, when did all this happen?"

I continued. "This was the tenth year of Mahavir's *sadhana*. He was now in a forest near Kaushambi, the capital of Vatsa. Sometimes, he would walk to nearby Kaushambi city to beg for food, but had not accepted any food for more than five months.

Bhagwan knew about the war between Shatanik of Vatsa and Dadhivahan of Anga. He knew that Shatanik had won but did not know the fate of King Dadhivahan and his family. He had thought it possible that Dadhivahan may have been killed, and Queen Dharini and Princess Vasumati might be living in Kaushambi with Dharini's sister Mrigavati.

Everybody was worried because Mahavir would not eat. People were counting the days that went by without food for Mahavir. Five months and 25 days had passed without food! As usual, Mahavir was walking the streets of Kaushambi, but today he was near Dhanvah's house in a different part of the city. As he turned the corner he saw a woman in handcuffs, draped in rags, with her crudely shaven head, and a pan of food in her hand. Chandanbala was standing at her doorway. She was surprised to see Mahavir turn the corner towards her house. Suddenly she had tears of joy in her eyes. Her heart was screaming, 'Bhagwan has come... How lucky of me, my Bhagwan has come!'

Sudharma was overcome with intense emotions. He had tears in his eyes. "You are right *Ganadhar Gautam*! One might think that Chandanbala was crying because of her ordeal, or because she had nothing but dry lentils to offer Mahavir. However, Chandanbala is not

the one who would shed tears over her miseries. Hers must have been the tears of joy over encountering Mahavir.”

“You are correct, *Ganadhar* Sudharma,” I responded. “Even at that young age she must have had equanimity and balanced mind. Living through such an ordeal without protest or self-pity, and accepting life as it came is impossible without equanimity. Such a person would not be crying with self-pity at the door. She must be saying to herself, ‘I have lost everything; even my friends and relatives; but I am lucky to have Bhagwan come to my door today! Come, My Bhagwan. Please accept whatever I have to offer!’ Certainly, hers were tears of joy.

“Mahavir also was gazing at Chandanbala with fixed eyes. He wondered, ‘This poor and unfortunate woman has familiar face. But I have never seen anyone with such intense devotion to offer me food. Kings and barons have also offered me food but none with such devotion. I have refused all offers of food for more than five months, but I cannot break the heart of this devoted child.’ Mahavir moved closer and extended his hands to receive her lentils. Imagine the flow of tears from Chandanbala! Such a feeling of fulfillment!

Living through an ordeal without protest or self-pity, and accepting life as it came is impossible without equanimity.

The news that Mahavir had broken his fast by accepting food from an ordinary housekeeper spread quickly. King Shatanik, Queen Mrigavati and hundreds of citizens of Kaushambi rushed to witness the event. Mrigavati was anxious to see the woman who persuaded Mahavir to break his fast. “Who is this lucky woman?” she thought. “How many

times did we try in vain to persuade Mahavir to break his fast, but he wouldn't. How did this ordinary *dasi* convince him?"

People made way for the royal couple to enter the house. There, seated on the floor in one corner, with face down and her glaze glued to the floor, was a raggedy young woman. Mrigavati did not recognize the woman at first, but was intrigued by the familiar face. She kept on staring at her, and as the woman looked up Mrigavati was shocked! "Vasumati?" Mrigavati almost screamed in disbelief, "My Vasu is that really you?" Tears rolled down the cheeks of both women. Mrigavati rushed to embrace her niece. It was an emotional reunion. Mrigavati took Chandanbala to the palace, where Chandanbala lived for the next two and half years until Mahavir achieved enlightenment."

"What a life!" Sudharma spoke with a hushed voice. "Ajjā Chandana has endured enormous challenges, challenges which have shaped her strong personality. Her ordeals at such tender age have sensitized her to injustice, pain, and cruelty. She feels the agony of a woman trapped in the wheel of misfortune. No wonder she is so involved and active in looking after the interests and comfort of every *sadhvi* in her group. There is not a tinge of ego in her actions. She never treats anyone with contempt. She loves everyone and is rewarded with the affection and gratitude of all. Why would anyone have any complaints against her?"

She understands human psychology so well that she is able to make everyone smile and feel special. She is so discreet that no one is able to understand her magic. Does anyone understand how the sun

makes flowers bloom? Does the sun ever have to look for light? Why, then would *Ajja Chandana* ever need to consult anyone for tips on managing her group? She blends with the *sangh* so well that the manager and the managed have become one and the same.”

Sudharma continued, “*Sadhvi* Mrigavati was so absorbed in the *samosaran* yesterday that she forgot to return to her quarters before dark. Everyone, including *Ajja Chandana*, left the *samosaran* grounds and returned to their quarters before the appointed time as per the rules of the *sangh*; but no one disturbed *Sadhvi* Mrigavati’s meditation.

When *Sadhvi* Mrigavati returned, *Ajja Chandana* politely reminded her that she had transgressed the *sangh*’s rule. Mrigavati gently asked for her pardon and went to her room for meditation. At night, while *Ajja Chandana* was fast asleep in her room, *Sadhvi* Mrigavati was still meditating next door. Suddenly she was startled. Being close to achieving enlightenment, Mrigavati, though in her own room, was able to see that a poisonous snake has entered *Ajja Chandana*’s room. Mrigavati rushed there and awoke *Ajja Chandana*.

Whenever men, in their ignorance and arrogance, will try to oppress women, *Ajja Chandana* will inspire women of the world to assert and trust themselves.

Ajja Chandana immediately realized that Mrigavati had reached the ‘Arhat’ stage. “How else could Mrigavati have that sixth sense to see a snake coming into my room?” She wondered. She regretted reprimanding Mrigavati for being late and promptly asked for Mrigavati’s forgiveness.

It is a tribute to *Ajja* Chandana's leadership skills that when she reprimanded *Sadhvi* Mrigavati, Mrigavati did not reply angrily to remind *Ajja* Chandana that she was her aunt, a Queen who had handled the affairs of a kingdom, and did not need lessons on responsibilities. *Ajja* Chandana, though her leader, was also humble enough to ask for forgiveness from *Sadhvi* Mrigavati. *Ajja* Chandana has truly nurtured a humble, gentle culture among the *sadhvis*."

Ganadhar Gautam, I now understand why Mahavir appointed *Ajja* Chandana to lead the group of 36,000 *sadhvis*. Bhagwan Mahavir placed immense trust in *Ajja* Chandana and she has truly dignified that trust by infusing Mahavir's personality into the *sangh*. Gautam, "Perhaps you will remember that on the day when Mahavir ordained Chandana, he addressed her as *Ajja* (honorable) Chandana. Honorable indeed, she truly has brought honor to the entire *sangh*."

I was listening to Sudharma and said, "You know Sudharma, there was a time when I too was a strong believer in the superiority of men, but the bold step taken by *Tirthankar* Mahavir to ordain women like *Ajja* Chandana made me believe that our mothers, sisters, and daughters are no less! In the future, whenever men, in their ignorance and arrogance, try to oppress women, I am sure that *Ajja* Chandana will inspire women of the world to assert and trust themselves."

4. The Birth – The Liberator has arrived

In keeping with the Arhat tradition, ordained men and women travel barefoot explaining the Arhat path to liberation. Today we are headed for Kundagram*, the birthplace of Mahavir. This is where the young prince Vardhaman (Mahavir's original name) grew up. This is the holy soil where he played with his friends, and where the divine fragrances of every tree still reminds everyone of his youth. As we arrived, the citizens of Kundagram were anxiously awaiting their dearest son. Mahavir may be a celebrity and a *Tirthankar* for the rest of the world, but for them he was their beloved prince. He was a dear friend to many--those in the royal family, those who watched him grow, and those who played with him in the royal gardens and nearby forests.

Although *Tirthankar* Mahavir was to stay at the Bahusal gardens on the outskirts of Kundagram, *Maharaja* Nandivardhan had ordered that the entire city be decorated to welcome his younger brother. The streets were immaculately cleaned, the houses freshly painted, and welcome gates were built at the entrance to the city. The town's people had also painted colorful auspicious symbols in their front yards.

* Some people believe that Mahavir was born in Kshatriyakund. Further historical and archeological research may establish the exact place of Mahavir's birth.

Now the citizens of Kundagram were gathering at the Bahusal gardens. They were anxious to see and hear their dear Prince, who was now a celebrity. *Maharaja* Nandivardhan was busy, personally looking after all the arrangements. Thousands were expected, including hundreds of guests and kings and queens from far and wide. Nandivardhan wanted to make sure that he was personally present at the outskirts of the city when his dear brother arrived.

When Mahavir arrived at the gardens the crowd exploded with loud cheers. Mahavir walked swiftly to the podium. He was poised, calm and appeared motionless. Every eye was upon him as he started his sermon. He was speaking and all were able to hear, but to look at him one would have thought he were a statue. People were mesmerized as if in a trance, lost in the memories of earlier days with their prince.

I spotted Nandivardhan quietly standing in the far corner of the garden. He too appeared to be lost in his memories and was perhaps reminiscing about his growing up together with Mahavir. Perhaps he did not want to take away the spotlight from his dear brother. He did not want to show off that being the king and Mahavir's brother, he deserved a special seat on the podium.

I slowly walked up to Nandivardhan, but as soon as he noticed me he bowed respectfully and asked, "Honorable *Gurudev* is everything alright? Is there anything more I can do?"

I said, "*Maharaja* Nandivardhan, you have arranged everything so well that there seems to be no problem at all. However, I noticed that you were standing here all alone and are lost in your thoughts."

"Gurudev, I wanted to listen to Vardhaman, but right now I am so thrilled that I can hardly pay any attention to what he is saying. To tell you the truth, I was thinking about those wonderful days in the palace where Vardhaman and I grew up together."



Queen Trishala's fourteen dreams

This was my chance to learn more about Mahavir's past. I asked, "Maharaja, I am always with Bhagwan Mahavir like his shadow, yet I know very little about his childhood. Perhaps you could tell me about it. Was there anything special about his birth or childhood?"

Nandivardhan was eager to tell but he said, “Honorable *Gurudev*, I was too young to remember Vardhaman’s birth. Actually, we should ask *Ajja Sarika*. She has been in the palace since *Maharaja Siddharth*’s young days. She is our ‘*Dasi*’, but she raised both Vardhaman and me. She is like our grandmother; therefore, we call her *Ajja Sarika*. She is somewhere at the *samosaran* today to see her dear Vardhaman.”

It was not too difficult to find the frail, old, *Ajja Sarika*. We took her away from the crowd. Nandivardhan told her about me, and asked her to tell me about Vardhaman’s birth. The old lady was very sharp. She said, “I will tell you all about him, but first tell me, “Are you taking good care of him?” She began her story only after I assured that her Vardhaman was well looked after.

“I have been the palace *Dasi* (maid) since *Maharaja Siddharth* was about 18 or 19 years of age. I witnessed his wedding to *Maharani Trishala*, and I know all about Vardhaman’s birth and about the grand celebration that followed. By that time, I was already senior enough to become *Maharani*’s personal *Dasi*.

Vardhaman was very special, even before his birth. Mother Trishala was unusually serene, and at peace with herself this time. During pregnancy her mood was bright, bubbly, and happy. Her body had a wonderful glow. She walked and talked as if she was on cloud nine. Everyone in the palace knew that the *Maharani* was pregnant, and wanted her every wish fulfilled. *Maharani Trishala*, was content and happy, and was thinking only about the little life that was wonderfully

growing within her. She felt extraordinarily lucky, and was anxious for the day when she would present her little miracle to the world.

One night, while the whole town was quiet and asleep, when the twinkling little stars in the sky were smiling at her beautiful sleeping face, *Maharani* Trishala was having wonderful dreams. One by one, she saw fourteen marvelous dreams, and she woke up. I was sitting by the door to her bedroom and saw her sit up in the bed. She was very excited. I rushed inside. She grabbed my hands and said, “Sarika, just now I had the most amazing dreams. These dreams must have great significance. *Maharaja* must hear about them first. Come let me go to his chamber.”

King Siddharth was woken up by the gentle sound of his queen’s approaching footsteps. He was lying awake, thinking about the queen and the baby that would soon arrive. Surprised to see the queen at such wee hours of the morning, he asked, “What is the matter, my dear queen?” He noticed Trishla’s face beaming with joy and excitement. “What happened?” He asked again.

The queen replied, “I have been thinking about our baby, but I don’t know when I fell asleep. I had dreams, so vivid that I still wonder whether they were dreams or reality. One after the other, I had fourteen beautiful and auspicious dreams.” The queen then narrated to the king each of her auspicious dreams in detail. I was her personal *Dasi*, and am a witness to that event.” *Ajja* Sarika was now lost in that moment.

“How did *Maharaja* Siddharth react after listening to her dreams?” I wanted *Ajja* Sarika to continue the exciting story.

“Oh, how else could the *Maharaja* react? How else would anyone react to such wonderful news? In fact, *Maharaja* was already ecstatic by the time *Maharani* Trishala finished telling him about her first dream. In the end, he said, “*Maharani*, I am overjoyed with your dreams, and feel so lucky! Your dreams tell me that you will soon be known as the greatest mother on earth. A great soul will be born as your child. Not only will he bring fame and fortune to our family, but he will also be like a beacon of light to the suffering humanity. He will bring comfort and solace to all living beings. I can’t wait to announce this news to the entire world. I will call my ministers in the morning and ask them to spread the news and prepare for grand celebrations. We will call great pundits and the whole world would know what a fortunate mother you are!”

The queen was even more thrilled to see the king’s exuberance. After bidding goodnight to the king, she returned to her chamber and sat in her bed. Unable to sleep, she was absorbed in her thoughts. “How fortunate I am that such a wonderful child is in my womb! Bhagwan Parshvanath*, let me never forget this moment. Let all my dreams come true. I promise that I will raise him to be your greatest devotee.” The queen was praying and awaiting the morning.

A few months went by, and as the baby in her womb grew, the queen looked ever more radiant. Soon the great moment arrived! It was the 13th night of the waxing moon of the month of Chaitra♦. The

* Sramans, the predecessors of Jains and Buddhists, have a series of 24 Tirthankars. Mahavir is the last i.e. the 24th and Parshvanath was his predecessor, the 23rd, some 250 years before Mahavir.

♦ According to the Indian calendar.

twinkling stars had come together in the sky to make the night more auspicious and brighter than ever. A gentle cool breeze was telling everyone waiting expectantly outside the palace to be patient. The trees in the palace gardens were gently swaying creating divine, melodious tunes as the wind caressed them. Every leaf, every flower had put on a beautiful smile. The air was full of pleasant fragrance. It was moonlit night but even the birds were awake and singing. All of nature was anxiously awaiting a great event, pregnant with expectations from a pregnant mother!"

By now, *Ajja Sarika* was completely lost in her past memory. She continued as if were in a trans. "At such an auspicious moment, it was my privilege to bear the good news, and convey it to the king. I ran to the king's chamber as fast as I could and saw him anxiously pacing the floor. "It's a boy! My Lord, It's a boy!" I shouted, and almost instantly came to my senses.

The queen had given birth to such a beautiful child. People were chanting the slogan 'Long Live the king', but no one was saying, 'Long live the Queen!'

I was just a *Dasi*. I was not supposed to shout! However, the moment was such that the king did not even notice my indiscretion. "A boy! A Prince! Go announce it to the world!" He too shouted with excitement. "Thousands of people are waiting outside, go tell the guards to announce the good news." I ran to the palace balcony, but the news had already reached the crowd. The trumpets were blowing and everyone was shouting, "Long live the Prince! Long live the King! I was listening to the crowd. Suddenly, I felt sad. The queen had given birth to

such a beautiful child. People were chanting the slogan 'Long live the King' but no one was saying, 'Long live the Queen!'

"Long Live the Queen!" I shouted from the balcony. "Long Live the Queen! ! !" I shouted again and again. But no one was paying attention to me. No one was listening. No one! "Does no one care for the women? May be, may be..., our new prince will!" I hoped.

The entire kingdom was now in a festive mood. The royal family and its distant relatives converged on Kundagram to see the baby and to greet the new parents. Parshvanath's monks, aware of the fourteen auspicious dreams, also wanted to welcome and pay their respects to the new baby. They were hopeful that such a great soul in a Sraman family would certainly be a great Sraman monk. Ordinary citizens were anxious to have a glimpse of their prince. Music and dance programs were arranged throughout the kingdom. Cities and towns were decorated with colorful flags and banners, and people shared boxes of sweets in celebration.

We didn't know it fully then, but the peaceful liberator had arrived.'

5. Young Vardhaman and the Cobra

*M*y visit to Kundagram was really proving to be a boon. *Ajja*

Sarika told me about Queen Trishla's wonderful dreams and about Bhagwan Mahavir's birth. I wanted *Maharaja* Nandivardhan to tell me more but he was busy talking to someone else. Many people had gathered around us while *Ajja* Sarika was narrating the story. Some of them were old enough to have personally known the prince. I asked if anyone had known Mahavir as a child.

"Do you mean Prince Vardhaman?" said one of them. "We used to play with him in the palace gardens, and sometimes in nearby forests. Our Prince was always charming and fair, never treating us as commoners. He showered us with friendship and love."

"I remember the day when Vardhaman boldly handled a vicious cobra and treated it with compassion and kindness." said another person. "We were playing under a giant Banyan tree when we suddenly noticed a huge black cobra. Perhaps we had unknowingly disturbed it, as it was in the attack position with its hood raised. One of us sounded the alarm and we all started running away, frightened and screaming. Some of us picked up stones and tried to throw these at the cobra from a safe distance. We screamed, 'Run!..., kill it, kill it!'"

Nobody was paying attention to what Vardhaman was saying. He was calmly asking us not to throw stones at the cobra. “Have you noticed how the Prince’s persona always has an aura of gentleness and kindness?” he asked me but then continued without waiting for my answer. “It was the same even when he was a child. We all knew and admired his friendliness, but little did we know that even animals could read his aura. Once we became quiet, Vardhaman slowly approached the cobra. His hands were extended to signal friendship. All of us shouted almost in unison, ‘Vardhaman, don’t! It is poisonous! It is deadly! Run, Vardhaman, run!’

Vardhaman again signaled us to be quiet and moved closer to the cobra. We were watching this with fear and amazement, but Vardhaman was not afraid. The cobra must have sensed that Vardhaman meant no harm. As if to acknowledge this friendship, the cobra also slowly lowered his hood; it was no longer in attack mode. We were amazed. The cobra actually appeared to be longing for Vardhaman’s friendship. It was inviting him to come closer. Vardhaman’s love and kindness was transforming the vicious cobra into a harmless, friendly creature.

“You too, are my friend! Would you like to come and play with us?” Mahavir was gently saying to the cobra as he went very close. We were terrified. ‘Stop, Vardhaman! Do not go any closer. Are you crazy? Run!’ We were shouting again. Vardhaman signaled us to be quiet, extended his hand to the cobra, and gently sat down.

Believe it or not, the cobra actually started crawling up his arm. Once on Vardhaman’s arm, the cobra raised his hood again and was

actually eye-to-eye with him. As if the two long-lost friends were suddenly coming face-to-face! We were horrified, but soon realized that they were mutually appreciating their beauty and magnanimity.

The two stared at each other for a while, and then played together like friends. We remained awestruck at a safe distance. Finally, when their playful encounter was over, Vardhaman took the cobra to the trees and bid him a friendly good-bye. We realized that Vardhaman could actually talk to and understand the animals.

After a while Vardhaman returned to us and we hugged him. Some of us were literally crying! We asked, “Were you not afraid, Vardhaman? We were so terrified that we couldn’t scream anymore! What kind of friend are you? Why didn’t you listen to us? Enough of your showmanship!

Vardhaman was about to say something but we shouted, ‘No, we won’t listen to you. We’re going back to the palace to tell your mother. She will make you listen! But....wait! First, tell us how it felt when that cobra was crawling up your arm? Weren’t you scared? Were you talking to the cobra? What were you saying to it?’

Vardhaman realized that we were now in a mood to listen. We surrounded him as he sat down on a rock. ‘Tell me!’... ‘No! Tell me!’ we all shouted eagerly to have the Prince turn and talk directly to us.

Vardhaman greeted everyone with his typical smiling face. ‘I am looking at everyone. I am talking to all of you’ Vardhaman said.

‘Tell us dear Prince, how did it feel when you touched the cobra?’ someone asked again.

‘It wasn’t any different from being near you, hugging you,’ said Vardhaman with a smile on his face.

‘Whom are you kidding, Vardhaman? It could have killed you. It was poisonous. We are not crazy. You cannot talk like this to us Vardhaman; we have to tell your mother all about this foolishness.’

The Prince continued. ‘When I saw that cobra, I was amazed by its smooth and beautiful body and by its bright red, shining eyes! It was staring at me as well. I sensed that it wanted to tell me something. When I offered it my hand in friendship, it smoothly crawled up my arm. I kept on caressing it and the cobra was happy, like a child in its mother’s lap. I gently told him, “Welcome, my friend, I love you.” The cobra told me, ‘We, too, need love and friendship. We do not bite people just for fun. If people harass us, and we have no other defense, then we strike back. How else can we save ourselves?’

