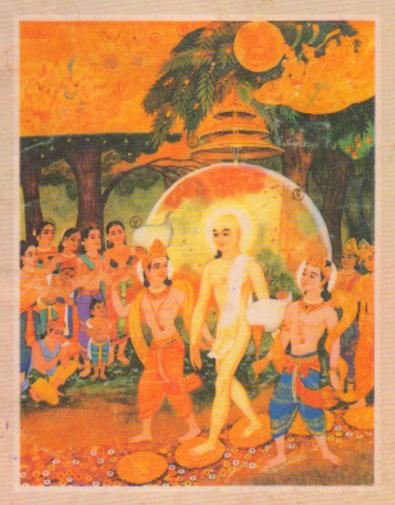
# NON-VIOLENCE: A WAY OF LIFE

(A sketch of Bhagwan Mahavir's life and teaching)

BY: DR. KUMARPAL DESAI



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13/B, Chandranagar Society Jaybhikhkhu marg. Paldi, Ahmedabad-380007 (Gujarat) Non-violence : A Way of Life (A sketch of Bhagwan Mahavir's life and teachings) By Dr. Kumarpal Desai

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### Preface

It is indeed a pleasure to establish rapport with the wider community of Indians living abroad and especially the Jain community, through the medium of books or discourses on Jainism and on Jain saints. It strengthens the sacred bond that binds the souls together in peace and harmony. Having offered Stories from Jainism, Kshamapana and the illustrated primer, Tirthankar Mahavir, I am glad to approach my reader this time Non-violence: A Way of Life, a brief life-story of Mahavir, highlighting his main teachings. I am delighted to note here the Stories from Jainism is now on the list of books prescribed wherever Jainism is taught as a subject in secondary schools in London.

In this book I have tried to narrate several incidents in the life of Bhagwan Mahavir which are as much inspiring and fascinating as they are instructive. I have also tried to analyse and explain his teachings in a simple but logical manner, keeping in mind a new audience which is conversant neither with the Gujarati language nor the tradition of Jainism. I hope this will serve as an appetiser to modern readers in moulding their attitude to life; and, like the great Preacher, Mahavir, every young man will form a broad-based human outlook, free from considerations of caste, creed or colour. Mahavir's preaching of non-violence will teach love and self-restraint and Syadvada will teach respect for other persons' viewpoint.

I shall feel happy if the message of Bhagwan Mahavir will reach my fellow bretheren abroad through this modest publication.

I am deeply indebted of Shri Swetambar Moortipoojak Jain Boarding. I am also thankful to Smt. Muktibahen Shah and Shri Dineshbhai Shah for their kind support.

- Kumarpal Desai



जो देवाणवि देवो, जं देवा पंजलि नमंसंति । तं देवदेवमहिअं, सिरसा वंदे महावीरं ।।

(I bow down my head in obeisance to Mahavir, who is worshipped by the great gods, who is the god of gods and to whom gods pray with folded hands.)

Before Bhagwan Mahavir was born, every soul upon this earth was in intense distress. A few men in their vain belief in a so-called heaven turned life on earth into hell. Men had come to give up all effort and to believe in fate entirely. Their hands, legs and minds had become inert. What will be—they thought.

In those days temples had become hunts of trickery and deceit. all religious life was reduced to the performance of sacrificial rites and offerings. The way to redemption lay through sacrificial killings, people believed. Many living beings were consumed by the blazing fire of sacrifices. Thousands of beasts lost their lives

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on the altar. Kings waged constant wars for petty gains. Scriptures spread the false belief that to die fighting in such wars was the easiest path to salvation. Many women lost their husbands. Countless innocent children became orphans. Only a small group of persons had the access to right knowledge. Even the right to perform penances was restricted to a small group of people. What knowledge could the poor and lowly have? Only a certain class of people could read scriptures. Others were not allowed to even listen to them. If someone of the lower castes learnt scriptures secretly, setting in a corner molten lead was poured into his ears. The life of women was full of toil and drudgery. Woman was regarded as nothing more than a household commodity. She was not treated as an individual in her own rights. A beast of burden could easily escape but a woman could not win freedom except through death. All the four classes treated each other with feelings of hostility and contempt. The high-born were conceited. The distress of the downtrodden and the untouchable knew no bounds. They had no roof over their heads. They suffered silently the ceaseless oppression of the high-born. Aggression was regarded as a sign of bravery and he who sought friendship was regarded as a coward. To bathe in

the blood of one's enemies was regarded as the height of bravery. Man was groping in the dark. Nature groaned terribly. All living beings were in agony. As if in answer to this universal fright Bhagwan Mahavir was born almost 2589 years ago. Light spread over the hellish scene on earth.