A villager who was listening to this story in the Bahusal gardens suddenly interrupted. “*Gurudev*, isn’t that wonderful and bold of Vardhaman?” However, the story teller continued, ‘That is when we decided to call him *Vir Vardhaman*! Brave Vardhaman!’ Others joined us and raised the slogan, “*Vir Vardhaman, Vir Vardhaman...*”

6. Vardhaman – Education and Ordainment

J was talking to Bhagwan Mahavir's childhood friends at the *samosaran* grounds in Kundagram who had just finished telling me about young Vardhaman's adventure with a cobra. I loved listening to stories about Mahavir as much as I enjoyed listening to him. His friends' shouts of "Vir Vardhaman" attracted others who quickly surrounded us.

I noticed that Mahavir's brother Nandivardhan was listening to the story. He had a serene smile on his face that was silently saying, 'Yes, that's my brother all right! Fearless!' His memories were coming alive, and he wanted to share them. How fortunate for me!

I approached Nandivardhan and said, "Dear *Maharaja*, you are the luckiest of all! You are the elder brother of the omniscient one. Mahavir has limitless vision and knowledge. Was he always like this? Who was his Guru? At which *gurukul* (school) was he educated?"

Nandivardhan had a big laugh. He said, "My venerated Swami, yes, Vardhaman was sent to a *gurukul* for his education, but who could teach him? He already had so much knowledge! He was not interested in what the *gurukul* had to offer. He did not want the education that is normally given to a prince. His focus was on the spiritual world, not the physical world! He went to school simply because my father insisted.

Many of us accompanied him to the *gurukul*. When we arrived, he respectfully greeted the guru and said, '*Pranam*, respected *Acharya*, I have come here to learn from you the answers to some questions that intrigue me. Would you kindly satisfy my curiosity?'

This was an unusual experience for the *Acharya*. Never before had a new student asked him, so politely and gracefully, to satisfy his curiosity. The *Acharya* was extremely pleased. He said, 'My dear prince, please feel free to ask whatever you want to know.'

The prince asked, 'Respected *Gurudev*, I want to know who I am. Am I this body? I suspect that my body is different from my soul. How can I be sure? Can you teach me how to know this fully? When our body

What is the purpose of this universe? Why is it here? Why am I here? Is it possible to liberate the soul? Passions and emotions rule our minds. Is there any way to control this mind?

is hurt, our soul knows the pain. Can the soul be separated from the body to free it from the bodily trauma? What is the purpose of this universe? Why is it here? Why am I here? Everyone seems to be in pain

and worry. Is it possible to liberate the soul from this burden? Passions and emotions rule our minds. Is there any way to control this mind?'

The entire classroom was stunned. Students were looking with amazement at Vardhaman. No one had asked such questions before. Someone said, 'How intelligent and bold he is! Look at his beautiful eyes. Listen to his sweet sound! What poise, what courage! Will *Gurudev* aptly satisfy his curiosity? What if he cannot?'

‘Vardhaman’s questions set everyone thinking. Who could answer these questions - they are difficult even for adults? This was not a school that taught such things. Future kings are trained here in the art of ruling a kingdom, law and order, economics, warfare, and conquering new lands. Winning the battle to control one’s own mind was not within this school’s syllabus. Perhaps no school could satisfy Vardhaman’s curiosity, and he would have to blaze his own trail to find the answers!’

Maharaja Nandivardhan continued, ‘The students were silently awaiting the *Gurudev*’s response. Finally, he answered patiently and in hushed tones. ‘Dear Prince, this is a school for learning how to defeat your enemy, how to protect and enlarge your kingdom, and how to make, stockpile, and use weapons. Students come here to learn how to become an effective ruler. This is not the place to find your answers.’

Nandivardhan continued his story. “With due respect to the *Gurudev*, Vardhaman left the school and returned to the palace. My parents were worried, even angry, to see Vardhaman back. However, I knew that Vardhaman was exceptionally different. Every one loved him, and though he was young, he had unusual abilities and could resolve problems facing families or kingdoms. Everyone admired and even looked forward to his input on important matters. As a child, he was the center of attention for all his friends and family.”

Nandivardhan could not stop reminiscing about his brother’s childhood, but I interrupted. “It seems Vardhaman had everything – wealth, health, friends, and happiness. So why did he leave?”

For a moment, Nandivardhan was silent, as if I had touched a deep wound within him. Visibly disturbed, his eyes became moist. ‘Respected Gautam swami, with his educators unable to answer his questions, Vardhaman needed to leave the palace and search out truth elsewhere. Nevertheless, he did not leave the palace immediately because he knew that his parents would be hurt.

Vardhaman’s early quest for answers revealed a great deal about his insight and determination. He knew as a young boy that there was much more to be learned, and that it was essential to understand these things. He was not in the slightest bit interested in the knowledge imparted to Kings – he wanted the truth of the universe – truth that could be shared with all. Everyone around him knew that no school could provide the answers to his keen questions.

After the death of my parents, Vardhaman intensified his *sadhana*. Though he was physically among us, mentally he remained lost in a different world. I did not want him to leave. We tried to dissuade him for two full years under the pretext that I needed his help. Vardhaman was determined but polite enough to never speak out against our attempts. He quietly and patiently waited for the next opportunity to pursue his dream. However, I notice that he was becoming more withdrawn from worldly life, and lost in his thoughts. He was physically among us but mentally in a different world.

Gurudev, how can anyone put limits on the limitless? Can anyone contain the sky? Parental family ties cannot bind the one for whom every living being in this universe is his family. Vardhaman had everything,

enough wealth and love, but he was restless because he was in search of the absolute truth. His goal was to free his soul from its ties with his fickle mind and mortal body. He used to say, 'limitless energy and knowledge of my free soul will enable me to help all human beings, even those in the animal and the plant world - every living entity.'

One day, Vardhaman was standing on the banks of a rapidly flowing river. I was watching him from a distance. I sensed that he was thinking about the river. I could read his thoughts, 'Poor river, it is sending all this much water to the ocean, but the ocean is ever thirsty. It is never content, never satisfied! Is life just like the ocean? Is it ever possible to feel satisfied with life? Will our thirst for comforts ever be quenched? Is there any end to our greed and lust? Can we ever be free of misery? Is this the truth of existence?' Vardhaman was getting restless.

By now, my brother was like a free bird, neither tied down by his past, nor worried about his future. His focus was on the strange 'Me' within ones body. How could 'Me' be a ruler, if 'Me' himself is trapped within a physical form and is ruled by his mind? One who is influenced by external events cannot be an influential ruler. How can the one who is being ruled over, be freed to become a true ruler?'

Vardhaman was focused on only one question, 'Who am I?' Almost no one has succeeded in answering this age-old question. No one seems to have understood the Reality. Why else would there be so many scriptures, and such different versions of Reality peddled by those who claim to have the only and the absolute truth? Nevertheless, Vardhaman was confident that he could discover Absolute Truth through *sadhana*. He

once told me, 'Parshvanath and our 22 Sraman gurus before him had succeeded in doing so by *sadhana*. I must too'!

Venerated Swami, Vardhaman's anxiety for discovering the Reality was so intense that he would hardly eat or sleep for days. The **No one seems to have understood the Reality. Why else would there be so many scriptures, and such different versions of Reality peddled by those who claim to have the only and the absolute truth?** physical demands of the body could not impede his resolve. In fact, his body itself had become his partner in this quest. His body was no longer sensitive to pain or pleasure. As you know well, the path of *sadhana* involves many battles, but the first is always with the *sadhak's* own body. Vardhaman had already won this battle.

My brother was politely waiting for my permission, and I could no longer stop him from leaving home for *sadhana*. I said to him, 'Dear Vardhaman, you are in search of truth, but obviously no one else can ever show you Reality. You must discover it by yourself! Do so, and you can bring peace to all of humanity. You have my blessings. I will arrange for your ordainment. Let peace be with you, dear brother!' And so, at the age of 30 my little brother was gone!

Most people hesitate to take any decision. Even after careful analysis they are afraid of the unknown and worry that their crazy ideas may spring them into hasty action. They brood upon the difficulties they might encounter, problems they might face, the effect of their decision on the self and the others, and try to weigh all the consequences.

On the other hand, my brother had no difficulties leaving his friends and the relatives with whom he grew up. He did not appear to be concerned about such problems as: Where shall I go from here? Where will I sleep? What shall I eat? Who will accompany me? Who will look after me if I am not well?

Nandivardhan could not hold back his tears. Despite the passage of so many years, his intense brotherly love overwhelmed him. I held his hand to comfort him. Such a strange bonding! Both of us loved Mahavir; now we were bonded as well through our hearts.

Nandivardhan continued, 'My dear brother grew up in regal luxury, but was now on a lonely path. He bravely pulled out his own hair, and wore only a piece of divine cloth on his shoulder. He had no one to tell him where to go; no guide, no guru, no pre-determined path! I can still picture him walking away leaving us behind. We kept on watching, with tears in our eyes, until our dear Vardhaman disappeared completely into the distant woods.

Gurudev Gautam, on the day Vardhaman left home I was worried and depressed, and remained so for 12½ years. However, when I saw his brilliance today, I realized that Vardhaman may have left the childhood friends and family, but has endeared the entire living world as his friend. He may have given up his physical wealth, but he has gained an everlasting, invaluable divine treasure.'

Nandivardhan continued further, but my mind began to drift. I – Gautam - have Mahavir to guide me. I try to walk in his footsteps. Who

Vardhaman may have left the childhood friends and family, but has endeared the entire living world as his friend. He may have given up his physical wealth, but he has gained an everlasting, invaluable divine treasure.

or what guided Mahavir? In whose footsteps did he follow? Every time I have some questions I run to Mahavir, but to whom did Mahavir ask his questions during *sadhana*? Mahavir is my solace, but who was his? How did he persevere year after year for 12½

years, all alone? My mind was spinning with so many questions; I could not concentrate on the rest of what Nandivardhan was saying. I bid him good-bye and wandered off lost in my thoughts.

I was hoping to unveil these secrets, though I wondered if Bhagwan would ever reveal them. How did he survive those years of *sadhana*? How did he finally realize the Reality? Where did he develop his limitless compassion for all living beings?

I sincerely wished that Bhagwan will someday talk about this. He will reveal his secret to us – his most dedicated followers. He would unlock the mysteries of his *sadhana*. However, I also knew that Bhagwan never talked about himself!

7. Sadhana

*N*andivardhan's description of Vardhaman's resolve to leave the palace and head for the forest gripped my thoughts for several days. The vivid images of Vardhaman giving away all his wealth, walking barefoot into the forest and covered with just a single piece of cloth still haunts me. I can see people lined up along his route bidding him farewell with tears, Nandivardhan watching all this in stunned silence while others urging Vardhaman to return to the palace. Obviously, their affectionate pleas did not dissuade Vardhaman from his decision. The Prince – now a pauper – walked all alone, with no one for company, blazing an unknown path, his destination unknown.

Where did he go? What was the force driving him? How did he endure the hardships of twelve and a half years of lonely *sadhana*? What difficulties and dangers did he face? People expect me to know all about this period in Mahavir's life because I, Indrabhuti Gautam have been his disciple for so many years. However, I too am desperately looking for the answers, because Mahavir has always been silent on these matters. Perhaps there are clues in his sermons and his day-to-day living. I try hard to analyze his every word, his every move. For all my efforts, what

have I found? What have I learned so far? All I can say is that I am like a child standing on the shore, trying to embrace the vast ocean!

Mahavir commands tremendous respect from every member of our *sangh*. His words are like a lifeline and his every move guides us. We truly crave seeing him, listening to him, worshiping him, fulfilling his every wish, and emulating his every action. Everyone desperately wants to know more about his long *sadhana*. Every now and then our intense curiosity unearths bits and pieces of information and a cloud of frustrated sadness spread over us. We feel sad because Bhagwan Mahavir had to endure such hardships for such a long period, and frustrated because we were not there to help and protect him. We are always anxious to enjoy the benefits of his advice and guidance, but where were we when he faced deadly dangers for those 12 long years?

These concerns are but empty words now. We know several stories and eye-witness accounts of Mahavir's ordeals. He was insulted, hassled, harassed, and even physically assailed by many of his detractors. However, Mahavir's response, if he ever did response, to all these atrocities was always equanimity and compassion – not hatred or revenge. Thousands of Mahavir's followers have asked us about it, and perhaps millions more would ask in the future, but we do not know the answers. I don't believe anyone can understand the source and the fortitude that shaped Bhagwan Mahavir's extreme courage and determination. These are his innate qualities that defy explanation.

Ordinary mortals like us can only imagine how Mahavir endured such intense and sustained suffering. Could our delicate bodies ever withstand such pain? In the entire history of humanity, hardly anyone has suffered like he did, or has ever shown such courage and compassion. People suffer during natural disasters, some accepting such pain as



Mahavir giving away his wealth before leaving for *Sadhana*

inevitable, but rarely has anyone tolerated atrocities without fighting back, and without resistance. Moreover, has anyone ever continued to shower kindness and mercy on an assailant like Mahavir did? Doesn't

the human mind instinctively react with anger and violence towards inhuman atrocities? How did Mahavir gain mastery over his mind to react with so much compassion?

My older colleagues usually suppress their curiosity. They know that the answers to such questions can be found only through self-experience. However, the new and younger monks cannot contain their curiosity, and often ask how Mahavir achieved such self-discipline. “*Gurudev*,” they ask, “Tell us how Bhagwan Mahavir survived those twelve and a half grueling years. We want to learn the art of enduring hardships and achieve self-discipline. Such information would help us. It would be a beacon of light for our journey. Please do tell!”

What could I tell them? Can such things ever be taught? Nandivardhan told me that Vardhaman had full control over his physical pain and pleasure before he left the palace. With full command over his body and mind, Vardhaman was no longer distracted by the demands and desires of his body. I trusted Nandivardhan, but his explanation did not satisfy my curiosity.

This afternoon while I was still pacing the ground thinking about Mahavir’s 12 years of *sadhana*, Ganadhar Sudharma joined me. He sensed my restlessness and asked, “You seem to be lost in a different world, Ganadhar Gautam. What are you thinking about?”

I answered, “I am trying to string together the twelve and a half years of Bhagwan’s *sadhana*. Those mystery years are extremely important for all of us. They could guide us in our *sadhana*.”

Ajja Chandana overheard our conversation and joined in. “I-too, am wondering about Bhagwan’s lonely years. I am thinking about the dangers and the hardships he faced, and also about the emotional pressure he may have faced to give up and return to the old, comfortable life of physical pleasures. All that suffering but Mahavir never gave up.”

“No doubt Bhagwan did suffer a lot!” Sudharma intervened. “But, do not link suffering with self-realization. Suffering is everywhere. All living beings suffer but such suffering does not bring Self-realization.” Understanding Mahavir’s secret would certainly give us some pointers.”

I responded to Sudharma by repeating *Maharaja* Indravardhan’s words. “*Vir Vardhaman* was totally absorbed in his search for reality. He had such a mastery over his body and mind that he could take physical pain and pleasure with equanimity and without any distraction.”

“But how is this possible?” *Ajja* Chandana demanded gently. “How did he master his body and mind? You cannot just walk away in the forest and turn off your mind so that hunger, sleep deprivation, and boredom no longer bother you. One can go without food for a few days, but eventually must yield to the pangs of hunger!”

“You are right *Ajja* Chandana”, Sudharma said. “However, this is true for the early stages of *sadhana*. Gaining control over our emotions and physical needs is a slow process, but it is achievable! We can endure physical pain when we are fully absorbed in achieving our goal.”

“It is likely that in his early days of *sadhana*, Vardhaman was uneasy with the demands of his body for food and sleep. However, his *sadhana* started long before he left his palace. Lost in his quest, he was

used to going without food and sleep for days. So, having no food or sleep may not have been a great hardship when he entered the woods.

I believe that his real problem in the initial stages must have been to face ego. As a rich prince whose every wish was once at his command, it must have been intensely humbling to go to someone's door, half naked, and beg as a mendicant. Overcoming ego and having to ask people to spare some food must have been his true devils."

I joined in to support Sudharma's argument. "Remember how Bhagwan repeatedly tells us that our passions (*kashayas*) such as ego,

Our passions such as ego, anger, hatred, deceit, lust, and attachments, are our true enemies. Overcome these, and the road to enlightenment is open.

anger, hatred, deceit, lust, and attachments, are our true enemies. Overcome these, and the road to moksha is open. The essence of our daily *sadhana* is to practice austerities so

that we slowly eliminate our passions and our bodily demands.

It is a common experience that, when one is truly absorbed in his work, one forgets to eat or drink. *Vir Vardhaman* was totally absorbed in his search for Reality. It was his singular focus, his singular goal. It was so important to him that food, sleep, and pain or pleasures did not concern him. His conscience was oblivious to the physical demands of his body. *Vardhaman* certainly endured many hardships during those 12 years, but his fully focused mind was probably unaware of external happenings. External events may not have even entered his conscience."

By now, our newest monk, *Ganadhar Prabhas*, had also joined our discussion. I remember him as a Vedic scholar who firmly believed that



Mahavir Enduring Physical Pain

bliss and everlasting happiness are God's rewards to those who win His favors. Sraman concept of soul and its purification were totally new to him. However, being a great scholar, as he evidently was, Prabhas came with his followers to learn from Mahavir. He asked of Mahavir several questions about soul and its liberation. Impressed by what he heard, Prabhas joined our *sangh* and Mahavir readily honored him as a *Ganadhar*. He was still learning about *sadhana*. That explains why he asked, "Honorable dear Gautam Swami, what was the goal of Mahavir's *sadhana*? Why did he have to remain so focused? What did he seek?"

I liked *Ganadhar* Prabhas' child-like innocence and readiness to learn. I decided to explain Sraman concepts in detail and said, "Mahavir was seeking full knowledge of his soul. In the field of knowledge the knower, the known, and the knowledge are the three different entities. For example, in a simple statement such as, 'The grass is green', we are the knower because we learned about the color of the grass. The fact that it is green is the knowledge, and the grass, the object about which we learned, is the known. In reality, the true knower is not us, but our soul. Just as we can know or learn about grass, so can we learn about the soul. That makes the soul both a knower as well a known. Mahavir's soul – the knower – was seeking the knowledge about his pure soul – the known."

Ganadhar Prabhas asked, "But, why was Bhagwan so resolute to know more about the pure soul? What do you gain from it?"

I replied, "*Ganadhar* Prabhas, knowing our soul is the true goal of all our *sadhana*. What good is *sadhana* if we don't know our goal? The soul is both the knower and the known. But when a *sadhak's* soul becomes

pure and free of all karma, the knower and the known become one. This is the *kevali* stage of the spiritual progress. At this stage the *sadhak* gains *kevalgyan*, that is, he is fully enlightened or knows everything. A pure soul is thus absolute knowledge itself!

The soul is a knowable entity, but who among us really knows his soul? When we talk about ourselves, we use the words 'Me' or 'I'. Who is that 'Me'? The 'Me' is actually within us. It is our soul, our consciousness. Do we really know any thing about 'Me'? 'Me' is just a part of us. When we are happy or sad, when we win or lose, we feel its presence within us, but who is 'Me'? We think that 'Me' rules this body, yet it is also simultaneously imprisoned within the body. How can one be both the ruler and the prisoner? Vardhaman was in search of that mystery. Vardhaman had his sights focused on that mystical 'Me', - the 'Me' who makes us feel both happy and sad, the winner and the loser, and the 'Me' that virtually rules our lives, was his curiosity."

As was typical, *Ajja* Chandana joined the serious philosophical debate by raising a more serious question. "What is 'Me'? Is it the soul, the mind, the conscience, or our physical being? Are these all different entities or just different terms for the same entity?"

Ajja Chandana's curious nature always impresses me. Her questions were opening doors to Vardhaman's 12 mysterious years. Everyone was anxiously awaiting my reply. I did not have a clear answer, but I decided to draw upon whatever I had heard from Mahavir. I replied, "The soul, the mind, the conscience, and our physical being are all different, but they influence one another. If we want to understand

Mahavir's *sadhana*, we must first understand the interplay between the mind and the soul. Mahavir was able to understand it, and thereby 'know' it. 'Me' is also often called, Soul, *Atma*, *Jiva*, Self, *Chetana*, or Consciousness. Actually, 'Me' is the Self only in its purest state. Pure 'Me' has infinite consciousness, and unlimited knowledge and energy. But the 'Me' within us is impure, bonded and contaminated by material karmic particles. These material particles (*dravya*) limit our knowledge and vision, and also cause our impure Self to generate some kind of vibrations. These vibrations are our psychic or emotional states, desires, and passions, which are collectively called our *bhava* karma or *chitta*.

The emotional states in the impure Self are actually created in response to events occurring within the material objects that exist in the external world. In other words, the change seen in material objects (*dravya* karma) is said to be the indirect, or subsidiary cause (*nimitta karan*), not the direct or primary cause (*upadan karan*), of the change in our psychic or emotional state. For example, pleasure and pain are the emotional states of the impure Self, caused by nervous impulses or thought processes. External objects do not contain pleasure or pain; they cause (*nimitta karan*) such impulses. Since the impure soul generates emotional impulses (*bhava* karma) according to its own state, the same event or object affects some people with pain and others with pleasure."

"You mean to say that some people respond with rage and anger to an event, while others may remain cool and kind in the same situation because soul generates these responses according to its own state of impurity?" Prabhas was excited and wanted to ensure that he understood my explanation so far.

“Exactly,” I said. “Our conscience is indirectly influenced by the external objects (*dravya*), which directly affect our mind causing neuro-chemical changes in the brain. This is where the subjective material changes, i.e. mental or thought activities are evolved. The soul also affects mental activity, but only indirectly through *bhava*. Thus, the consciousness, or Self is the direct, intrinsic cause (*upadan karan*) of its own modifications, generating *bhava* karma (pure or impure, wholesome or unwholesome), but not the direct, intrinsic cause of any modifications of the mind or the neuro-chemical processes of the brain.”

“If the soul and mind are two different entities, how do they influence one another?” *Ganadhar Prabhas* was still curious.

I replied, “Like a vast ocean, our soul generates endless *bhava*-waves. These waves excite our mind, and the vibrations thus generated impact our senses. Thus, the center of all this is our soul. The mind is only an active messenger, it reacts to every wave.

Sometimes the mind responds to the external events without consulting the *bhava* center (*chitta*), or the Soul, and sometimes it sends and receives signals from the *chitta*. Sometimes it calls upon its own accumulated experiences before responding, while at other, its response is spontaneous. Mind is able to influence the entire internal system, as well as be influenced by it. This fickle mind is so unstable and quick that it is almost impossible to keep it steady and disciplined.”

Ajja Chandana was listening carefully and appeared somewhat disturbed. She wanted to ask a question, but Prabhas jumped in wanting

to repeat every thing in simple point form so that he clearly understood the sequence. He said, “Let me see if I have got it right.

1. External events affect our body and senses, as well as our soul, causing the inflow of *dravya* karma.
2. Our body and senses transmit impulses to our mind and brain. These cause neuro-chemical changes in the brain.
3. The mind and the brain then may send signals to our *bhava* centre (*chitta*) through our thought processes.
4. At the same time, our impure soul generates *bhava* waves and transmits those to the *bhava* centre.
5. The *bhava* centre then sends impulses back to our mind and sense organs, instructing them on how to respond.”

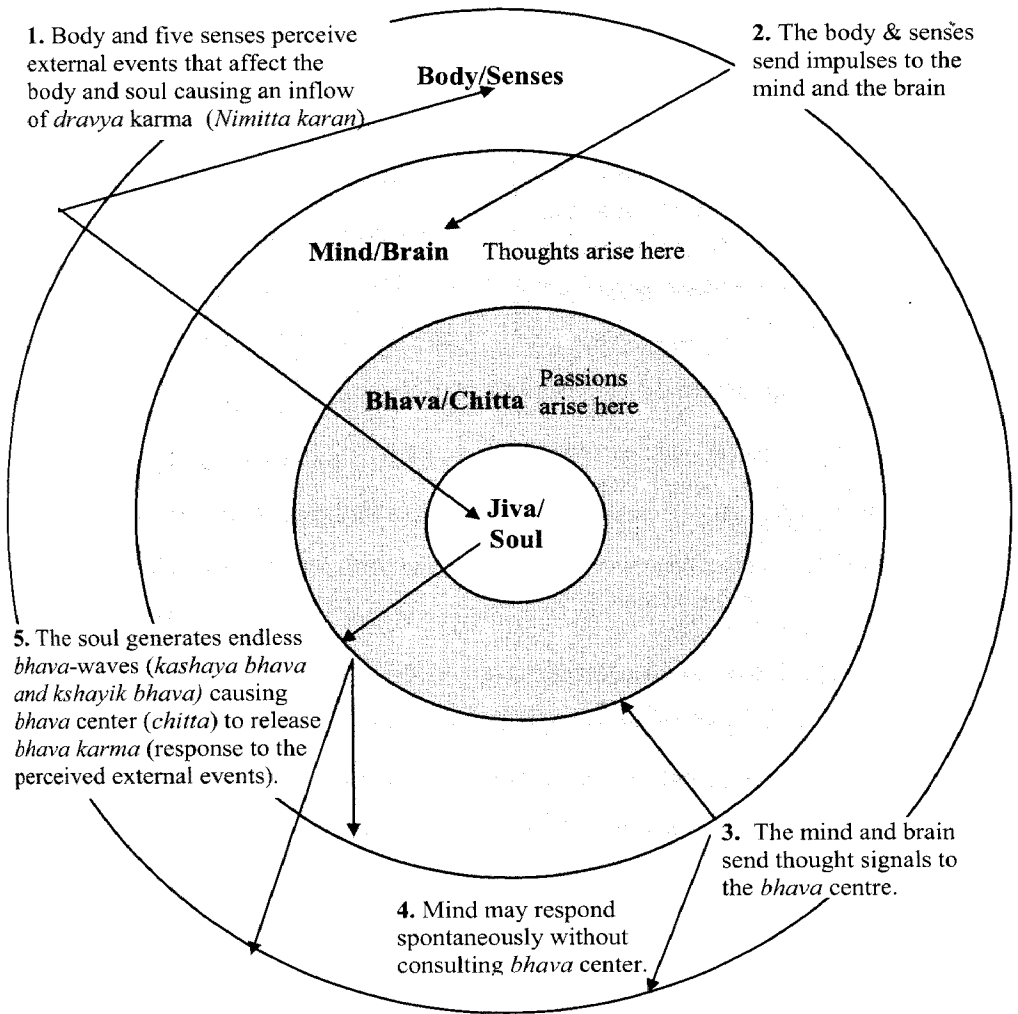
By now, *Ganadhar* Sudharma was thinking about yet another issue. He said, “Bhagwan Mahavir was in search of the Self. Was he not simultaneously concerned with the purity or impurity of the mind?”

I replied, “Sudharma, the purity issue comes later. Mind and soul interactions are so intertwined that it is hard to appreciate their

You are different from your mind, which is an outsider. The mind cannot and must not be allowed to control your soul. You are your own master.

individual activities. Bhagwan Mahavir’s technique of *sadhana* has evolved out of his deep insight. According to that insight, ‘You are different from your mind, which is an outsider. The mind cannot and must not be allowed to control your soul. You are

your own master. The ‘Me’ has own independent authority. Understand this and discipline your mind so that you can liberate the ‘Me’ from the dominance of your mind.



The *samsara*, (the cycles of death and rebirth) and the resultant

The samsara, (the cycles of death and rebirth) and the resultant suffering, is due to the intertwining of 'Me' and the mind. Being able to recognize these two as separate entities is to know the Self.

suffering, is due to the intertwining of 'Me' and the mind. Being able to recognize these two as separate entities is to know the Self. This knowledge enables you to be free of all miseries and enjoy

bliss.' Mahavir was focused on this insight."

Ajja Chandana saw this as an opportunity to express her concern. She was apparently disturbed by the implication that Bhagwan Mahavir was absorbed in rescuing his soul from the influence of his own mind because his mind was his internal enemy. *Ajja Chandana's* intense love for Bhagwan Mahavir had a protective streak. She said, "Bhagwan is such a peaceful and quiet person, and is totally withdrawn from worldly concerns. Why then did he have to suffer so much? I have heard stories about the insults and atrocities heaped on Mahavir by people without any provocation. Bhagwan had to face such provocations, several calamities, and also had to fight his internal enemy. How did he endure this pain and suffering, and still remain focused on his goal? So many challenges and atrocities, such inhuman treatment, yet Bhagwan always showered only love and compassion on every living being. Why? How?"

I was moved by *Ajja Chandana's* concern for Bhagwan Mahavir. I replied, "Chandana, natural calamities certainly did have their effect on Mahavir's body. After all, the body is an inevitable partner in our *sadhana*. When we are awakened to our soul's need for freedom, the body begins cooperate, stops its mundane demands, and prevents external

events from disturbing our *sadhana*. A person in that state of *sadhana* is so detached from his body that the atrocities, calamities, pain and pleasure become distant events for him. These events do not disturb him, and cannot distract him from his *sadhana*. His soul becomes a mere observer, the knower.

During those 12 years, several people, kings and commoners, may have showered tributes and praise on Mahavir, and several others may have heaped insults and atrocities. However, I am certain that Mahavir

merely observed these events, saw them, and heard them. His mind may have carried this information up to his soul, but his soul in turn would promptly have

A person in deep sadhana is so detached from his body that the atrocities, calamities, pain and pleasure become distant events for him. These events do not disturb him, and cannot distract him from his sadhana. His soul becomes a mere observer, the knower.

instructed his *bhava* to suppress all ill-passions (*kashaya bhava*) and generate only forgiveness (*kshayik bhava*), thus preventing any negative responses. As a result, his senses, mind and body became mere silent observers without generating any negative response.

Sadhana is a tool to shed the past karma (*nirjara*) as well as to stop the new ones from bonding (*sanvara*). With deeper *sadhana*, the karma that obscure our soul's innate intuition and knowledge fall off and we begin to understand our karmic load. We also realize that our miseries are due to our own past karma, and we better endure these without blaming others. In that state, people naturally respond with compassion, affection, and love, even for those who heave insults and abuse at them. Mahavir had reached that stage in his *sadhana* and was never perturbed."

Ganadhar Sudharma now jumped in to support my explanation. He said, “You are right *Ganadhar* Gautam! The other day we were in a small village called Morak where Bhagwan spent four rainy months in the first year of his *sadhana*. We were told about an incident there. Bhagwan was staying in a grass hut given to him by a villager. One day, while Bhagwan was in deep meditation, an animal ate away the grass hut. Bhagwan was not even aware of this until the hut’s owner came shouting insults at him. Unable to get any response from Mahavir, the owner shouted even louder and asked him to leave. Such an insult would have evoked an angry response from a former prince. However, as you say *Ganadhar* Gautam, Mahavir’s response was peaceful.

It seems that even in the first year of his *sadhana* Mahavir had already mastered his emotions. In that incident, his soul must have instructed his mind that it had no authority to generate a unilateral response without consulting the chitta (bhava center) and the soul. And his *chitta* must have instructed the mind that Mahavir had failed to protect someone else’s hut and that therefore, instead of getting angry at the owner’s excessive behavior, the right response from Mahavir would be to apologize, bless the owner for his generosity, and resolve never again to accept something that he could not look after.

Bhagwan’s *sadhana* has enabled him to walk the fine line between his soul and mind, thereby liberating his soul from the influences of his mind and body. His mind is thus no longer influenced by ill passions (*kashaya bhava*). Only the innate qualities of a pure soul - such as



Enlightenment on the banks of river Rujuvalika

compassion, and love (*kshayik bhava*)* now govern all his responses.

This was only the first stage of Mahavir's successfully proven technique for *sadhana*. Mahavir's *sadhana* continued even after becoming immune to external events. His focus now was on eliminating his internal *kashaya bhava*. He knew that the soul-polluting karmic particles were responsible for these passions (*kashaya bhava*). To be free from *kashayas* he needed to purge this karmic matter. His *sadhana* had to continue, but the focus had to be on the purification of the soul. Only then could he discover the pure, unadulterated real 'Me'. Suppressing *kashayas* was easier than eliminating them, but to free himself of all *kashayas*, Mahavir had to stop fresh inflow (*Samvara*) of karmic particles and also eliminate (*Nirjara*) already attached karma. It took him 12 long years of *sadhana* for both – stopping the inflow of *dravya* karma by gaining control over his mind in the first stage, and getting rid of existing karmas, during the second."

It was getting late and *Ganadhar* Sudharma wanted to end the afternoon by asking some concluding questions. He said, "Respected *Ganadhar* Gautam, it seems that we now have a pretty good understanding of Mahavir's two-stage technique. Therefore, should we not prepare some guidelines describing his technique of discovering the Self? It would be a useful tool for our *sangh*".

* Although the English spelling is almost identical, the two terms are different. ***Kshayik bhava*** (our pure, non-violent *bhava* that elevates our soul closer to the liberation state), and ***Kashaya bhava*** (*bhava* motivated by our passions. This promotes bonding to keep our soul forever in the cycle of death and rebirth), the two must not be taken to be the same.

“*Ganadhar Sudharma*,” I said, “I don’t think that we can really understand Mahavir’s technique just by reading some guidelines. Perhaps no one can without personal experience. Mahavir discovered his path through focused practice and *sadhana*. Similarly, each individual must discover this technique by the self to realize the Self.”

Though everyone needs to develop ones own technique through experience, Mahavir’s path can be summed up in his own words; “Understanding the logical distinction between *Jiva* and *Ajiva*, (the living and non-living entities) is enlightenment.” In other words, Mahavir asks us to understand the difference between *Jiva* – our eternal live soul - and everything else that is non-living in this universe. Such understanding is truly achieved only when we fully know our pure Self.

Sometimes his *sadhana* involved practicing austerities and sometimes total silence to experience and understand the effects of strange events and hardships on the inner workings of his mind and soul. Such understanding enabled him to develop a personal technique to control or stop the influence of external events on his mind and to empower his *kshayik bhava*. He was thus able, during the first stage of his *sadhana*, to train his body, senses, and mind to stop negative responses to adverse events. After that, it was a long road to eliminate all *kashayas*. Nevertheless, Mahavir proved that it is not an impossible task. We too can achieve it through focused and sustained *sadhana*. Only then would we really understand the true process of liberation.

8. Ahimsa and Social Justice

Our Arhat sangh was rapidly growing in numbers, thanks to Mahavir's wonderful *samosarans* and his ability to explain Sraman principles. People were thrilled by Mahavir's revolutionary messages of equality, love, compassion, and reverence for every living being, and by his concern for the wide-spread social injustice in the society. Though, Mahavir was once a prince, and lived mostly in the forest for his *sadhana* for 12 years, he was completely aware of the problems facing the poor and disposed in society.

I was still new in the 'Arhat sangh', but being a *Ganadhar*, new monks would ask me several questions about our philosophy, our *sangh*, and even about Bhagwan Mahavir. I knew that Mahavir achieved *kevalgyan* (absolute knowledge) and total bliss through his focused *sadhana*. I was also aware of his love and compassion for all living beings, but, when they asked why he chose to re-enter the society and tackle its problems when he could have simply rested in his state of bliss, I had no answers. I too wanted to know why Mahavir continues to work so hard, walking barefoot through heat and forests, fasting for days, and visiting town after town serving the sick and the poor.

Let self-liberation be the focus of our sadhana, but the goal of our sadhana should be to alleviate pain and suffering of all living beings.

One afternoon I was alone with Mahavir. I asked, “Bhagwan, I understand that our *atma* is trapped in this ‘*samsara*’ and our goal is to liberate it from this painful cycle of birth and death. You have already achieved that hard-won goal. Why then do you still work so hard? Are there new goals to meet?”

Mahavir replied, “Gautam, the focus of my *sadhana* was ‘*atmagyan*’ (knowledge of the Self). As a result, I am completely at peace with myself. However, personal peace and *atmagyan* should not be the ultimate goals of *sadhana*. These are simply the means to achieve a much larger goal -- to alleviate the misery of all living beings. This *samsara* is

Any *sadhana* that does not sensitize us to the pain and suffering of other living beings is only a meaningless ritual. Such *sadhana* may bring *gyan* (knowledge) and liberation, but will not serve the larger goal of common good.

painful. Every living being is in pain and suffering. We can feel their pain only if we are sensitive enough. Is it not selfish for us to have personal liberation or happiness as our ultimate goal?

While self-liberation should be the focus of our *sadhana*, its goal should be to alleviate pain and suffering of all living beings. Devoting my life to freeing every living being from fear (*abhayadan*) and ignorance (*gyandan*) is my greatest hope. It is the ultimate goal of my *sadhana*. Any *sadhana* that does not sensitize us to the pain and suffering of other living beings is only a meaningless ritual. Such *sadhana* may bring *gyan* (knowledge) and liberation, but will not serve the larger goal of common good.”

That was a revelation for me! Before joining the *sangh* I was proud to be a *yagnya* expert, I considered myself to be superior to others, and never understood the pain inflicted on others by my arrogance. The pathetic cries of the slaughter-animals never moved me, but now I feel ashamed. Bhagwan says that all living beings want to live, that they feel pain or pleasure just the same as we do. He says, “We must not treat others in a manner that we ourselves would not like to be treated. Be sensitive to the suffering of others; feel it, share it, and serve others to alleviate their suffering.”

We must not treat others in a manner that we ourselves would not like to be treated. Be sensitive to the suffering of others; feel it, share it, and serve others to alleviate their suffering.”

How right he is! Look at our society today. Someone somewhere twists the truth in the scriptures and pitches one caste against another. We make people our slaves because they look different, and call them ‘*Dasyus*’. We buy and sell them in the markets as we do with animals!

Our cruelty and madness does not stop there. We have killed many human beings from the Naga and the Rakhshasha tribes, for our *yagnya*. We did not care! Our crooked distortion of truth has not spared even our own family members. Just think about the way we treat our women! Drunk with ego, Manu* drummed up male superiority by writing Manusmriti, and turned our mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters into virtual slaves. Where is our wisdom?

* The aboriginal Indian culture was matriarchal before Aryans arrived in 1500 BCE, but males dominated the newly migrated tribes of nomadic Aryans. Manu, a great Aryan scholar, wrote Manusmriti which brought about widespread social changes and turned the Indian culture into a patriarchal one. Matriarchal practices are still found in a number of forest dwelling aboriginal communities, and also in parts of southern India.

Bhagwan Mahavir strongly resists such discrimination. He has welcomed everyone warmly and has given men and women, young and old, the same love and dignity. In fact, he has ordained several low-caste people such as Harikeshmuni ⁽⁴⁾, Kiratmuni, and Arjunmuni.

Within a few days after his enlightenment Mahavir dared to ordain both men and women. Wasn't that a bold, revolutionary step in a culture where Manu has effectively turned women into the 'objects of enjoyment and abuse'? Mahavir honored them all by appointing *Ajja Chandana* as the leader of a large group of *sadhvis*.

His limitless compassion includes even animals and plants. *Maharaja Nandivardhan* told me that even as a child, little Vardhaman ***"Total ahimsa should be the basic rule of our conduct towards all living beings."*** loved animals so much that he would get upset if he saw anyone mistreating our elephants, horses and cattle. Animals felt his love and had great affection for Vardhaman. Remember how a venomous cobra played with our little prince when Vardhaman extended his hand in friendship!

Bhagwan calls this *ahimsa* (non-violence) and asks us to completely avoid violence. ***"Total ahimsa should be the basic rule of our conduct towards all living beings."*** Mahavir insists. I used to sacrifice

⁴ For example, Harikesh, was born in a low-caste 'Chandal' (hangmen) family. As a child no one would play with him and high caste children would throw stones at him. One day, when he was a young man, he watched some children throwing stones at a snake, killing it. That set Harikesh thinking that the killing was the result of the snake's karma. "People throw stones at me perhaps because of my karma in the past life. I can get rid of my bad karma through meditation and penances." He asked Bhagwan Mahavir to ordain him in the Arhat order. His devotion and hard work made him a well-known Sraman scholar.

animals in *yagnya*, so I thought *ahimsa* means only 'to stop killing animals'. The true meaning of *ahimsa* became clear to me only when a *shravak* (layperson) asked Mahavir about it at a *samosaran* in Pava.



Mahavir's *Samosaran* (sermon) on Ahimsa

That *samosaran* in Pava became a dialogue between Mahavir and a *shravak*. The *shravak* asked, "Bhagwan, you ask for total *ahimsa*, but is that ever possible? Do we not kill and destroy many lives when we eat food, drink water, or breathe air? While walking we kill many insects under our feet. How can we live without such violent activities? How can we live a totally non-violent life?"

Bhagwan Mahavir actually welcomed this question. A dialogue allows for a message to be better understood. “You are right,” Mahavir said. “We do inevitably kill or hurt other living beings every day through our actions, yet many of these activities are essential and unavoidable for our survival. However, know that violence is essentially of two types – violence motivated by our body (unintentional), and that motivated by our mind (intentional). We must understand the difference between the two.

Our body’s motivation is only survival, and therefore, our acts of survival, regardless of our caution, are inevitable acts. Yet even in such situations, our inner *bhava* and our inner conscience must always be aware of the violence we commit. We must avoid unnecessary violence, must guard against excesses, and must seek pardon daily from the souls we hurt. In other words, even our inevitable violence must have our pure, non-violent conscience always associated with it.”

“Why should it be so, Bhagwan? After all, a killing is a killing regardless of our conscience,” asked the same *shravak*. Most people nodded apparently in agreement with him.

Mahavir replied by asking a question, “When a killer kills someone, whom does he kill? He cannot kill the body, for the body is itself material in nature and is thus lifeless. No one can kill the soul because the soul is immortal. So, where is the violence?”

While the audience was trying to figure out the answer, Mahavir continued, “The killer hurts his own soul, bit by bit. This is so because while every soul wants to be liberated, violent acts attract karmic particles

which bond with the soul and ruin its prospects for liberation. The killer is actually violating the sanctity of his own soul by taking it deeper in the karmic bondage and away from its path of liberation. Any act, intentional or not, which violates our soul's innate quality of compassion, and hurts its chances of liberation is violence. Thus, while both intentional and unintentional violent acts attract more karmic bondage, our intention and the intensity of passions in a violent act determine the outcome of such bondage. Passions are like glue. They bond karmic particles to our soul. Unintentional acts, being passionless, lack the glue and form weak bonds, but we must face the consequence for our lack of caution in these acts, such bonds can be easily broken off by seeking pardon.

Any act, intentional or not, which violates our soul's innate quality of compassion, and hurts its chances of liberation, is essentially violence.

The audience was puzzled, but was trying to understand. Mahavir continued, "Now let us look at the second type of violence – that motivated by our mind. Most violence in this world is motivated by our mind's insatiable needs. Our passions, lust, greed, ego, and anger perpetrate most violence in the world. Every war in history has its origin in the human mind. Animal sacrifices, killing animals for food, fishing, hunting, and all these violent acts are to satisfy the ugly needs of the human mind. These are not acts of survival. Killing is not natural to the soul; kindness and compassion are. Our passions are always involved in intentional violent acts. They haunt our 'guilty' conscience, and our soul tells us that it has been degraded and taken further away from liberation and freedom. Strong karmic bonds are formed due to our passions, and our soul is truly violated.