In that era there were a large number of states in India. Some states were ruled by kings and some others were ruled by powerful groups of men. Vaishali, the capital of the state of Videha, stood on the bank of the river Gandaki. This city had a number of suburbs. One of the suburbs was Kundagrama. King Siddhartha ruled in Kundagrama. He was a Kshatriya but he believed in peace and in the ultimate truth. He followed the ahimsa, non-violent way of life of Tirthankar Shri Parshvanatha, who had lived 200 years ago. One night queen Trishaladevi, the wife of King Siddhartha, had fourteen dreams. Having these dreams, the queen woke up. She related the dreams to King Siddhartha. The king called an assembly of the experts who knew the science of dreams and he asked them to expound the meanings of these dreams. The following are the portents of these fourteen great dreams.

The first dream of the saffron coloured lion suggested that the king's son would be matchless in fearlessness, bravery and generosity and that having destroyed passions, he would protect all living beings just as a lion, destroying all the mad elephants, protects the forest.

The second dream of the elephant with four tusks meant that his son would preach the fourfold religion. This fourfold religion pertains to the *Shramana* (the Jaina monk), the *Shramani* (the Jaina nun), the *Shravaka* (the Jaina layman) and the *Shravika* (the Jaina laywoman).

The third dream of the bullock implied that on this earth the chariot of religion had got stuck up in the mud of irreligion, but the king's son would pull the chariot of religion out of the mud and thus propagate religion.

The fourth dream of Lakshmidevi (the goddess of Wealth) implied that having given alms all the year round he would enjoy the endless splendour of the status of the Tirthankara.

The fifth dream of the nest implied that he would deserve the place of honour among living beings in all the three worlds, that is, he would be revered in all the three worlds.

The sixth dream of the moon implied that he would spread tranquility in the world which was so full of distress. He would propagate the religion of forgiveness which gives peace as the moon does.

The seventh dream of the sun implied that he would be radiant like the sun, distroying the darkness of ignorance and speading the light of knowledge.

The eighth dream of the flag implied that he would be like a flag in the king's family.

The ninth dream of the pitcher implied that he would be the treasure-house of all riches, all powers and all acquisitions.

The tenth dream of the lake implied that like a lake he would remove the mental and physical fatigue of the people who are tired in spite of the fact that some of them rest on soft velvet beds, and that he will quench the thirst of people lying thirsty on the bank of the lake of samsara (worldly life).

The eleventh dream of the ocean implied that, like the ocean, he would possess the gems of vast knowledge and faith.

The twelfth dream of the gods' abode implied that his fame would ascend up to that high abode. He would be adorable to gods.

The thirteenth dream of the mine of gems implied that he would be the mine of the gems of virtues.

The fourteenth and last dream of the firelight implied that he would serve as the light in the soul. Thus, it was prophesied that a leader of the masses,

one possessing many virtues, would be born to the queen. His name would be famous in all the nine continents.

At that time farmers went to King Siddhartha and said, "We do not know why but the fertility of the land has increased."

Cowherds went and said to the queen, "A miracle! Cows give more milk. More grass has grown in pastures."

Forest-dwellers said, "The mango-trees are the same but they abound in the yield of mangoes. Plants are bending down with the luxuriance of flowers and trees with the abundance of fruits."

Citizens said, "This is a prosperous year. The occasions of mourning have been few. Pre-mature deaths haven't occurred. We experience more and more a new impulse of joy and vitality."

Hearing this, King Siddhartha said, "If the forecast of the astrologers comes true, a great soul will make himself mainfest in the world. My heart is also stirred with delight, I don't know why."

Queen Trishaladevi said, "My mind is also stirred with joy. Shall we name the child Vardhaman?" The word Vardhaman itself suggests an increase in the quantity of the good in life.

The great soul now in the mother's womb thought, "My stirrings give indeed great pain to my mother. I shouldn't be a cause of it." Thinking thus, the soul in the womb became stable. It stopped stirring. Mother Trishala's pain in the womb subsided but her mental anxiety increased. She suspected that something inauspicious would happen, wept bitterly and swooned. The whole royal family now was full of sorrow. And, the great soul yet in the mother's womb thought, "What I did for their good, has caused grief." So it began its stirrings, the mother's joy knew no bounds. This happened when the soul had been in the womb for six and a half months. But the great soul was deeply moved at this and thought, "How wonderful is a mother's affection for her child! The trouble the child causes actually gives her pleasure. In this samsara there is no virtue greater than dedication to one's mother. I am yet in the womb. Mother has not even seen my face. But how much affection she has for me!" At that time Bhagwan Mahavir made up his mind that he would not take initiation during the life-time of his parents. Thus the first lesson Bhagwan Mahavir taught was one should always have feelings of loyalty and of love towards one's mother.