The audience was deeply absorbed and listening very carefully. Another *shravak* instantly jumped to a logical conclusion and said, “Bhagwan, in that case, a violent act is not only physical. Sometimes our mere words hurt others, or we silently think ill of others. Are these not the violations of our innate compassion? Should we not therefore consider such mental or verbal acts as violence?”

Mahavir smiled and continued, “Yes, even if no one is hurt by our evil thoughts, it still is *bhava himsa* – violence committed by our mind! Once this subtle meaning of violence is clear, it is easy to realize that violence is widespread in our society. Telling a lie is violence, exploiting others is violence, depriving someone of his livelihood or legitimate

Telling a lie is violence, exploiting others is violence, depriving someone of his livelihood or legitimate rights is violence, ignoring the pain and suffering of others is violence, treating others as inferior is violence, and denying education or knowledge to someone is also violence. Similarly, poverty, child labor, and caste or gender discrimination are acts of social violence. A society that tolerates such behavior against its own people is a violent society.”

rights is violence, ignoring the pain and suffering of others is violence, treating others as inferior is violence, and denying education or knowledge to someone is also violence.

Similarly, poverty, child labor, and caste or gender discrimination are acts of social violence. A society that tolerates such behavior against its own people is a violent society.” Bhagwan was now more eloquent than ever.

People were excited to see the sermon turn towards more practical issues. A *shravak* got up and asked, “Bhagwan, you say that tolerating social injustice is violence. However, discrimination, poverty,

and exploitation are deeply rooted in our society. We cannot challenge the entire society. All we can do is to follow personal non-violence!

Bhagwan was now forthright and direct. He said, "Non-violence is not for the cowards nor is it for those who want to remain passive in the face of violence and injustice. It is true that violence is deep-rooted in our society. We have accepted poverty, discrimination, and animal sacrifice to be a part of life. However, remember that our mind and its lack of empathy and sensitivity to violence, empowers this kind of *himsa* (violence). This is *bhava himsa*. It can be stopped only by changing the *bhava*, or mental attitude of people. Eradicating discrimination, poverty, ignorance, and cruel practices requires shifting the mindsets of people. *Ahimsa* is a practical concept because it is the basic nature of our conscience. So, it IS possible to turn around an entire society by appealing to people's conscience.

Non-violence is not for cowards nor is it for those who want to remain passive in the face of violence and injustice.

This task may be difficult, but as I said, it is not for cowards or for passive and inactive people. If you are a true Sraman, or *sadhak*, you must be bold and be active. I am telling this to everyone including those who are ordained in my *sangh*...There is no greater *sadhana* than to eliminate all kinds of *himsa* from our self and our society. There is no better path to liberation than to awaken the innate compassion of your soul. No penance or prayer will liberate your soul without being in tune with its innate qualities. Work individually and collectively to serve others and to eliminate *himsa*. Serve those poor souls that are trapped in the ravages of *himsa*, and alleviate their pain." A very powerful message

indeed, but apparently there were still some people who were not quite convinced.

A *shravak* rose and asked, “Bhagwan, meditation and penance eliminate our karma, but how can service to other living beings wash away our sins and take us closer to moksha?”

Mahavir was anticipating this question. He said, “Killing or hurting is not natural to the soul; kindness and compassion are. When we serve or help others with love we feel happy because our pure, non-violent *bhava* is then in tune with the true nature of our soul. The bonding or the elimination of karma happens because of our *bhava*.

Those who regularly live a life of helping others, without any expectations, any attachment, and any kind of passion, live a serene and happy life. Serenity and calmness originates from our pure, non-violent bhava.

Those who regularly live a life of helping others, without any expectations, any attachment, and any kind of passion, live a serene and happy life. Serenity and calmness originates from our

pure, non-violent *bhava* (*kshayik bhava*). *Kshayik bhava* stops karmic inflow, eliminates bonding, and actually elevates our soul closer to the liberation state. On the other hand, *himsa* lacks pure *bhava*, it is motivated by our passions (*kashaya bhava*), and promotes bonding to keep our soul forever in the cycle of death and rebirth.

Escaping the cycle of death and rebirth should certainly be the goal of every individual. However, the pinnacle of the development of every individual is to alleviate the pain and suffering of all living beings. Do not forget that the individual develops not in isolation, but among

other individuals. Service to others, preserving and protecting them, and helping them grow, compliments an individual's spiritual growth.

Therefore, know that serving humanity, bringing justice to society, spreading compassion and protecting all living beings from systemic *himsa* is the sure path to immortality. I ask all who love me to avoid any kind of *himsa*, and to be proactive in sensitizing the masses to the effects of *himsa* on their own lives. My dear people, I want you to commit yourselves – individually and collectively - to become the catalysts, the leaders, and the messengers of *ahimsa*. Make our world free from fear and ignorance, and a safer place for all living beings.”

Serving humanity, bringing justice to the society, spreading compassion, and protecting individuals from systemic himsa is the sure path to immortality.

9. Mrigavati – War and Peace

*M*ahavir's sermons on *ahimsa* and compassion have become so popular that he is now being identified with these terms throughout our Bharatvarsha (India). Even warring kingdoms and republics now seek his help in settling disputes and stopping bloodshed. This morning I was thinking about Mahavir's growing reputation as a peacemaker. *Sadhvi* Mrigavati's enlightenment last night had set me thinking. Only four years ago Mahavir's peace efforts had saved her from certain devastation in a war.

The news that *Sadhvi* Mrigavati achieved liberation has caused quite a stir in the *sangh*. Just four years ago she was ordained and admitted in the *sangh* under the leadership of her young cousin *Ajja* Chandana.

I was absorbed in thinking about Mrigavati's accomplishments when *Ganadhar* Achalbhrat (Achal = for ever; steady; Bhrat = brother, fellow) walked in and sat near me. As his name suggests, his fellowship neither waxes nor wanes, his love for every one is genuine and unwavering. At 58, his child-like voice is still sweet and pleasing. He said, "*Ganadhar* Gautam, may I ask you something?"

I said “Certainly dear Achalbhrat, I will be more than pleased to answer your query to the best of my ability. What is on your mind?”

Achalbhrat continued, “How fortunate of *Sadhvi* Mrigavati that she achieved liberation in such a short time. Such a feat is not only surprising, but also almost impossible! How did she achieve this? Who was she before joining our *sangh*?”

I knew Mrigavati’s background and decided to tell her story. “Achalbhrat, Mrigavati was the Queen of Vatsa. Progress and conflict

Political life knows no relatives, or loyalties; only opportunities. Opportunists could care less about the suffering and pain inflicted on the people by their machinations.

had always gone hand in hand in Vatsa and Mrigavati had seen it all from the capital city of Kaushambi. Her sister Dharini was the queen of the kingdom of Anga, and the two kings, Dadhivahan of Anga, and

Shatanik of Vatsa, had supposedly trusted each other. Yet, Shatanik sensed that Anga was ill-prepared for defense, and launched a surprise attack on the kingdom. Dadhivahan escaped, but Dharini committed suicide and her daughter, Vasumati, was abducted and sold as a slave.”

Achalbhrat intervened, “Did it not bother Shatanik that he had destroyed his wife’s family?”

I continued, “Political life knows no relatives or loyalties – only opportunities. A brother may turn against his brother, a son against his father, and a friend against his friend if it is opportune to do so. Arch-enemies readily become friends if there is something to be gained by such union. Such opportunists could care less about the suffering and pain

inflicted on their citizens by such machinations. Rulers are supposed to protect their citizens, but their greed and arrogance often have no limits. People were so fed up with their feuds that, whether they lived under an autocratic monarchy or in a democratic *ganatantra* (republic), they were praying for a peaceful liberator. Everywhere I heard their cry:

“Maggadayanam Jeeyabhayanam”

(“Please deliver a peaceful liberator, one who has conquered fear itself.”)

Ganadhar Achalbhrat wanted me to come back to *Sadhvi* Mrigavati’s story. He intervened, “Wise rulers and administrators bring about great social and economic progress in their states. Their citizens achieve rapid prosperity. A well-managed, peaceful, and responsible state promotes great strides in art, culture, and the spiritual life of its people. Only the foolish rulers ignore peaceful alternatives and resort to war.”

Wise rulers and administrators bring about great social and economic progress in their states. Only the foolish rulers ignore peaceful alternatives and resort to war.

I continued, “You are right *Ganadhar Achalbhrat*, but Mrigavati’s troubles did not end there. A few years later King Chandrapradyot attacked Kaushambi, the capital of Vatsa, and killed her husband King Shatanik. Mrigavati was now all alone to take care of the kingdom and Prince Udayan. Chandrapradyot wanted not only land, but also Mrigavati’s hand in marriage. The murderer of her husband, wanted Mrigavati to marry him.

One can only imagine Mrigavati’s trauma through all this. The daunting responsibility of looking after the young Udayan and the affairs

of the Kingdom were now hers. A challenging situation even for great kings! Still Mrigavati handled it with grace and dignity.”

Ganadhar Achalbhrat said, “I do know about Chandrapradyot. He is a skilled but cruel warrior. Many a kingdom readily surrenders when he attacks. Kings and generals fear him and pray that they would never have to face his wrath. People call him *Chanddpradyot* (cruel Pradyot) instead of his real name Chandrapradyot (Beautiful Pradyot).”

I continued, “*Chanddpradyot* is a very appropriate name for him, but Mrigavati’s clever wit had worked magic even on so cruel a king! She outwitted Chandrapradyot! She has never talked about it to anyone in our *sangh*, but I have witnessed her smart maneuvers. People often egotistically brag about their small achievements, and gloat over their memories for a long time. Yet *Sadhvi* Mrigavati never mentioned her triumphs. To her, these successes were all in the past. Once ordained, she remained focused on her future, leaving her past behind. Her soul was free of any past debris. Ego, lust, greed, or anger never touched *Sadhvi* Mrigavati’s soul!”

Ganadhar Achalbhrat said “Dear Swami, I am aware of *Sadhvi*’s gentle nature, but I am curious to know how she faced Chandrapradyot.

I said, “Mrigavati cleverly avoided Chandrapradyot’s demand for marriage, and replied, “I have just lost my husband. My son, Udayan, is still a baby, and the citizens of my kingdom are in a state of terrified shock. Let us first restore peace and administration to this place. As our new king, you must fulfill your responsibility of making our people feel secure. Let us allow some time for that to happen.”



Chandrapradyot asking Mrigavati to marry him

It was neither a 'No' nor a 'Yes' but her reply gave false hope to Chandrapradyot. He asked his generals to make the best possible

arrangements to protect the Queen, rebuild the city, and to provide a safe haven for the citizens of Kaushambi. He returned to his capital with the hopes of later marrying Mrigavati.

Over time, Kaushambi was rebuilt and secure, Udayan grew up, and Chandrapradyot grew anxious to marry Mrigavati. He sent a letter containing a fresh marriage proposal to Mrigavati, but she sent back a

People usually become arrogant and egotistical when they benefit from a string of successes and victories. They gloat over their memories and brag about their small feats for a long time.

terse 'No'. Chandrapradyot was furious, and asked his armies to again attack Kaushambi. Queen Mrigavati had cleverly anticipated Chandrapradyot's move, and secured the city by closing all the gates.

Kaushambi was safe for now...but for how long could the gates really remain closed? Something had to be done to fend off the waiting army. Mrigavati recognized that shutting down the city was bad for the morale of her army, her people, and for the dignity of her family, but there was little she could do."

Ganadhar Achalbhrat was now emotionally involved in the story. I could read his face and knew that he was struggling to find an answer to Mrigavati's predicament. He said, "*Gurudev*, she could have asked Bhagwan's guidance! After all, he who blazes his own trail with personal vision is usually a good leader and guide. Such a person with experience is certainly the best guru, and his guidance has a better chance of success.

Before he left the palace for his *sadhana* Vardhaman used to help his brother in the affairs of the state. He has first-hand experience of princely intrigues, feuds and wars. He has also blazed his own path for

enlightenment. Certainly, such a person must be aware that kings indulge in wars because of their ego, arrogance, and lust. Bhagwan must also know that wars destroy relationships, ruin families, and devastate citizens. Why didn't Mrigavati seek Bhagwan's help? "

I answered, "Actually, she didn't have to! Bhagwan Mahavir's message of peace and compassion had spread widely from the eastern to the western regions of our vast land. *Ganadhar Achalbhrat*, you know that Bhagwan personally travels to kingdoms where simmering conflicts may be ready to explode; sometimes he even ventures out to battlegrounds. He invariably succeeds in stopping violence and bringing about truce. Warring kings willingly accept his advice and the entire area sees an unusual spiritual awakening.

In fact, once, when the King of Sindhu-Sauvir defeated and took the powerful King Chandrapradyot as his prisoner, Mahavir went to Sindhu-Sauvir for the *Paryushan* (a Jain spiritual festival) and gave a series of lectures on "*Uttam-Kshama*" (forgiveness as an ideal), thereby influencing the King to release Chandrapradyot. Bhagwan has actually saved *Maharaja* Chandrapradyot from certain death!

Although Mrigavati had been unable to send a messenger to Bhagwan Mahavir, the news of her plight had already reached him. He promptly reached the outskirts of Kaushambi just as the impatient Chandrapradyot was about to attack. The messenger of peace was now in the midst of the battleground!

Mrigavati could not believe her ears when she heard the good news. She ordered the gates to the city to be opened. She wanted to see

the Bhagwan personally, but her ministers were strongly against opening the city. “Opening the gates now is suicidal! It would result in a massacre by Chandrapradyot and his army,” they advised the queen.

The queen, however, had full faith in her decision. “The Lord of Peace himself is at our door! The savior of our people has arrived - how can we keep him out? Throw the gates open and welcome him with full reverence. Bhagwan Mahavir will find an honorable solution and protect us all. Let me repeat my orders; open the gates and let me see my Bhagwan! I am ready to accept any consequence.”

The giant gates opened. Prince Udayan, Queen Mrigavati, all her ministers, and the prominent citizens boldly stepped out and rushed to the battleground to meet Bhagwan Mahavir. Chandrapradyot watched all this with awe. He was impressed with Mrigavati’s move and thought, “She is headed for Mahavir’s *samosaran*; She has such bravery and trust in Mahavir! How can I attack her? Perhaps I should also go to Mahavir! He always finds peace for all. He has once saved my life, and may now convince Mrigavati to marry me to avoid bloodshed.”

The sermon had already started when Chandrapradyot entered the *samosaran* tent. Mahavir’s voice was firm and sharp. It went straight to the heart of the listener. Chandrapradyot noticed that Mrigavati was seated in the front row, and he walked to the front. Mahavir gently acknowledged the king’s arrival with a friendly smile and continued with his sermon.

“The natural attribute of every soul is compassion and friendship, not enmity. Hatred is external, artificial, and harmful. *Ahimsa* is the

essence of life. It is the call of every heart, whereas violence is damaging to one's own soul. Violence kills us before we kill our enemies. It damages us internally by destroying our sensitivities and civility. Having killed us from within, *himsa* then wrecks external havoc." Mahavir was rapidly bringing down the artificial walls of hatred.

"I ask you, therefore, to abandon violence and save your souls from total destruction. One who spreads the poison of violence, bitter conflicts, and hatred is a devil in human form, but one who spreads the sweetness of love and compassion, and gives sanctuary to others is the divine soul in the human body. Only those who are self-disciplined could provide a well-developed ethos in their people.

A good ruler is self-disciplined, not self-destructive. He makes friends, not enemies; makes peace, not war; builds bridges, not walls; and cooperates, not competes with other kingdoms to provide security and comfort to all living beings.

A good ruler is self-disciplined, not self-destructive. He makes friends, not enemies; peace, not war; builds bridges, not walls; and cooperates, not competes with other kingdoms to provide security and comfort to all living beings. A person's caste, wealth, or power does not make him great, and winning wars, or a lavish lifestyle, do not make him happy.

Life is full of triumphs and tragedies. Intrigue and deceit may give you small victories, but you may then likewise become a victim of these hurtful acts by another person. Life is an endless cycle of such small victories and defeats. Real victory lies in winning the self! The greatest defeat is in losing to oneself; that is a truly disgraceful defeat! Other gems in Mahavir Bhagwan's peace message that day were:

Na tam ari kanthachetta kareye, jan se kare appaniyaa durappa
(The havoc wreaked by one's own unruly mind is more devastating than that caused by a ruthless murderer.)

Varam me appadanto
(Control and win yourself. One who has won the self never gets defeated.)

Imena chev juzzhahee, kin te juzzhena bajzhvo, juddharinha khul dullbham
(Fight and defeat your own passions. What on earth can worldly wars bring you? Human birth is the best opportunity for the greatest victory – the victory over your passions.)

Anusaasana jaanagunovaveya
(Accept the kingdom of knowledge and ethics, and walk the path of liberation.)

Mahavir was asking people to give up violence, anger, ego, and lust. Suddenly, Queen Mrigavati stepped closer to Bhagwan Mahavir and respectfully declared, “Bhagwan, I want to be ordained by you in your *sangh*, and surrender my son, Prince Udayan, to the care and protection of the King Chandrapradyot.” She then turned towards Chandrapradyot, awaiting his response.

Chandrapradyot was deeply moved by Mahavir's message. He stepped forward and embraced Prince Udayan as if he were his own son. The aggressor became the guardian, and the crowd burst into applause!

This was a brilliant victory for Queen Mrigavati, but once ordained she never uttered a word about this to anyone. She went through her *sadhana* in a totally balanced manner. I believe that the secret of rapid spiritual progress and enlightenment is to be at the pinnacle of perfect balance. Equanimity was the secret of her success – both in her role as a queen, and also as a *sadhvi*.

10. Keshiswami - Anekanta Dialogue

Bhagwan Mahavir's message of peace and solidarity has intrigued people from all over the land. Mahavir is constantly traveling from one kingdom to the other. People as far away as Sindhu-Sauvar, Takshashila, and Gandhar in the northwest invite Bhagwan to come and give sermons. Sometimes Bhagwan goes even uninvited to stop wars or animal sacrifices, and many of us go with him. For eight months a year, during the non-rainy season, all *sadhus* and *sadhvis* in the *sangh* are expected to travel. Those who did not accompany Bhagwan often travel in small groups to spread his message in different cities.

During one such voyage a few monks and I arrived in Shravasti City and decided to stay at 'Koshthak Gardens on the edge of the city. That same evening one of my colleagues discovered that Keshiswami and his group were camped in 'Tanduk Gardens' at the other end of the city. Keshi is a senior Sraman monk, but from a different tradition – that of the 250-year-old Parshva⁽⁵⁾ School. Monks of the Parshva School also believe in the liberation of the soul through *sadhana*, and travel across the country spreading this belief. Unlike us, however, they wear yellow robes.

⁵ Jain tradition has 24 enlightened gurus who are called 'Tirthankars'. Mahavir was the 24th and Parshva, 250 years earlier was the 23rd Tirthankar.

We rarely came across monks of the Parshva tradition during our travels, so this encounter was indeed a rare event. I decided to visit Keshiswami's camp with my colleagues to convey Bhagwan Mahavir's greetings. I was curious and wanted to know more about them. The next morning on our way to Keshiswami's camp, one of my colleagues asked me, "*Gurudev*, the monks from *Acharya* Keshi's group are also Sraman. Like us, they receive training in *sadhana*. Their ultimate goal is also the same as ours. Why then is their *sangh* separate from ours?"

"I don't know, but this is a good opportunity to find out." I replied. We are a larger *sangh*, but, we are also a newer tradition. Therefore, it is up to us to ask such questions of Swami Keshi, and report that information to Bhagwan Mahavir."

In the Bharatiya (Indian) tradition, the leaders of different groups came together to debate. One leader would then challenge the other to a debate and the loser would accept the winner as his guru. The news of my decision to meet with Swami Keshi's group had already reached the people; and the city was awash with rumors. What kind of debate would ensue? Which group would win: the larger one of *Ganadhar* Gautam, or the more ancient tradition of Keshiswami?

Thousands of curious towns' folk had already arrived at the Tanduk Gardens when I reached there. People were expecting that Keshiswami would simply scoff at me, the young challenger. However, they were surprised when Keshiswami welcomed our entire group with warmth and respect, and offered me a seat by his side on the dais.

According to tradition, the junior visitor normally starts the conversation by respectfully seeking help from the senior guru in understanding intricate philosophical concepts. The junior asks, and the senior explains. However, Keshiswami did not follow this tradition. Though much more my senior, and from a more ancient tradition, he was the one who started asking questions.

Perhaps he wanted to test my knowledge. Perhaps he wanted to assess the credibility of Mahavir's new movement. May be, by asking selected questions, he wanted to explore the connection between his Parshva tradition and Mahavir's new path. Whatever his motivation, I did not feel that he was challenging me or my faith.

"Parshva preached that a monk must observe four vows, namely, *Ahimsa*, *Satya* (being truthful), *Achurya* (non-stealing) and *Parigraha-parimana* (minimizing needs and possessions), but Mahavir speaks of five vows, the fifth being celibacy. Why do we have this difference if the final goal is the same?" Keshiswami asked.

I answered, "The philosophical basis of any tradition is wisdom. Knowledge and ethics are the foundations of wisdom. Whereas knowledge is eternal and innate, ethical concepts change with time, place, and society. The monks of the first *Tirthankar* (Rikhav) were loyal and immune to the ethical changes in their society. In Parshva's time also, monks were both loyal and wise (in preserving their ethical standards);

The philosophical basis of any tradition is wisdom. Knowledge and ethics are the foundations of wisdom. Whereas knowledge is eternal and innate, ethical concepts change with time, place, and society.

therefore only four ethical vows sufficed to guide their conduct. Today, Mahavir's monks are smart but vulnerable to the declining ethical standards of the society. Hence they need an additional vow of celibacy."

Keshiswami was pleased by the answer and asked another question, "Whereas we, from Parshva's tradition wear divine yellow robes, why have Mahavir's monks shunned all clothing?"

I replied, "Clothes are but external trappings to remind an individual that he is a monk. Clothes do not help anyone in his *sadhana*

Our passions are our enemies and victories over our passions ultimately enable us to achieve the greatest victory - that over our own Self. When we win this single battle, we win them all.

and are of no real use. In reality, both *Tirthankars* have repeatedly said that rational vision, rational knowledge, and rational behavior (*samyak darshan, samyak gyan, and samyak charitra*)* are the three jewels that pave the road to moksha. That foundation is common to both our traditions."

Keshiswami asked, "*Ganadhar* Gautam, life is an endless battle with thousands of enemies. Who are these enemies, and how do we defeat them?"

I replied, "Our passions are our enemies and victories over our passions ultimately enable us to achieve the greatest victory - that over our own Self. When we win this single battle, we win them all."

Keshiswami continued, "A poisonous plant grows in all our hearts, and bears destructive fruits. How can one destroy this plant?"

* These three together are called '*Ratnatraya*' or Three Jewels and form the basis of Sraman and therefore of Jain philosophy.

This was a very complex question. I said, “Our urge to remain trapped in this endless cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*) is the poisonous plant rooted in every heart. Repeated births and deaths are its destructive fruits. *Sadhana, samyak darshan, samyak gyan, and samyak charitra* (ethical conduct) uproot that plant and liberate our soul.”

Keshiswami was lobbying more questions energetically. I answered them to the best of my ability, using the knowledge given to me by Bhagwan Mahavir. In the end, I summarized Bhagwan’s words: “Knowledge is eternal and does not change with time; it is an internal achievement of the learned. However, our ever-changing conduct is subject to the influences and pressures of time, place, and popular culture. In a way, our conduct is shaped by the perceived norms of our society, while the same society is influenced and molded by our conduct. Social changes evolve from the interplay between human inspirations and the behavioral norms of the society.”

Since knowledge does not change with time, the message of Bhagwan Parshvanath and Bhagwan Mahavir is the same. Both preach ‘To know the Self is the ultimate goal of life.’ However, every society, every *sangh*, and every organization shapes its own ethical codes. Over the years, these codes change because of greater insights or laxity, carelessness, ego, and social pressure. Such change can rapidly take an individual or a society to unprecedented heights or on a wrong and undesirable path to destruction.

Mahavir's five vows and the path to reach *kevalgyan* (enlightenment) have evolved from this awareness. Following them is essential for the smooth and efficient operation of the *sangh*. Rational knowledge contributes to rational conduct and rational conduct is essential for gaining rational knowledge."

By now, Keshiswami was extremely pleased and excited. Disciples in both the groups realized how close, in spite of the apparent differences in some rituals, the two traditions were. The old tradition of Parshva and the new tradition of Mahavir shared many principles and practices. This was now apparent to all, and the two groups decided to merge into a single entity.

I was amazed by Swami Keshi's wisdom and magnanimity. He is the embodiment of the Sraman doctrine of *Anekantavada* (this doctrine

Truth has many facets of which we perceive only a few. Therefore, everyone should try to understand more perspectives through peaceful dialogue.

emphasizes that truth has many facets of which we perceive only a few and suggests that we try to understand more perspectives through peaceful dialogue.) In an inter-faith dialogue like this, a person who accepts *Anekantavada* can never become a

fanatic crusader. Such a person is always polite and respectful of different viewpoints. For him, a dissenting opinion is not an obstacle, but an opportunity to learn more about absolute truth. Such a person sees a friend, not an enemy, in another individual of different tradition. He is ready to learn and change if necessary, for he is after truth. This is why Keshiswami has been able to work his magic on us.

I have heard Bhagwan Mahavir say that time is the agent of change.

(Kale kaalam samayare.)

He warns us that change is inevitable with time hence, we must be flexible. Individuals, institutions, or traditions that refuse to change with time will perish. Only the dead do not embrace change; they decay. How long would a foolish coal miner survive if, when confronted with gold in his mine, he refuses to mine it merely because he has traditionally dealt only with coal? Likewise, a religious tradition must embrace change and not be afraid of it. Or else, it shall perish.

Individuals, institutions, or traditions that refuse to change with time will perish. Only the dead do not embrace change; they decay.

Keshiswami is a unique individual who welcomes change and respects new ideas. He is a senior in an ancient tradition and has 500 disciples. Yet he welcomed us, listened to me with respect, and honored us by telling his disciples to join our *sangh*. He said, “Our ideals are common, and we share same goal. What is the point in following different paths? Mahavir has advanced Parshvanath’s concepts by developing a more effective path to liberation. I have therefore decided to merge my *sangh* with Mahavir’s. We will grow together. Come, let’s go to Bhagwan Mahavir’s camp and ask him to accept us in his *sangh*.”

This was an important historical event. No adamant discussions or ego, and no seniority claims. Keshiswami could have easily insisted that his Parshva tradition was older and that therefore, Mahavir should

join him. Instead, he had a simple, intellectual, and honest focus on the unity of two traditions for the betterment of the 'Sraman' path.

The news that Keshiswami joined Mahavir's *sangh* with his disciples spread rapidly, evoking different reactions from the public.

It is about time that the monks, and indeed the entire four-fold Arhat sangh understand the importance of unity and do what is best for the Sraman community.

Some welcomed the news and said, "It is about time that these monks, and indeed the entire four-fold Arhat *sangh* understand the importance of unity and do what is best for the Sraman community." Others wondered how long the union would last.

Some, of course, were bemoaning the apparent merger of an ancient tradition. Mahavir, while gracefully welcoming the followers of Parshvanath, fully acknowledged that his *sangh* was not a break-away sect. After all he too was raised in the Parshva tradition. Bhagwan said, "I am not starting a new tradition. I have merely made some changes to an ancient one to enable the Sraman tradition to grow with full vigor."

Keshiswami's decision was based on practical wisdom. He realized that Mahavir's reforms brought new vitality to the Sraman tradition, and suppressed his reservations to embrace reforms. I am very grateful to have such forward-looking monks in our tradition, and hope that generations of future monks will continue to draw inspiration from Keshiswami.

11. Meghkumar - Youth Revolution

Jirthankar Mahavir is perpetually roaming from one kingdom or *ganatantra* (republic) to another, and wherever he goes, his every step is amazing. I am fortunate to accompany him in his travels. Thousands of his followers trail only a few steps behind us everywhere we go. To observe Mahavir is a divine experience. The air around him is always filled with heavenly fragrance. His movements are so harmonious that one can almost hear a melody.

Today we were journeying down the road from Madhyama to Rajgrihi, the capital of Magadh. This walk with Mahavir is such a pleasant experience. In his radiant, blissful manner, Bhagwan continues his silent march. Women along the route are staring at him with joined palms and are signaling to others to be quiet so that they can fully appreciate Mahavir's beauty and radiance. It is said that, one who has achieved internal peace radiates perfect beauty in all respects. Every plant and tree along our route is shining in radiant bloom, and people's faces are lit up with joy. The atmosphere is filled with happiness.

Soon we reached the 'Gunshil' gardens in Rajgrihi, and Bhagwan started his sermon to an eager crowd. "All life is great, but the human form is the most opportune birth. Animals, birds, and bees also live a life; even heavenly beings and hell-beings have life, but the human birth is the

greatest. Liberating ones soul is possible only for humans. Animals are trapped in a body that makes them devote their lifetime to meeting basic

Humans, by virtue of their mind and intelligence, can transcend their life and reach the heights of divinity.

needs. But humans, by virtue of their mind and intelligence can transcend their life and reach the heights of divinity. Humans can trust, learn, understand, and travel boldly the path to liberation and bliss. Do not look for peace and happiness elsewhere; these are within you."

The crowd was spellbound and listening carefully. Bhagwan continued, "The lives of heavenly gods and goddesses may be great because of what they enjoy, but only human life has the potential to reach the liberated state. The human birth is your opportunity to free yourself from the painful *samsara*. Life is like a water droplet in the desert. One never knows when it will evaporate in the wind. Therefore, we must begin our divine journey without wasting even a single moment. Do not wait until you are old and frail; take care of your soul right now!"

The people of Rajgrihi were receptive to the sermon. The city is a wealthy and booming place ruled by Emperor Shrenik of the 'Sahaishu' dynasty. His family and the citizens of his kingdom now actively follow the Sraman path and are fond of listening to the Bhagwan's lectures. The people and the royal families of all the nearby kingdoms also live by the Sraman path of the Twenty-Third *Tirthankar* - Lord Parshvanath. Emperor Shrenik is so fond of Bhagwan Mahavir that he has repeatedly proclaimed support to the families of people who wish to be ordained by Mahavir. After all, Mahavir's new path has many things in common with that of Parshvanath, though he preaches some new practices to suit the

modern times. People flock to the *samosaran* grounds in every city to see him and understand his new ways.

Emperor Shrenik's entire royal family is among the audience today. The young Prince Meghkumar is carefully listening to Mahavir's words, "Do not wait until you are old and frail; take care of your soul right now!" These words must have inspired the young Prince. He seems anxious to follow Mahavir's footsteps and begin his divine journey. As soon as the sermon is over, Meghkumar rushed to the podium and asked, "Bhagwan, I want to join your *sangh*. Will you ordain me?"

Mahavir replied, "Of course, my dear, but you are still very young and should get your parent's permission."

"But, what if they refuse to let me go? I want to start taking care of my soul right now." Prince Meghkumar was excited.

Mahavir replied, "You can! But, you have some responsibilities towards your parents, families, *sangh* and the society. Travelling a spiritual path does not mean that you can neglect these."

The Prince was ecstatic with the thought of joining our *sangh*. I could hear him saying, "Yes! My Bhagwan said, 'Yes'! Now I will always be close to him. Well-known *Ganadhars* and holy saints will teach and guide me. I will sincerely learn everything they have to offer. I feel so lucky!" Meghkumar rushed to his parents to seek permission.

As Meghkumar approached his father, *Maharaja* Shrenik could read the excitement on the young prince's face. The Emperor himself also wanted to leave the kingdom and be ordained into Mahavir's *sangh*, but

he knew his limitations and his enormous responsibility to his family and the kingdom. He was sad, but the prince's enthusiasm cheered him. "My son," he said, "I wish that I too could join Mahavir's order, but I am not so lucky. Now that you are so inspired, I will not stand in your way. I will be happy if you could clutch this opportunity, which I so regrettably cannot! It is an honor for our entire family.

Bhagwan admitted Prince Meghkumar into Sraman *sangh* and ordained him as Meghmuni. The newly ordained Meghmuni enjoyed his first day talking to other monks, joyously soaking in their experiences and listening to every word spoken by Mahavir. After a short study session late in the evening, it was time for everyone to retire for the night. Monks slept on the bare floor. Being the newest monk, Meghmuni was given a place on the floor closest to the entrance of the sleeping hall. The prince of the great kingdom, accustomed to a lavish soft bed, lay on a hard, cold floor in the doorway of an unlit hall.

It was a very difficult night for him. Meghmuni was turning and tossing all night, but his worst moments were when the monks on their way to heed nature's call, inadvertently kicked the young prince in the dark. This was unacceptable to the ego of the former prince. "I am the son of Emperor Shrenik. Everyone treated me lavishly and respectfully until only yesterday. These very monks used to address me with full respect. They showered me with sweet words before I joined this *sangh*. But now, they do not care for me, they even kick me! In the face of such indignities how can I live here? I will talk to Bhagwan in the morning and tell him, 'I cannot stay in your order any more. I want to go home.' The young monk lay awake all night with these thoughts. Meghmuni,

still with his princely pride, went to Mahavir in the early morning and waited for his attention. Mahavir could easily see the anger and disappointment in young Meghmuni's face.

"How was your night my son? Were you unable to sleep, and now want to go home?" asked Mahavir before too long.

Meghmuni did not reply; he was still brooding over the indignities of the night. A storm was raging through his mind. "Did I make a mistake? I got carried away by Mahavir's words and joined his order in the hope of finding some peace of mind. I came here seeking peace and happiness, but these people do not care for me. Everyone seems to be busy with their own *sadhana*. No one respects me anymore. Maybe, these Sraman monks respect only wealth and power. How can I find any peace and happiness here?" Meghmuni was lost in his thoughts, when he remembered yesterday's sermon. He recalled the words "Do not look for peace and happiness somewhere else. They are within you. No one else but you can make you happy."

We fail to understand the difference between physical pleasure and eternal happiness. Do not look for peace and happiness somewhere else. They are within you. No one else but you can make you happy.

Meghmuni looked at Mahavir. Mahavir was asking him to move closer. "Last night was an uneasy night for you Megh, and it has made you sad. You have lived a life of luxury, but last night you had to sleep on a hard, cold floor. Life is like that. One moment we are happy but sad the next! We seek physical pleasure but neglect eternal happiness. Pleasure is derived from external sources, therefore temporary. As soon

as the external source disappears, we are sad. Our trapped soul gets accustomed to luxury, comforts, and power, and we waste our energy attempting to regain lost pleasure. We lose sight of true happiness. However, those who learn to take a balanced view and discriminate between pleasure and eternal happiness are not bothered by the vicissitudes of life. They accept both pleasure and pain with equanimity and remain calm. True happiness is within us.”

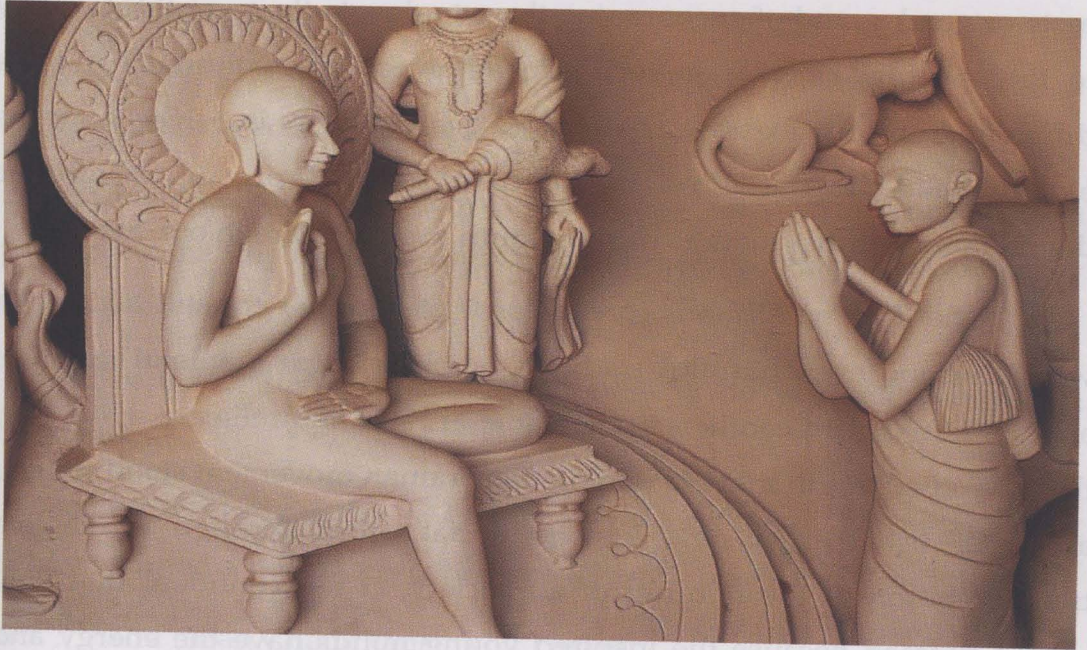
“But, Bhagwan...” Megh wanted to tell Mahavir how the careless monks kicked him last night. However, Mahavir continued. “You are angry and want to quit this journey toward liberation. Think about it! No one here wants to hurt you. Maybe in the darkness of the night they couldn’t avoid stumbling into you. We react with anger because of our ego. Sometimes people unintentionally hurt each other, but we take it seriously because of our ego. Accepting reality as it is, instead of letting our ego brood over it, strengthens us. Such strength builds patience to give others the benefit of the doubt. It allows us to appreciate each other’s limitations and gives us the wisdom to tolerate inevitable actions. Mutual understanding and cooperation is the key to co-existence.

A little physical pain is easy to overcome if you can imagine how much pain you may have endured during your countless births and deaths. Perhaps you can recall your past birth as an elephant*. Do you remember that in your previous incarnation you sacrificed your life to save a rabbit that had taken shelter under your raised foot? That auspicious karma has earned you this precious human birth and an

* Enlightened ones have absolute knowledge (*kevalgyan*) unrestricted by space or time.

opportunity to elevate your soul to liberation. If an elephant's physical restraint elevated your soul to such a height, imagine how far you could go as a self-restrained monk. How could you think of quitting now?

You once saved a rabbit. You have now an opportunity to save millions of sacrificial animals. You may some day influence the entire world to change its cruel ways. You are young, and only the young are energetic enough to bring about massive revolutionary changes. But your thinking must change first. Megh, instead of dwelling on who kicked, you should be worried if anyone was injured because you were in



their way! You are new here; it will take some time to correct your thinking. A kind soul such as yours deserves a chance in this life to spread that kindness." Meghmuni was moved by the wisdom of his master. He calmed down and returned to his studies.

As a *Ganadhar* responsible for leading a large group of *sadhaks*, I watched all this with awe. Through personal one-on-one discussion, Bhagwan Mahavir resolved Meghmuni's concerns, and inspired him by delving deep into his heart and touching it with kindness. The whole *sangh* was enveloped by Mahavir's love, and I was drawn ever closer to him. Mahavir's tact in explaining Sraman concepts, and in inspiring a young novice, impressed me, because I realized that he was bringing about a social revolution in our society.

Mahavir's idea of ordaining young boys and girls, without bias of caste or gender, and of encouraging them to devote their youthful energy to the spiritual as well as social development is revolutionary. It is different from our existing tradition of *sanyas-asram*, in which only the elderly head for the forest in full-time spiritual pursuit. Full-time devotion to spiritual matters during youth has been rare in our society.

The Brahma *Dharmis* (predecessor of Hindus) are still tied up in worthless and even harmful traditions such as *yagnya*, animal sacrifice, and are mired with conflicts in the name of caste and religion. However, the awakened youth that are joining this Sraman movement stand united, and will usher in a new, golden social order through a massive transformation of the mindset of all society. I felt confident that they would succeed because the inspired young minds have the energy and receptive ingenuity to move beyond orthodoxy or beyond petty discriminatory practices.

12. Chandkaushik – Universal Language

*M*ost people tend to portray their heroes as somewhat larger than life. This happened with Bhagwan Mahavir too. His ability to broker peace, his compassionate response to viciously jealous detractors and his aura that conveyed only love and compassion to everyone, including most dangerous animals, gave people the impression that Mahavir was a miracle man. Bhagwan Mahavir's encounter with a vicious cobra named Chandkaushik explains why.

Chandkaushik incident was just a story for me until an old man approached me this morning and said, "*Gurudev* Gautam, you are lucky to be so close to a miracle man."

I replied, "I am lucky indeed, but why do you call Bhagwan a miracle man?"

"What else can he be? Have you not heard of the miracle? Mahavir turned a poisonous cobra into a loving pussy cat?" said the man.

"You mean Chandkaushik?" I asked.

"That's it!" said the old man. You have heard! Is it not a miracle?"

I said, "Yes, I have heard about it, but not from someone who has personally seen this miracle."

The old man was excited. “I live in a village on the outskirts of Kankhal forest, and I have seen the miracle with my own eyes. I am the witness to the miracle. It is true! Let me tell you how it happened.”

The old man did not know where to start, but started anyway without waiting for my consent. “We were telling him not to go along that abandoned path leading to the forest. Someone in my village saw him going towards the forest and beseeched him to stop because of the dangers, but he would not.

He was almost naked, and we thought he must be deaf or deranged. We all shouted, ‘Don’t go in there! A big, poisonous cobra lives in that forest and has killed many people! It is so poisonous that it even breathes out poison that kills trees. Nothing grows near its home!’

The young man did not even stop to listen to us. We yelled, ‘You fool! Don’t you understand? Don’t you care for your life?’ Nevertheless, the young man continued as if he was on a death mission. Perhaps this man was determined to end his own life. In desperation, I said to him, ‘Young man, we can only warn you of the dangers, but it is up to you to decide what to do. We cannot stop you if you want to kill yourself.’ He just continued his brisk walk and disappeared into the forest.

We waited at the edge of the forest anticipating the death cry from this young man – a cry we have heard several times before. Thankfully, the cobra never comes out of the forest, but guards its territory with all its might. It hisses loudly to warn intruders away, but if someone continues to approach, it kills the person simply by breathing the poison out of its system. Its hissing is so loud that we can sometimes hear it in our village.

We heard the cobra hiss when this young man walked in – not once, but repeatedly! This was unusual. The cobra was getting angrier. We realized then that this young man must be a magician. We slowly ventured in the forest to see his magic. And magic it was, for this young man was standing in the middle of the clearing as the angry cobra repeatedly attacked his foot. He stood there fearlessly, with his hand extended, as if to assure the cobra that he was a friend, not a foe.”

I tried to interrupt to tell the old man that it was neither magic nor miracle, but he did not listen to me.

He continued, “We saw the magic! We saw the cobra calm down and lay quietly at the feet of this magician. The man actually talked to the cobra, and amazingly, the cobra raised its hood, looked at the man, and carefully listened to him. I heard the man clearly. He was saying, ‘Calm Down. Calm Down. My dear king cobra, you understand, don’t you? The terrible poison of yours hurts others, but also it hurts you. Everyone around you is so afraid that no one dares to come near you for now. However, someday they will hurt or even kill you. Just look around, you have already wreaked so much havoc and destruction.’

You are intelligent enough to understand what I am saying. Recall your past birth, Chandkaushik! You were then a learned but angry monk and died while you were in a terribly vicious mood. That is why you were reborn as an angry, vicious cobra. Listen, Chandkaushik, you do not have to continue being so angry. Consider your future. It is not too late to change your ways and become good, and enjoy a better future.’



Pacifying Chandkaushik

The cobra was listening motionless. I believe that he was recalling his past life and feeling the need to make changes. He was recalling that he was not at peace with himself, for he had died in a rage. The cobra must have realized that the man speaking to him must be a

great sage to know so much about his life and to counter his attacks with such kindness.”

The old man suddenly came out of his trance and said, “Am I dreaming? How can a man and a cobra understand each other? Magic, I am telling you *Gurudev*, I witnessed the most amazing magic!”

I said, “Dear *Ajja**, Mahavir is certainly not a magician, nor a miracle maker! Mahavir’s communication with a cobra is indeed a rare, almost miraculous, event. How can a man communicate with an animal, unless there is some other way of communicating?

Usually we communicate using words. Words form the language, and only those who know our language can understand us. This form of communication has limited range. However, there is yet another way to communicate, and that is between two souls. This is how a newborn baby communicates with her mother. It is not through words; rather it is through the ***Sensitize your soul so that you may receive the vibrations from every living being and understand nature.*** *bhava* language. This is the universal language. We call it *Divya Dhvani* – Language of the Pure Souls. Every sensitive soul can understand our conscience, our *bhava*, our vibrations, and our aura-waves. Bhagwan Mahavir says, ‘Sensitize your soul so that you may receive the vibrations from every living being and understand nature.’

Unfortunately, our consciousness has been clogged with desensitizing karma. As a result, our soul has lost its sensitivity and we

* Honorable old person.

are unable to communicate in the universal language. Some of us are not even aware that a soul exists within us. There are those who do not accept that there is this universal language, or that we can be one with nature by developing our sensitivity. But don't you find that sometimes animals try to communicate with us? Unfortunately we are numb to their language, and arrogantly believe that they are dumb.

Numbness of our soul is due to our passions (*kashayas*). Unless we are able to control and eliminate them, we cannot reach our conscience. If we do not understand our own soul, how can we understand and

Our consciousness has been clogged with desensitizing karma. As a result, our soul has lost its sensitivity and we are unable to communicate in the universal language.

communicate with another? The more we understand our soul, the stronger our ability to understand every soul in the universe. Our lives, our culture, and our traditions

have so entrapped our mind that it, too, refuses to get in touch with our real Self. *Ajja*, what you saw in that forest was not magic. Mahavir and the cobra really did understand each other. Thanks to Bhagwan Mahavir's revolutionary discovery, this communication technique is now understood. We too can communicate with every living being if we purify our soul by eliminating our *kashayas*."

"But the poison, the poison! How was Mahavir able to neutralize the poison? It must be magic!" The old man was unwilling to give up.

"That too was not magic." I replied. Our soul meekly suffers bodily pain because our *kashayas* make it a virtual prisoner of our body. If we eliminate our *kashayas*, the soul becomes free, regains its unlimited

power and begins to rule. The soul then neither suffers nor enjoys the pain or pleasure of the body. Instead, it becomes a mere observer and the body stops responding to the external events. Consequently, even the poison does not have any effect on the body of an enlightened person. If we were able to free our own soul, as Mahavir has done, our bodies would also be free from pain.

Dear *Ajja*, I too was once ignorant of these matters. I was lost in the scriptures and their empty babble. I was vainly groping in the dark to extract truth from those mantras. I discovered Bhagwan Mahavir's path only when I met him. All of us, everyone in our *sangh*, are here to try and achieve what Bhagwan Mahavir has achieved. By his own example, he has shown us that consciousness is limitless compassion and knowledge.

Our soul is a prisoner in our body due to our kashayas. In that state, our body is the virtual ruler and the soul is the prisoner! Our powerless soul meekly suffers bodily pain.

He is the living proof of this. We can also communicate in the universal language of the soul when we imbibe compassion and knowledge. Through his 12 years of *sadhana*, Mahavir has been able to discover the Self. This is why he was able to communicate with that cobra. It was not magic. Neither was it a miracle. It was simply a logical outcome of Mahavir's success in discovering the Self."

13. Mahashatak – The Family

The rainy season was over, and we were once again traveling.

We had just arrived in Rajgrihi, in the kingdom of Magadha. It was the tenth day of the waning moon of the month of Margshirash. This day had special significance for the *sangh*. Few years ago on this auspicious day, young Vardhaman left home. Everyone in our *sangh* celebrates this day – *Diksha Klyanak* day - as the anniversary of Vardhaman's first day in the forest in search of the Self.

In the afternoon, I wanted to be outdoors in the pleasant cool breeze. I found a quiet place on a rock, just outside in the courtyard. As I was about to settle down, I heard some gentle footsteps approaching me. *Ganadhar* Sudharma was coming closer. I signaled for him to come near me. He came, bowed to greet me, and sat by my side. I asked him where he was going. He said, "The morning was very busy, but if you can spare a few minutes of your quiet time, I want to talk to you."

Ganadhar Sudharma started the conversation by asking, "Honorable *Ganadhar* Gautam, we all know that Bhagwan is very kind and compassionate. You always tell us that he is at the highest level of kindness and compassion. I do not doubt that, but I don't understand

what it means within the practical considerations of our daily life. What do you mean by the ultimate level of kindness?

I smiled a little and closed my eyes. Both of us were quiet for a few minutes. Then, I opened my eyes slowly and said, 'Mahavir's compassion is like a vast ocean. Sometimes, just a small wave of this ocean touches us, but we fail to recognize its vastness. Sudharma, it is a matter of personal experience'.

"That is true *Ganadhar* Gautam, but with your help I hope to understand that vast ocean of kindness, simply by touching a tiny wave. I hope to understand the mighty sun from just one ray of light."

Sudharma was now deep in thought, and I am not sure if he heard me further. I was trying to tell him how difficult it is to describe Mahavir's compassion in words. Words are inadequate to reach the depth of his compassion. I said, "Sudharma, one can explain social issues, philosophy, or ideology by using words, but mere words are not enough to understand Mahavir's compassion. You are hoping to sail the breadth of a mighty ocean with a tiny, inadequate boat."

Sudharma said, "So be it honorable *Ganadhar* Gautam. I am ready for the adventure. Will you take me there?"

His intense curiosity left me no choice; a difficult task now became an easy obligation. I said, "I do not normally discuss the events of people's personal lives, and this story is about a person you know well. Nevertheless, Sudharma, as a *Ganadhar* you carry big responsibility of leading a large group (*Gana*) of *sadhus*, and you may soon take on the leadership of the entire *sangh*. People would then expect as much

compassion from you as they have been receiving from our Mahavir. Therefore, it is only appropriate that you learn about Mahashatak.

As you know, *Sadhak* Mahashatak from Rajgrihi is a great devotee of Bhagwan. He has memorized every word that Bhagwan ever said. He takes good care of his community and his family. He is a financial pillar of the community and generously helps the needy. People love and respect him, and he treats the community with equal respect. However, he has always been in *sadhana* for the last few years and does not say a word to anyone. About four years ago, he even handed over his business to his son so that he could devote more time to his *sadhana*.

Everything is going well for him except for his family life. He has very painful relationship with his wife Revati. She does not like her husband being busy in *sadhana* and his devotion to Mahavir, nor does she care for his feelings and ideas. She is so crafty that she has even managed to grab the belongings of his other relatives. Revati's brothers and cousins now rule Mahashatak's household. Mahashatak follows the Sraman life of vegetarianism, but she likes veal steaks (meat of newborn calves). He has tried several times to talk her out of it, but each time he has met with ridicule and arrogance. In fact, ever since King Shrenik has declared a total ban on animal slaughter in Magadha, Revati manages to get her veal daily from the neighboring kingdom.

These days, Mahashatak keeps himself busy meditating all day at the Sraman Centre. He feels that in his old age he should devote all his time to *sadhana*, but Revati gets mad at his religious devotion. She goes to the centre, and insults him publicly. Mahashatak has tried several times,

very patiently, to make her understand his Sraman ways. Now, unable to make her understand, he has simply given up talking. This has irritated Revati even more. She now comes to the Center, shouts loudly at him and continues to insult him publicly.

One day Mahashatak lost his patience. In a rage, he shouted back, “Wicked woman, do you know the outcome of your ugly behavior? You have sinned so much that you will go to hell. You would pay dearly for your crafty, crooked life and suffer untold miseries.”

The people at the Sraman centre were surprised to see Mahashatak lose his temper and break his vow of silence. Someone immediately conveyed this news to Bhagwan, and Mahavir asked me to talk to Mahashatak. Mahavir asked me to advise him that the main purpose of *sadhana* is to learn to control ones emotions. No one in *sadhana* should ever lose his temper; it is important to be calm and quiet by keeping emotions under control.

When I went to Mahashatak, I could read the frustration on his sad face, despite his attempts to hide it. He smiled gently and tried to be pleasant while welcoming my intrusion. We exchanged some pleasantries, talked a little about some religious matters, and finally, upon seeing that no one was around, I gave him Bhagwan’s message.

“You, Mahashatak, are Bhagwan’s loved one. You must not lose your patience. Your harsh words must have hurt your wife. You are a *sadhak* – a devotee who has resolved to rid yourself of all passions. You know that passions keep our soul bonded in this *samsara* and prevent it from achieving the heights of ultimate bliss. Years of *sadhana* have

enabled you to bring most of your passions under control. You have successfully climbed this difficult path of self-purification, but this is a slippery slope. Your resolve and determination is being tested at each step of this climb. Watch your every step. Caution must be your concern now. The slightest carelessness can send you tumbling down. Do not lose your hard-earned self-control. If someone is mean to you, is it right for a *sadhak* to be mean in return? An eye for an eye is not the Sraman way. Retain your cool and be magnanimous!”

“Honorable *Gurudev*, it is very kind of you to bring me such a noble message! I have erred. I was angry because of my wife’s continued misbehavior, but that does not justify my senseless misconduct. I was feeling sad and miserable because of my mistake, but Bhagwan Mahavir is so compassionate that he sent you to comfort even an ordinary wayward devotee like me.” Mahashatak had tears in his eyes.

“Mahashatak, you are a great *sadhak* and a devotee of the Sraman path. Tears of repentance have cleansed your heart. You learn caution from your mistake so that you can have a safer climb ahead. Peace of mind is important for *sadhana*. A *sadhak* must have peace at home and in his family. Only a cultured family can provide an atmosphere conducive for *sadhana*. A foul atmosphere disturbs *sadhana*. Therefore, a *sadhak* must ensure that he always generates good aura.”

“*Gurudev*, why is all this happening to me now? I was so calm and composed all these years. I am old and am trying to walk peacefully into the sunset. Should I not be able to live my life the way I want? Revati never listens to me. All these years she has tried to control me,

neglected me, and insulted me. How long can I take this? For many years I tried to make her understand, but I realized that she was beyond redemption. Therefore, I decided to let her live the way she wants, and I started taking more interest in meditation. Her relatives saw this as an opportunity and moved into my house. They made it impossible for my brothers to stay in our house. I was not blind; I saw all this but tolerated it without saying a word. Still, she would not leave me alone or let me live peacefully. Tell me, *Gurudev*, what else could I do?"

Mahashatak collapsed in my lap and started sobbing. I had no words to comfort him. He was finding solace in the emotional release.

Sudharma was very disturbed by Mahashatak's story. Sudharma is very kind and sensitive, and is happy when he is with happy people, but gets disturbed when he sees people suffering. He could not tolerate Mahashatak's plight and asked, "Why do good people have to suffer like this? Above all, why is it that the dear ones who are supposed to make you happy end up being your worst tormentors?"

"Sudharma," I said. "You know that all the riches or the knowledge in the world does not make one happy. One must have good character. This means cultivating a strong family atmosphere which influences each family member. A single member with bad character can spoil that ambiance. An unbaked earthen pot cannot hold water for long, nor can a baked pot with holes in it. The pot has to pass through fire to get baked. Likewise, knowledge, wealth, or happiness cannot remain for long in a family or with an individual of low character. The character of

every individual must pass the fiery test. Like a leaking pot, a family with even a single member of poor character can lose everything.”

“You know Sudharma”, I said, “An individual’s character and culture develops as he grows. A child that grows up in a character-building culture grows up to be a gentle and civilized individual. Revati did not grow up in such an atmosphere. Even after her marriage, she did not give peace and understanding a chance in her new home. This has resulted in discord and violence in the family, but her husband sought Bhagwan’s guidance at the right time. Mahavir has advised Mahashatak to control his anger by resorting to meditation, thus saving him from verbal and mental acts of violence. It is to Mahashatak’s credit that he turned to peace, spirituality, and meditation.”

A child that grows up in a character-building culture grows up to be a gentle and civilized individual.

Sudharma was convinced. He said, “You are right *Ganadhar* Gautam, Bhagwan Mahavir’s compassion has no limits. Despite being a great person, he did not hesitate to help an ordinary couple in marital conflict. Even after achieving the highest goal of *kevalgyan*, Bhagwan remains concerned for the society and for every individual. Why else would he care for ordinary people? Bhagwan’s life is a message for those who believe that *sadhaks*, *sadhus*, and *sadhvis* need not get involved in the social issues.” Sudharma was overcome with emotions.

He continued to let go his emotions. “*Gurudev* Gautam, our *sangh* is a great organization, a great family with thousands of *sadhaks*. This big family also sometimes encounters personality problems. Not everyone is

careful with his words. Thoughtless words can unintentionally hurt others. Most of us forget this as an unintentional, unfortunate event, but some cannot forget, and relationships get strained. How do we handle such a situation? If people are sensitive to other people's feelings, they will remember that just as we can be hurt by someone's careless words and actions so can our words hurt others. "

It was getting late and I had to return to my evening meditation. I said, "Sudharma, knowledge alone cannot resolve such problems. A hurt individual would find solace only in sympathy and limitless compassion.

If people are sensitive to other people's feelings, they will remember that just as we can be hurt by someone's careless words and actions so can our words hurt others.

Such considerations as senior-junior, guru-disciple, wise-stupid, child-parent, learned-uneducated, husband-wife, or who is right and who is wrong, do not matter in

compassionate behavior. These are all insignificant. All that matters is the selfless love for one another. In a loving relationship, mutual mistakes, problems, hurts, and insults all disappear. We are then left with only the singular determinant to 'never hurt anyone.' Compassionate behavior automatically takes us to the next step, where we proactively share our happiness and someone's pain. This is the motto of our *sangh* –

'Parasparagrahe Savva Jivanam.'

(Life is interdependent, so protect all life)

This motto speaks adequately about Bhagwan's limitless compassion for all living beings.

14. Anand – The Art of Living

By now our four-fold *sangh* had more *shravaks* and *shravikas* (Lay people) than *sadhus* and *sadhvis*. Nevertheless, most people were still under the wrong impression that one has to leave home and become a monk or nun if they wanted to follow Sraman *Dharma*. Probably this is why an enthused business man hurried to the podium today to ask a question of Bhagwan Mahavir.

This was our first visit to Vanijyagram. Bhagwan Mahavir was giving a sermon, and like everywhere else, the whole town was present. Everyone was attentively listening to Mahavir's message. Bhagwan's topic today was '*Sadhana*'. He was saying,

"Anyone can achieve moksha through *sadhana*. However, first we need to be aware of the Self and must have full trust in it. Self is not this body; it is the 'Me' in our body. 'Me' is different from this body. We can see our body, touch it, feel it, see it taking birth, growing and dying. Self on the other hand is trapped in the body. It is eternal, and it is independent of this physical body. We achieve everlasting happiness only when we 'know' the Self. Knowing Self is the same as realizing the ultimate truth. It is the state of bliss and happiness.

Our pleasure and pain is suffered by this physical body and experienced by the Self. *Sadhana* starts and ends with our becoming aware of the Self, experiencing the Self, and knowing the Self. No one, neither a householder who is looking after his family, nor a monk who has left his family and the worldly affairs, can realize the Self without intense *sadhana*."

Someone in the audience stood up in excitement and asked, "Bhagwant, can someone like me start *sadhana*? I have a wife and small children yet to care for. Undertaking *sadhana* at this stage would be harsh not only on my body but also on my family."

Bhagwan replied, "*Sadhana* need not be harsh. In fact, fundamental changes occur - both internally and externally - in the life of a person who earnestly starts *sadhana*. He realizes that he is responsible for his fortunes and misfortunes, pleasure and pain, and for all his actions - good or bad! No longer does he blame others for his own miseries, nor does he depend on some external force for relief. He accepts his responsibilities and begins to understand the real nature of the Self (*samyak darshan*). He thus takes all his tasks, including family and social responsibilities, more seriously and with dedication. Consequently, a *sadhak* builds up good character and his actions become gentler and kinder.

A tree with strong roots and a firm foundation dares to soar towards the sky. Similarly, with a strong foundation of understanding the Self, a *sadhak* always continues to soar towards his goal of liberation in spite of his earthly responsibilities, and ultimately achieves it."

“But Bhagwan, I see you and your monks walking bare feet in hot sun, fasting for days, and refusing to eat lavish food. Isn't this harsh and painful *sadhana*?” the *shravak* interrupted.

I was seated on the floor just in the front row. Bhagwan looked at me and said, “Gautam, how do you feel about your *sadhana*? May be you should tell the audience about this.”

I got up promptly and said, “An inexperienced observer may think that our *sadhana* is torturous and harsh on the body. However, an experienced *sadhak* understands the difference between self-torture and self-discipline. *Sadhana* is just a tool to discipline our unruly mind, and apparently harsh measures may sometimes be necessary. In fact, as we progress in our *sadhana*, the joy emanating from progressive realization of the Self is so intense that the *sadhak* never feels any pain. *Sadhana* must not and does not imply that the body has to be neglected. Always tell yourself, ‘I live in this body. It is a companion, not an enemy. I must treat it well.’ Such respect for the body avoids fanaticism. It encourages rational analysis and rational behavior (*samyak charitra*).”

My answer concluded the sermon. Immediately, an apparently wealthy person from the audience, rushed to the podium. With due respect he said, “Bhagwant, my name is Anand. I am a businessman and also a farmer. I have considerable investments in my business, my home, my land, and my cattle. My dear wife's name is Shivananda. She is my only family; I have no one else.”

Bhagwan said, "Anand, I know all about you. You are a caring person. You use your wealth to help the needy and you are a pillar of support for the community. You are the architect of their hope."

Bhagwan's kind words pleased Anand. He said, "Bhagwant, I have a question. I heard your sermon with great interest. As I understood, you said that even someone like me with responsibilities towards family, business and the society can start *sadhana* and achieve liberation. How can I - a farmer - put your advice into practice without becoming a *sadhu*?

Bhagwan said, "Anand, you may not know it, but you already have started your *sadhana* long time ago. A monk devotes his full-time in pursuit of knowing the Self. Knowing the Self is your responsibility also, but it is not the ultimate responsibility. Sharing the bliss that you

Life cannot be without actions, but actions can be without sin. A sadhak also is not free from actions, but one who is engaged in sin-free activities is a true sadhak.

experience by 'knowing' your Self, with other living beings is your ultimate responsibility. Anand, you are already fulfilling that responsibility by sharing love, kindness and compassion with your

family and, the community. That is the beginning of your *sadhana*. Whether you are a farmer, businessman, or a cowherd, your work and your actions can be performed without being sinful. Life cannot be without actions, but actions can be without sin. A *sadhak* also is not free from actions, but one who is engaged in sin-free activities is a true *sadhak*. Anand, you may not yet be able to live a monk's life, but can certainly live as a true *sadhak*.

Anand got excited by Mahavir's words. "Bhagwan", he said, "How can I free my actions from sin? Can I follow your path without becoming a monk? Can I have my business and still follow your advice?"

"You are a farmer. You have to work with the animals. You have to get work out of them; in fact, they are really your helpers! Recognize that, and treat them with compassion and kindness. Give them the freedom to move around if you can. If you have to tie them up, make sure that the loop around their neck does not hurt them. When they carry goods, do ensure that their burden is not too great. Feed them well, ensuring that they do not go hungry or thirsty.

Anand, a *sadhak* is compassionate to all. A human being can always find a way to reduce his burden or pain. Animals too, tell us about their pain, but we are not sensitive enough to understand. We simply use them. Why not love them, and be compassionate? Keep this in mind next time you are on the farm."

The families of those who work for you survive on the wages that you pay your workers. If their families remain hungry, then your business is sinful.

Mahavir continued. "You have a business too. Always remember that the families of those who work for you survive on the wages that you pay your workers. If their families remain hungry, then your business is sinful. Anand, the government often regulates all businesses. Do not bypass those regulations. Your customers deal with you in full trust. Never breach their trust or short-change anyone.

Family life also has some rules, regulations, and limits. Never cross those limits. While trying to enjoy your life, be careful not to make

your life a spectacle for others. Enjoy life, but do not make it laughable. Do not lose control when buying things, or else you will come under their control. A self-controlled, balanced life is the key to spiritual progress.

While living the life of a layperson with compassion and caution, it is essential to have daily a minimum of 48 minutes of calm, quiet meditation. I call this meditation "*Samayik**." It is the time devoted to being in touch with your Self.

Similarly, everyday we commit some offenses, knowingly or unknowingly, through our physical actions, or by our thinking or uttering ill of others. Such offences are sinful. Therefore, '*pratikraman*' is

Enjoy life, but do not make it laughable. Do not lose control when buying things, or else you will come under their control. A self-controlled, balanced life is the key to spiritual progress.

also essential everyday. Through *pratikraman* we look inwards, acknowledge, and make ourselves aware of these offenses. While so doing, we must (i) repent for our transgressions, (ii) renounce our evil

thoughts or actions, and (iii) resolve to gain the strength to prevent such offenses in the future. *Pratikraman* serves to exercise control over our mind by prodding it to overcome its weaknesses and encouraging it to strive for forgiveness, humility, and strength.

Keep aside a few days every month for intense *sadhana*. If anyone comes to you for help, treat him with dignity and honor. Try to meet his

* The word '*sama*' means 'balanced' - a state of mind free from attachment or hate, '*aya*' means 'on the path of liberation', and '*ika*' means aspiration. '*Samayik*' therefore means 'aspiring for liberation through equanimity'. The word *Samayik* may also be based on the word '*samay*' which means 'time' or 'soul' (as in Kundakunda's *Samaysara*).

needs and thank him for giving you the chance to assist. Such simple things in your busy life as a farmer, a businessperson, or an artisan are, in fact, your acts of '*sadhana*'. They will further your spiritual progress."

Anand was so awestruck that he hardly heard the last words. He hurriedly said, "Thank you so much Bhagwan", and ran home to share this message with his wife. Both of them resolved to live their lives according to Mahavir's advice, and ultimately took all 12 vows recommended for a *shravak*.

Though Bhagwan asked me to conclude the session, I witnessed the patience and intense affection with which Bhagwan explained the simple philosophy of daily living. The citizens were excited to learn that *sadhana* could be a part of their daily life. With such basic teachings, hundreds of new followers joined the Sraman path. Sraman *Dharma* was growing in leaps and bounds!

15.Puniya – Purchasing Sadhana

*a*s a *sangh*, this was our first visit to Rajgrahi where Bhagwan had decided to stay for four months during the rainy season. Rajgrahi was not far from Kundagram where Mahavir was born. The royal family and the people of Rajgrahi were the followers of *Tirthankar* Parshvanath's Sraman tradition. In fact, Emperor Shrenik had invited Bhagwan Mahavir to Rajgrahi. Arrangements for Bhagwan's *samosaran* at the Gunshil Gardens were ready when we arrived.

The occasion of Emperor Shrenik's first visit to Mahavir's *samosaran* was an example of the unique ways Bhagwan Mahavir employs to explain his ideas. Emperor's curiosity, rather than devotion, had brought Shrenik to the *samosaran* grounds. Since this was his first visit, he came with full royal regalia. His party included his ministers, soldiers, ornately decorated elephants, numerous show horses, and musicians. It was a full display of his wealth and power. The owner of the world's riches had come to impress the one who had given up all his material treasures for spiritual wealth.

Beaming with the ego of his power, Shrenik entered the *samosaran* tent and sat in the front row facing Mahavir just as the sermon was about to start. Mahavir welcomed the emperor with his usual courteous smile, and began. The topic of the day's sermon was *sadhana*. In essence,

Bhagwan said, “Our constant companion and guardian is our soul – not wealth or anyone else. Only the soul stays with us and protects us from one birth to the next. Therefore, we should develop a positive relationship with our soul through daily *sadhana*. *Sadhana* disciplines our mind, and helps us to be in harmony with our soul. Undisciplined mind is slippery and elusive, and can be our worst enemy. Victory over this enemy is difficult but possible through daily meditation. It may take several meditations, *samayiks* and *pratikramans* before we are able to establish some rapport with our soul.”

Emperor Shrenik was impressed by the sermon, but was obviously not getting the gravity of it. After the sermon, he moved closer to Bhagwan Mahavir and paid his respects, but his ego was written all over his face. He said, “Bhagwan, I have fought many battles and won several wars. However, I do not quite understand when you say that the greatest victory is when one wins himself. With all my power and wealth, would it not be easy for me to gain mastery over my own mind?”

Bhagwan knew how someone full of pride could miss the essence of his sermon. He replied, “Emperor Shrenik, it takes several *samayiks* before one is able to get in touch with one’s own soul. Can we befriend anyone without getting in touch with that person?”

Bhagwan’s message was not filtering through Shrenik’s attitude, because the mighty emperor firmly believed that he could defeat or purchase anyone and anything with his wealth and power. “Surely, I can afford to buy as many *samayiks* as it takes!” He said.

Mahavir replied, “Emperor Shrenik, I would advise you to see Puniya. He lives in this city - a pious, humble, and devout man. For several years he has never missed his *samayik*. He has accumulated several to his credit. Perhaps you can buy some *samayiks* from him.”

Shrenik was excited. He said, “Bhagwan, I will do that right away. I have ruled my kingdom with a tight fist and have killed many people in battle. I now know that I have sinned and must wash away these sins. I will personally go to Puniya immediately and buy some *samayiks*. I will pay him whatever price he demands.” The emperor left in a hurry.

I was sitting nearby watching all this. I was surprised and wondered why Bhagwan asked Shrenik to buy *samayiks*. I looked at Mahavir in amazement and noticed a gentle smile on his lips. I understood then that Bhagwan wanted to teach Shrenik much more than what he asked for.

Emperor Shrenik went straight to Puniya’s house and said, Puniya! I have come here to buy something from you. I will reward you generously. I understand that for several years, you have been accumulating one *samayik* daily. You must have accumulated several *samayiks* over the years. Bhagwan Mahavir personally advised me to buy some *samayiks* from you, and I want as many as you can spare. Please tell me how many gold coins you want!”

Puniya was poor but an honest and modest person. He replied meekly, “My most honorable Emperor, I am honored beyond my imagination by your visit to my humble home. I am fortunate enough!

What more would I want from you. I wish I can give you any thing and everything that you want. However, I honestly do not know how to give you a *samayik*. I do not know how to put any value to it.”

Shrenik was still under the influence of his ego. He thought that Puniya was being crafty and attempting to get more gold. So he replied “Do not worry Puniya! Name your price, and I will pay it.

Puniya realized why Mahavir had sent the Emperor to him. He said, “*Samayik* is an effective tool that helps us to be humble and pious so that our mind and soul can become free from all passions such as greed and ego. I have practiced it for all these years to free my mind from passions and make it self-disciplined. My honorable Emperor, this being

Samayik is an effective tool that helps us to be humble and pious so that our mind and soul can become free from all passions such as greed and ego.

the situation with me, tell me how can I sell a *samayik* even if you were to offer me the whole world? In fact, no one can give away a *samayik*, nor can anyone buy one for all the wealth in the world. *Samayik* is a process of self-

purification; a *sadhana* that takes us closer to our soul.”

The meaning of *samayik* was now clear to the emperor. He understood why Bhagwan Mahavir had directed him to see Puniya to learn this round-about lesson. Thereafter, emperor Shrenik became an ardent devotee of one so wise.

16. Anathi – The Orphan*

Emperor Shrenik was to learn yet another lesson. However, this time it was not directly from Bhagwan Mahavir. One day he told me how this happened. “*Gurudev* Gautam, I try to see Bhagwan Mahavir as often as possible and also learn considerably from a senior *Ganadhar* like yourself, but I never expected that a new monk from your *sangh* could teach me such a valuable lesson.”

His remark piqued my curiosity. “Who was that monk, Emperor Shrenik? What happened? Was he rude to you?”

“Oh no, *Gurudev*, he was very polite and brilliant.” Shrenik replied. “The other day I was walking by the Manditkukshi garden, and I saw a young monk in deep meditation under a tree. I looked at him and was surprised to see such a princely looking man in Sraman mendicant attire like yours. Normally, I would not have disturbed his meditation, but this time I thought that something was odd! Here was a very handsome, well-built, young man with a serene, radiant regal face, and I wondered what might have prompted such a young person to walk away from worldly comforts and become a mendicant.

* Uttaradhyana sutra, Adhyaya 20 - Mahanirgranthiya

My curiosity overtook my judgment and I approached the young man. I greeted him respectfully and asked, "I am sorry to disturb your *sadhana*, *Muniraj*. I do not know you and have never seen you before, but I am anxious to know about you. I am curious to know what motivated you to become an ordained monk at such a young age. Youth are more interested in fun and games. They look forward to getting married and starting a family. However, you have chosen a hard spiritual path. Why? I am sorry to intrude in your *sadhana*, but I cannot help myself."

The monk opened his eyes, saw me seated close to him, and said, "No need to apologize. I was a miserable and helpless orphan. Therefore, decided to ask Bhagwan Mahavir to ordain me into his *sangh*."

I was shocked to hear that such a royal looking person was actually an orphan. Quite frankly, I did not believe him. I assumed that a helpless orphan would look different. His face will reveal his hardships and ordeals. This young man, on the other hand, looked poised and calm, as if brought up with love, care and culture in a royal or at least a well-off family. This boy could not be an orphan.

I instinctively said, "*Muniraj*, I find it difficult to accept that you could be an orphan. In any case, being an orphan does not mean that no one can help you and you have to become a monk. Come with me, I will be your guardian and see that my wealth fulfills your wishes.

The *Muniraj* said, "Excuse me, but you too are an orphan. How can an orphan become my guardian?"

I was taken aback by his remark. I said, “*Muniraj*, perhaps you do not know who I am. I am Emperor Shrenik of Magadh. I have the fortunes and riches of the world. How dare you call me an orphan? ”

The monk was calm and composed. He said, “I am sorry my dear Emperor, but you misunderstood me. Perhaps my understanding of the two terms ‘orphan’ and ‘guardian’ is different than yours.”

Of course I knew the traditional meaning of both the terms. However, I thought that the *Muniraj* perhaps had a philosophical interpretation. I asked him to explain what he meant.

Muniraj readily responded. “*Maharaja*, I was born into a very wealthy family. I was married to a beautiful woman who also came from a noble wealthy family. My wife and I lived happily with my parents.

One day, I suddenly developed excruciating pain in my eyes. Everyone tried to sooth my pain. Well-known medical experts were summoned from far away places but were unable to stop my pain. We tried many options but nothing worked. My parents, my wife, and my brothers and sisters could not really guard me against my misery. At that point, I realized that I was truly an orphan. A true guardian would have guarded and shielded me under all circumstances from such pain!”

Muniraj continued, “Then I remembered a sermon by Bhagwan Mahavir in which he explained the spiritual meaning of the terms, ‘orphan’, and ‘guardian’. In that sermon Bhagwan said, ‘Our body and soul are two different entities. The body reacts to external events by generating responses such as pain and pleasure. However, the soul wants, and can be trained, to be aloof to these responses. A free soul is a

mere observer of these responses. It does not experience or feel pain or pleasure.' I thought about that sermon almost all night... Mahavir's these words awakened me to the Reality, and, in a sense calmed me down.

When I woke up in the morning, my pain was gone! I concluded that this was the result of my awakening to the reality of my soul. It was a glimpse of what can happen if soul is freed from the imprisonment in a physical body. A pure, free soul will then be the ruler, not a prisoner of this body. The blissful soul will always be generating pleasure. So far, I was an orphan, but now I have found my guardian! I knew I must follow Mahavir's path to learn how to liberate my soul.

My dear Emperor, being helpless is, in a true sense, being an orphan. Such helplessness is because of our dependence on our body and its external trappings. Bhagwan Mahavir tells us that overcoming this dependence is possible. However, to choose to ignore Mahavir's message and not to become his fellow traveler leads to even greater helplessness.

We are all orphans as long as our soul is the prisoner of our body. Such an imprisoned soul suffers immense pain. Our liberated soul, however, becomes the body's ruler, and is our true guardian. No more are we orphans!

Gurudev, I was amazed by the wisdom of this young monk. I asked for his forgiveness for disturbing him during his *sadhana*. He is just a young disciple of Bhagwan Mahavir, yet what a beautiful message he gave me!

17. Prasannachandra - Mind & Action

It was a cold, wintry morning in Rajgrihi. Chilly, biting winds blew from the Himalayas. Hardly anybody was outside on the streets. Most people were quietly huddled around bonfires in their yards. I was in the main hall with Bhagwan, seeking advice on some philosophical issues. Emperor Shrenik and queen Chelana walked in and sat near me, taking care not to disturb our discussion. Whenever we were in Rajgrihi they came every morning to seek Bhagwan's advice and blessings.

When our discussion was over, Emperor Shrenik moved closer and asked, "Bhagwan this morning on my way here I saw a naked monk by the river. He was oblivious to the chilling cold wind. He could have wrapped his arms and legs around him to warm up, but he was standing stark naked with his hands up above his head, and was meditating. I cannot imagine why he does not feel any discomfort in such cold. Bhagwan, do you think that this old hermit is sane?"

Bhagwan replied, "The old hermit you saw by the river is not an ordinary person. He is *Maharaja* Prasannachandra, once a mighty and powerful king who gave his kingdom to his son and became a monk. He has been in *sadhana* for several years and is pretty good at it. However, to understand the secret of Prasannachandra's state of mind, you must first understand how one makes spiritual progress through *sadhana*.

People acquire self-discipline in the early years of *sadhana*. This requires training one's mind and body. But our mind is very fickle and restless. Our senses take note of all external events and send a signal to the mind. The mind responds with emotions such as happiness, sadness, love, anger, mercy, and kindness. Our soul and conscience also contribute to these responses. A self-disciplined mind controls or stops responding to the signals from the body, or is completely detached from the events affecting the body. This is the stage where mind is at rest and there is perfect harmony between the body and the mind.

Prasannachandra has achieved this harmony through his *sadhana*. As a result, this extreme cold does not bother him. Despite all that *sadhana*, his mind sometimes gets disturbed and escapes that harmony. Right now Prasannachandra is in that disturbed state of mind."

Mahavir continued, "This morning, a passerby sarcastically said to Prasannachandra, 'Look at this foolish king! He is standing here for a victory over his mind, while his son has lost a war and his kingdom.'

This remark triggered a reaction in Prasannachandra's mind. Although his body has become immune to the cold weather, his mind has become restless. His mind is disturbed by the news of his son's defeat, and is recalling the days when he ruled an invincible army. His mind is now fighting an imaginary war killing an imaginary enemy while his body is standing still on the riverbank."

Emperor Shrenik wanted to know the effect on one's *sadhana* under such circumstances. He asked, "Bhagwant, what will happen to him if he were to die while being in such a disturbed state of mind?"

“Hell is the only reward for such a soul which is mired in violence and hatred at the time of death.” said Bhagwan.

“Such difficult *sadhana* and you are saying that he would go to hell! Bhagwant, is there no reward for all that many years of *sadhana*?” Emperor Shrenik was not ready to accept such a harsh verdict. “Bhagwant, I have tremendous respect for someone like Prasannachandra and his deep *sadhana*. Therefore, I am saddened to learn that he will go to hell. Isn’t the battle waging in his mind just a temporary phase? Will his unruly state of mind not return to full peace? Could he not get back in the right direction with his *sadhana*? When will his imaginary enemies disappear?” Emperor Shrenik appeared to be concerned.

Bhagwan said, “*Sadhana* must always be accompanied with conscience or true *bhava*. Even a positive action is worth nothing unless it is in tune with one’s conscience. Auspicious thoughts must accompany auspicious acts. When and if Prasannachandra becomes free from violent thoughts and gets in tune with his *sadhana*, his rewards will improve. His soul will then merit a birth in heaven, or he may even achieve liberation.”

Emperor Shrenik was now intrigued. He asked, “Who regulates the mind? What is the power that decides whether we will go to heaven or hell? Is there someone or something that rules our overall life?”

Bhagwan replied, “There is no external power or authority that rules our life and destiny. We are the masters of our destiny. But, our undisciplined mind often ignores our *chitta* and rules our body and senses when responding to external events. It generates endless thought-waves that are full of desires and passions. If, through *sadhana*, we

understand the connection between our soul and our mind, we can train our mind to be in harmony with our *chitta*. Otherwise, we succumb to the unruly mind and lose control over our actions.”

Bhagwan continued, “The mind itself ironically helps us to understand how to be at peace. It is the mind that decides to enter *sadhana*, learn self-discipline, and achieve full internal peace. Those whose minds refuse *sadhana* will never gain this benefit.”

“Bhagwant, but what does *sadhana* do to the mind?”

Bhagwan replied, “Shrenik, whereas the unruly mind generates thoughts prompted by desires and passions, regular *sadhana* essentially trains the mind to be in touch with our *bhava* center (*chitta*) and to be free from *kashayas*. As we gradually eliminate our *kashayas*, such as desires, ego, anger, deceit, and lust; our mind achieves self-discipline and internal peace.” Bhagwan then continued with Prasannachandra’s situation.

“Prasannachandra has almost succeeded in being at peace with himself. Although he is determined enough to ignore extreme cold, his mind loses balance when his ego is provoked. He will soon realize this and will bring it back in harmony with his *chitta* through his *sadhana*. Death in such a disciplined state will merit him a rebirth in heaven. More *sadhana* would even win him a place in the *siddhaloka*.”

18. Taamali of Tamralipti - Extreme Penance

People who knew me as a Brahmin scholar often wonder about my decision to become Sraman monk. Sometimes they ask me about our practice of self-restraint, fasting for days, *sadhana*, and penance. In their view, all this amounts to self-torture and pain. Little do they know about the joy that flows from the soul when we get in touch with it through meditation and penance! A *sadhak* who is truly in harmony with his soul never feels bodily pain.

Recently a childhood friend earnestly asked me, “Goyama, what do you achieve through *sadhana* and penance?”

I said to him, “*Sadhana* is a technique to achieve self-discipline. It helps us to eliminate our weaknesses and gain mastery over our mind. Mastering the mind stops it from indulging in activities that might increase karmic bondage. *Sadhana* helps clear our thinking, makes mind steady, reduces stress, and slows down or stops the inflow and bonding of karmic particles to the soul. Penance, on the other hand, actually help cut the existing bondage, and purify the soul.”

“How do you know?” My friend asked.

I replied, "I know this through experience. I feel the joy that arises out of a progressively enlightened soul."

My friend wanted to know more. "Would you feel the same joy by taking penances to the extreme to a point where you are near death?"

I did not know how to answer that. I had never taken myself to that extreme and had no knowledge about it. I decided to ask Bhagwan Mahavir who had the omniscient knowledge.

"Bhagwant, what does one gain by extreme penance?"

Mahavir could sense the turmoil in me and asked me to sit down. Bhagwan usually tells illustrative stories, or narrates actual incidents to answer such questions. I have collected literally thousands of such stories.

"Have you heard of Taamali of Tamralipti?" Mahavir replied by asking a counter question.

"You mean the monk who fasted himself to death? All I know is that his body mysteriously disappeared from the spot where he died, but was later found somewhere else in a very bad shape. Terrible! Who could have done such horrible insult to his body? He was so well revered by the people of Tamralipti."

"Indeed he was revered and worshipped by the people", said Mahavir, "but people do not know the whole story."

"Pray, tell me the story, Bhagwant!" I pleaded.

“Taamali was a very rich and prosperous businessman in the city of Tamralipti⁽⁶⁾. He was brilliant, gracious, and noble. One early morning, he was thinking about his riches and his good fortune.

‘I am so lucky!’ he thought. ‘I have everything! I have so much wealth – gold, silver, diamonds, jewels, a variety of precious stones, and pearls. I own plenty of land, several magnificent buildings, thousands of cattle. Above all, I have bright children, a loving wife and my health is good. Certainly, all this fortune must be due to my past karma. I am enjoying this happy life because in my past lives I must have accumulated much good karma.

What am I doing to preserve and improve my good fortune?” thought Taamali, “How long would this last? Am I not depleting my stock of good karma by living like this? Soon this stock will all be finished and I will run out of this good life, good luck, and happiness. Will I not then be miserable in this and in future lives? Certainly, I must now change my wasteful lifestyle and start accumulating good karma.’

Taamali then remembered a monk who would stand up on the top of a near by hill for two continuous days, without food. All day long he would face the bright-hot sun and would endure the bitter night’s cold. He would then come down the hill and beg for food. On his way down, he would bow politely in front of every living being - humans, animals, birds, insects, or plants. After a single meal, he would return to the hill-top for two more days of penance.”

⁶ In Mahavir’s time, Tamralipti was well-known as a capital city of Vanga kingdom. It is now a village in the Midnapur district near Calcutta in West Bengal.

“Was he a monk in our Sraman tradition?” I asked Bhagwan.

“Goyama, this is an extreme form of penance known as ‘*Pranama Pravrajya*’ (a vow to respect all living beings). It was common both in Vedic and Sramanic tradition. People perform it hoping to purify their soul, or to gain thunderbolt energy (*Tejo Lesya*) from the sun.

Taamali also wanted to undertake the extreme penance of *Pranama Pravrajya*. So he decided to distribute some of his wealth to the needy, and then take the sacred vow of *Pranama Pravrajya*. In the morning, he told his wife and children about his decision and sought their permission. Upon distributing part of his wealth to the poor, he invited his friends to his house and declared his intention to them. He asked his eldest son to take charge of the business and to take good care of the family and the society, and left for the hill.

After two days when Taamali came down from the hill for food, people offered him lavishly-prepared dishes. He politely refused such special food, and accepted only small portions from those who would offer him simple food. This too was the part of his penance. Soon the penance started taking toll on his body; Taamali lost his fat, and became just skin and bones. Still, instead of giving up his penance, he started thinking about his own mortality. He realized the impermanence of life and concluded that it is futile to be in love with this body. “A purer soul would merit a better rebirth.” He would say to himself.

Taamali’s thoughts continued, “My goal is to accumulate good karma, but this body demands physical pleasures that would make me happy. Pleasure derived from external sources, such as money,

possessions, fame, etc. are only temporary. It eventually turns into sorrow when the sources disappear. Freedom of the soul is the true source of permanent happiness. I cannot be truly happy as long as my soul is trapped in the painful cycle of death and rebirth. I am now weak and fragile. Death must indeed be around the corner.”

He was now deeply contemplating on the spiritual aspects of his actions. “I must, therefore, use the remaining time to undertake the supreme penance of ‘*santhara*’ (fasting unto death)* and thereby achieve maximum freedom. As quickly as possible, I should now return to Tamralipti and consult with those whom I know, pundits, astrologers and Sraman monks about the appropriateness of my decision.”

Consult he did! His resolve strengthened, he selected a spot in an isolated garden to the north-east of the city. Sitting in the meditation position of *padmasan* (lotus position), he drew a small circle around him marking the limits of his movement on the ground, and took a vow not to move outside that circle, and give up all food and liquid until death. “I shall neither repent my decision, nor shall I be afraid of death. I shall neither break my vow nor wish death to hasten. I will free myself from all attachments - for this world, for my family, and for my body. I know that I was born alone, and alone will I have to leave.”

As this was going on the earth, the celestial beings of the kingdom

* A *santhara* is sometimes misinterpreted as suicide. Whereas, suicide is a desperate and cowardly act of killing oneself to escape pain, difficulties, disappointment, or sorrow, *santhara* is an intensely spiritual and courageous act by a person who realizes that the attachment to the physical body impedes liberation. Therefore, a decision is taken in consultation with the family, loved ones and a group of monks and nuns to give up this last bondage. Even today, *santhara* is frequently celebrated among devout Jains in India.

of Balichancha in the western part of the universe were carefully watching Taamali. They had recently lost their Indra (king of the celestial beings), and were in search of a new one. Only he who has the lightest load of karmic bondage could qualify, and Taamali, with his extreme penances was meeting their requirements. The Council of the Governors of Balichancha descended to earth to where Taamali was seated and asked him to be their king upon death. Taamali, deep in his meditation, did not respond. The Councilors of Balichancha, angry and disappointed with Taamali's behavior, returned to their celestial abode.

Taamali's *santhara* lasted for two months, and upon his death his soul was reborn in the kingdom of Isaan, another celestial kingdom, but in the higher, eastern universe. Issan too had lost its king (Indra) – and Taamali was born there to be their new Indra. When the councilors of Balichancha heard this news, they were very angry. They descended to earth where Taamali's body lay. They heaped insults at his body, spitting on and kicking it, and finally binding it with a rope and dragging it through the streets of Tamralipti. Having wrecked havoc all night, they dumped the body in another part of the city, and the celestial beings of Balichancha returned to their abode."

"Although the story of the feud between the celestial kingdoms of Balichancha and Isaan continues further, I will stop here because, Goyama, now you have realized the power of extreme penance to take the soul to the highest celestial level."

19. Gautam's Guardian

It has been nearly twenty-five years since I joined the *sangh*.

During this time thousands of men and women have listened to Bhagwan's *samosarans*. People from all walks of life came. Some decided to get ordained and devote full-time to *sadhana* as monks or nuns, whereas others chose to remain with their families and follow Mahavir's advice to the best of their ability.

Many who attended *samosarans* for the first time had absolutely no understanding of *sadhana* or Reality. I was glad to be able to guide them and watched hundreds surprisingly reaching their goal of liberation few years later. I admired such people with awe and reverence. After groping in the darkness of superstitious practices, they received a ray of light from Mahavir, and in no time they were able to reach the luminescent state of *kevalgyan* (absolute knowledge).

Those who were able to free their soul with such a short *sadhana* must certainly have carried a very light load of past karma. While I was happy for them, I, the very first disciple of Bhagwan Mahavir, his most devoted *Ganadhar* Gautam, anxiously wondered when I would reach that coveted state.

Since joining Mahavir's *sangh* I have earnestly carried out my *sadhana*. I have served my Bhagwan with devotion and love, and have received answers from him to thousands of questions, except for one.

That question was direct and simple. I asked, “Bhagwan, ordinary people receive your blessings and become exceptionally extraordinary in a very short time. It took them very little *sadhana* to become a *siddha* (liberated soul). Dear Bhagwan, when will I be able to reach that wonderful state? Why is it that my earnest *sadhana* does not yield positive results? I see the goal and feel that I am so close to it, yet it still eludes me. Where am I going wrong?”

Bhagwan replied, “Goyama, listen carefully. *Samsara*, this endless cycle of rebirth and death, is like a vast ocean. You have managed to swim across most of it. You are very close to the shore; it is in your sight, ***Just as there is no progress until you lift your foot off the first rock and move on to the next, so also, you cannot reach your goal until you leave your attachments behind.*** but you have stopped short of reaching that shore. Just as there is no progress until you lift your foot off the first rock and move on to the next, so also, you cannot reach your goal until you leave your attachments behind. Gautam, just as greed, lust, and ego, are passions, so are infatuation and attachment. Attachment to objects or persons cause bonding and impedes liberation of your soul. Cut all your bonds and free your conscience of all passions and you will reach your goal.”

“Bhagwan,” I said, “Have I not given up everything in your service?” I own nothing, and I have no desires for anything.”

Mahavir continued, “One whose conscience is not free of all passions (*kashayas*) cannot be completely free. Such a person is imbalanced because his conscience is dependent on external objects. He is

effectively still a prisoner of such objects. A soul is free when it is not dependent on any external objects of attachment or aversion. Freedom from attachment is not that easy. Gautam you have given up many objects and have cut your ties with many loved ones. However, you must also free yourself from your love for me, your devotion for me, and your emotional dependence on me. This too is bonding, Gautam! Shackles, golden or otherwise, will not allow a bird to fly free in the sky. Gautam, think about this imprisonment of your soul and set it free. Only then will you be able to reach the safe shores of freedom."

I was listening carefully. My Mahavir was telling me to give up my devotion to him. I lamented silently, "Bhagwan, how can that be possible. My love for you has no limits. Mine is an endless devotion! How can I end that which is endless! I understand you, and I have always obeyed your every command! But forgive me, my Bhagwan, for I cannot obey this. I am nothing without you. Please do not ask me to pay such a heavy price for freedom! I can live without moksha! I am all right Bhagwan where I am - away from my goal, away from the shore, but closer to you! I prefer being within this body in the blissful presence of My Bhagwan than in the eternal bliss of formless moksha. Forgive me Bhagwan, for I cannot leave you! You are my guardian. I will be an orphan without you.

20. Nirvana - I Am Alone

I have been the closest associate of Bhagwan Mahavir for the past thirty years. I clearly remember that particular afternoon when I first met Mahavir. Thirty years! Time has passed by so quickly! That afternoon I was performing a *yagnya* ceremony in this very town of Pava. My disciples were uttering *mantras* in preparation for the slaughter of hundreds of animals. I am so ashamed now of myself when I think of that ghastly ceremony.

When one of my disciples brought me the news of Bhagwan Mahavir's arrival in Pava I got angry. I wanted to stop Mahavir's rebellious message against *yagnya*, and drive that challenger out of Pava. In fact, I went to the Mahasen garden to do just that, but that very incident was to be an awakening in my life. When I arrived at the *samosaran*, there was no rebellion, no challenge, and no confrontation. The air was filled with kindness and love. It melted away my anger.

Bhagwan welcomed me with warmth. He already knew that I doubted the permanence of *atma* (soul), and corrected me even before my asking him any question. Indeed he proved to be a greater pundit than I was. Therefore, as per the tradition, I accepted Mahavir as my guru and became his disciple. I stepped into Bhagwan Mahavir's shadow and have

basked in his wisdom, love, and kindness for the last 30 years. I have seen the world around me change rapidly. The magic mantra of that change has been simply 'compassion and love for all living beings'. Love for the fellow humans as well as for the animals, the plants, the microbes, and for every living being.

The world I left behind that day was indeed a cruel one. Human beings in that world were pathetically divided. As a Brahmin, I used to look down upon the non-Brahmins and the entire womanhood - our mothers, sisters, and daughters. Our women-folks were allowed to study Vedas but never to preach Vedic wisdom. We did not allow even Kshtriya kings and warriors, to preach from Vedas. Our treatment of the poor working class, the Shudras and the dark colored *Dasyus*, was inhuman. We could touch animals but would not tolerate even the shadow of a *Shudra* or a *Dasyu*. With such contempt for fellow humans, compassion for animals was out of question. Such was our caste ego!

Mahavir changed all that! No less than 36,000 women joined Mahavir's movement as *sadhvis*, each of them as equal to us monks. In our *sangh*, no one is high cast and no one is low. We all are equal!

For the last 30 years I have seen the power of Mahavir's unconditional universal love and compassion. Traditional arch enemies simply drop their weapons and join hands. Even animals feel safe around him and understand his love. Vicious animals such as lions, tigers, forget their predator instincts in the presence of my beloved Guru. Brahmins or *Dasyus* men or women, elephants or earthworms, and tigers or deer, all equal share his love and compassion.

Mahavir often tells us that, “We are all mortals, the transients! Every one of us here is in this form only for a short time. Each of us has arrived all alone and will have to leave all alone. Our soul is trapped in the endless cycle of birth and death because of our own karma. It is up to us, and us alone, to free ourselves from this bondage.

He says that compassion with selfless love is the path to freedom, but your love must be universal. You cannot just love some and hate others. Universal love and compassion is possible only if you are not passionately attached to one thing or the other. Passions generate desire, hatred, and selfishness, and disturb our equanimity. Under the influence of passions, we tend to love some and hate others, increasing thereby our load of karma.” Mahavir’s love for all living beings has transformed the world, and I have been fortunate enough to witness all this closely.

Mahavir’s knowledge has no limits. I have asked him hundreds of questions and he has never avoided any. I am his most curious disciple, and his answers to my questions have been so informative that I have come to fully trust in his knowledge and wisdom.

Sevam Bhante! Sevam Bhante! Tahameyam Bhante!

(Yes Bhagwant, I trust what ever you say. Bhagwant, your every word is the truth and the only truth)

Once I asked Mahavir, “Bhagwant, I have been your faithful disciple ever since I joined the *sangh*. I am your very first disciple and have followed, obeyed and loved you faithfully. Yet why is it that so

many people who joined your path much later have achieved moksha (liberation), but not me?

Few years ago in response to a similar question, Bhagwan had told me to eliminate my attachment for him. I had categorically rejected that option. Mahavir knew that I preferred to live in his blissful presence to the eternal bliss of formless moksha. Therefore, this time Bhagwan did not answer me directly.

He said, “Absolutely selfless love, without any attachment is the key to moksha. However, do not lose heart Goyama! You and I have been together not for just last thirty years. This relationship of our two souls and this longing for each other goes back to several previous births. In our celestial births I was Triprusta Vasudev and you were my chariot driver. You were my disciple Kapil in the past life when I was Marichi. With such past association, our souls are now destined to be equal, and this association shall continue. ”

I was puzzled by that answer. Certainly, I was oblivious to the pain and plight of the fellow human beings and animals before I joined this *sangh*. But, have I not redeemed myself? Have I not learnt the art of boundless love and compassion? Do I not love and even revere every living being large and small? Does my love still fall short? I was perplexed but did not ask him about my shortcomings. I wanted to contemplate upon his answer and then ask.

I was still thinking about Mahavir’s promise, “Our souls are now destined to be equal upon leaving these bodies, and the association shall continue.” I didn’t want to be his equal; I am so attached to Mahavir that

I want to remain his disciple, in his shadow, for ever and ever! Unfortunately, it is too late now. I have just received the sad news that Bhagwan left his earthly abode, leaving all of us behind. Bhagwan achieved *kevalgyan* years ago; he had freed his soul from all his *ghatiya* karma. Free from all his *kashayas*, he was now free even from the cycle of rebirth and death. His soul is now already in *siddha-loka*.

Bhagwan, now that you have left, who will guide me? Who will explain your promise to me, “Our souls are destined to be equal”? I used to ask of you hundreds of questions. How shall I now access that boundless source of wisdom? Without you, this entire world will now sink into darkness of ignorance. Once again, ignorant people will be preyed up on by those who will claim to be God’s messengers and mislead them with false belief. There shall be wars, and people will kill each other. You intervened and stopped wars by preaching *ahimsa*, but now who shall teach them the reverence for all life?

Mahavir, you have given us so much wisdom! You asked us to listen carefully and try to understand the opponent’s view points, because absolute truth has many facets, and is beyond the reach of us ordinary mortals (*Anekantavada*). You repeatedly asked us to seek understanding of different opinions to avoid misunderstanding and conflicts. ‘Self-righteousness is a shallow passion. It builds up our ego and can only lead to war, death, and destruction.’ You used to say.

Dark forces of ego, self-righteousness, greed, and lust will now dance freely on this earth without your presence. Life on this earth will no longer be safe. Indeed the earth itself will not be safe without your

wisdom. Men, with their possessiveness, shall destroy the mother earth too! Who will convince them that this air, water, and earth are all living systems? “Treat them with respect and dignity”, you told us, “man shall misuse them at his own peril.” Who shall explain to them the virtues of *Aparigraha* (minimizing possessiveness)?

Bhagwant, I got the news of your nirvana as soon as I returned from Devsharma’s home. Your departure has plunged the earth in to even more darkness on this moonless night. People are lighting lamps* to illuminate their path, but will they remember your path to true enlightenment? When I got the news I cried like a small child. How can I help that? Bhagwant, I remember your promise that “our souls will be equal upon leaving these bodies.” How is that possible now? You have already achieved nirvana, and I am still trapped in this *samsara* all alone. I am alone! Bhagwant, I am alone without you!

You are a *kevali* (omniscient) ... Certainly you knew that you were to depart tonight. Yet you sent me away at such a crucial moment! Why? Just to leave me alone on this earth? I was carefully listening to each of your discourses. Wasn’t I paying enough attention? You knew that this was to be your last sermon! Yet you asked me to leave to help out Devasharma Brahmin.

* This is the basis of the Jain tradition of ‘Deepavali’, the festival of lighting the lamps on Mahavir Nirvana Day, the new moon night (*Amavasya*) of the month of Kartik.



Mahavir Nirvana - Cremation

Why Bhagwant? You knew how much I loved you. You knew of my immense attachment to you. Did you think that my attachment would have stopped you from leaving? Would that have blocked your journey to *siddha-loka*? No, no Bhagwant, although I am still possessed of the attachment, you are free from it. You, a *Vitaragi* (one who has conquered all passions and emotions) would not have been affected by my *raga* (love and attachment). Bhagwant, if not for my love, then at least for the sake of this earth, and for these helpless plants and animals, could you not have opted for another re-birth?

Suddenly, it dawned on me the fallacy of what I was saying. I am being selfish! I am asking a *Vitaragi* to be emotionally re-attached to this *samsara*. I am asking my Bhagwant to take re-birth simply because of my attachment for him. How shameful of me to be so selfish! Did Bhagwant not repeatedly say that even the slightest attachment is the *kashaya* one must get rid off! I had no craving for moksha. I had already told this to Mahavir. My only attachment was for Bhagwan, and now even he is no more!

Slightest attachment and that too is no more! Suddenly, I feel free. Free... Free... Bhagwan is that what you meant by “our souls are now destined to be equal upon leaving these bodies, and the association shall continue?”

Glossary

<i>Acharya</i>	Head of a religious order, school,
<i>Achurya-vrata</i>	Vow not to take that which is not rightfully ours
<i>Ahimsa</i>	Non-violence
<i>Ajja</i>	A honorific term for a senior (aged)
<i>Amavasya</i>	The new moon night
<i>Anath</i>	Orphan
<i>Anekantavada</i>	Doctrine of multi-faceted truth
<i>Arhats</i>	State of enlightenment; Followers of enlightened ones
<i>Atma</i>	Soul
<i>Atma-gyan</i>	Complete knowledge of the soul
<i>Bhagwan</i>	A very holy person; God
<i>Bhagwant</i>	A respectful way to address a very holy person
<i>Bhava</i>	Intention (good or bad); Conscience; Emotional state
<i>Bhava Himsa</i>	Intentional violence; Violence to satisfy our desires
<i>Brahamm-asram</i>	A celibate or student stage in life
<i>Chaturvidh</i>	Four-fold
<i>Chetana</i>	Life-force; Consciousness
<i>Chitta</i>	Center for the origin of emotional states
<i>Dasi</i>	Servant; Slave
<i>Dharma</i>	Demands of pure soul; Duty; Mistakenly used for 'religion'
<i>Divya-Dhwani</i>	Language of the pure souls
<i>Dravya</i>	Fundamental elements of the universe
<i>Gana</i>	Group; <i>Sangh</i> , Congregation
<i>Ganadhar</i>	Group/ <i>Sangh</i> /Congregation leader
<i>Ganatantra</i>	Republic
<i>Ghatiya-Karma</i>	Karma detrimental to spiritual progress
<i>Gotra</i>	Family class
<i>Grihasth-asram</i>	A married and family stage in life
<i>Gurudev</i>	A honorific term for a Guru/Teacher
<i>Gurukul</i>	School;
<i>Himsa</i>	Violence
<i>Jiva</i>	Soul; <i>Atma</i>
<i>Karmakanda</i>	Rituals
<i>Kashayas</i>	Harmful passions e.g. Anger, Lust, Attachment, Ego
<i>Kashay-Bhava</i>	Harmful intentions/ desires
<i>Keval-gyan</i>	Absolute knowledge
<i>Kevali</i>	An enlightened one
<i>Kshayik-Bhava</i>	Emotions e.g. love, compassion, kindness

<i>Kshtriya</i>	A warrior caste
<i>Maharaj</i>	King; Emperor
<i>Nimitta-Karan</i>	Subsidiary cause
<i>Nirjara</i>	To eliminate karmic bondage
<i>Nirvana</i>	Death; departure; to extinguish
<i>Parigraha-parimana</i>	Giving up needs and possessions
<i>Paryushan</i>	A Jain religious festival
<i>Pranam-Pravrajya</i>	A vow to respect all living beings
<i>Pratikraman</i>	Meditating for forgiveness and to avoid any transgressions
<i>Purusha</i>	Man; God
<i>Sadhak</i>	One who is on the path of spiritual progress
<i>Sadhana</i>	Spiritual exercises
<i>Sadhu/Sadhvi</i>	Monk/Nun
<i>Samay</i>	Time; Self; Soul
<i>Samayik</i>	Meditating to get in touch with the Self
<i>Samosaran</i>	Religious conference; sermon
<i>Samsara</i>	The cycle of death and rebirth
<i>Samvara</i>	Stopping the in-flow of karma
<i>Samyak-Charitra</i>	Rational Conduct
<i>Samyak-Darshan</i>	Rational Vision
<i>Samyak-Gyan</i>	Rational knowledge
<i>Sangh</i>	Congregation, brotherhood
<i>Santhara</i>	Fasting unto death
<i>Sanyas-asram</i>	A stage in life to become an ascetic
<i>Satya-vrata</i>	A vow always to speak truth
<i>Shila-vrata</i>	Celibacy
<i>Sraman</i>	A spiritual philosophy; one who follows Sraman Philosophy
<i>Shravak</i>	A Lay-man
<i>Shravika</i>	A Lay-woman
<i>Tapa</i>	Penances
<i>Tejo-Lesya</i>	Thunderbolt energy
<i>Tirthankar</i>	An enlightened one who shows the path to liberation
<i>Upadana-Karan</i>	Primary cause
<i>Uttam-Kshama</i>	Ideal Forgiveness
<i>Vanaprasth-asram</i>	A stage in life to become a hermit
<i>Vitaragi</i>	One who is free from all passions and emotions
<i>Vrata</i>	Vow
<i>Vratya</i>	People who take vows
<i>Yagnya</i>	Sacrificial fire-ceremony

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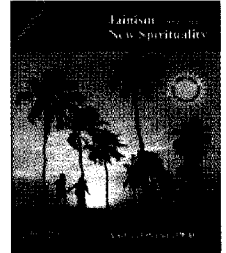
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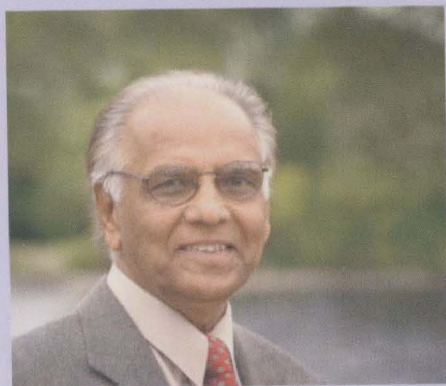
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