Of the twelve months of the year the month of Chaitra is considered to be the best. Shri Krishna has said in the Bhagavadgita, "मासानां मधुमासोऽस्मि।" (Among months I am the month of Madhu, the month of Chaitra.) It was on the eighth day of the dark half of this month of Chaitra that Bhagwan Rishabhadeva was born. Under the constellation Hastottara at midnight on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the month Chairta, Vardhaman was born.

56 celestial maidens joined the celebration of this birth. 64 Indras performed the infant's ablution with holy water. Even when he was a child, Mahavir was brave and knew no fear. When he saw seven, Vardhaman was once playing with children the game of ambali-pipali among the branches of a tree. At that time a snake coiled itself round the trunk of the tree. The children on the ground took to their heels. Those on the tree clung to the branches, trembling out of fear. But Vardhaman's mind knew no fear. He was not at all afraid of the snake. He caught the snake at its tail-end, shook it and threw off. The second lesson that Vardhaman teaches is that of fearlessness. intrepidity. Without fearlessness, there cannot be spiritual development. All frighten him who fears. Nobody can stand up to a man who is fearless.

In order to test Vardhaman's fearlessness one god took the form of a nauseating person. When he was eight, Vardhaman was playing with other children on the outskirts of the city. The rule of the game was that the winner winner would sit on the back of the boy, who had lost the game. The god assumed the form of a child, came to play there and according to his own plan he lost the game. He let Vardhaman sit on back. But all of a sudden he transformed himself into a giant as tall as seven palm-trees. The god uttered sharp loud shrieks. A mass of matted hair shot out of his head. His eyes became flaming red. Other children ran away out of fear. But there was no fear in Vardhaman's eyes nor did he show any other sign, not even a tremor. He was tranquil as if majestically riding an elephant. He so struck the god's shoulder with his first that the god cried out in pain. He gave up his hideous form of a giant and became a small child. Here, the whole city was full of fears, not simply because Vardhaman was the prince of King Siddhartha, but because people loved him so much. All saw Vardhaman returning safely, and heaved a sigh of relief. He was sitting on the god's shoulder. Some ran forward to beat up the god.

Vardhaman said to them, "No, he should not be beaten. It is the greatest punishment to an evil-doer if he repents of what he has done. Who are we to punish him? So, forgive him and let him go."

All obeyed Vardhaman. Now his little adventure was over and the god departed. At the time the god said, "The great god Indra admired your intrepidity and heroism but you are even more intrepid and heroic than we thought. Really, you are Mahavir."

Mahavir was put to the school. But to souls of this high order, schools and such things do not have much to offer. The teacher, who was astonished at his knowledge, said, "Trying to teach Mahavir is like holding up a lamp to see the sun." In this very childhood Mahavir thought deeply and found that the samsara was full of unhappiness. He saw that everyone liked to cause unhappiness to others but no one likes even a shadow of unhappiness for himself. He thought, "As we love our soul, so all love their souls. As we like to live, so all like to live."

एवं खु नाणिणो सारं, जं न हिंसति किंचण । अहिंसासमयं चैव एयावन्तं विचाणिया।।

(This is the substance for the knowledgeable that no harm should be done to anyone. If this true nature of ahimsa (non-violence) is understood, it is enough.)

It is the bonds of illusion and jealousy, attachment and aversion, that cause happiness and unhappiness. Vardhaman saw that even the most hated of enemies does not do the harm which uncontrolled attachment and aversion do. As the chicken comes out of the egg and the egg comes out of the chicken, so greed produces craving, craving more greed. However great the strength and the power may be, they are not greater than love and mercy. He decided to find the

empire of love and mercy in this world. Extraordinary were the thoughts of Vardhaman. In those days Kshatriyas fought terrible battles and killed countless enemies. Mahavir said, "What is the use of external battles? Fight your own selves. Conquer your own selves. Then only you can get true happiness."

अप्पाणमेव जुज्झाहि, किं ते जुज्झेण बज्झओ । अप्पाणमेव अप्पाणं जइत्ता स्हमेहए।।

(He said, "He who wins himself wins a greater victory than he who wins thousands of warriors in a battle difficult to conquer.")

Thinking thus, Mahavir conceived a desire to renounce the world but this pained his parents. When Mahavir was 28, his parents died and he prepared himself for initiation. But his elder brother Nandivardhana felt that the loss of their parents was iust a recent blow and so he would not be able to bear his brother's separation so soon. Vardhaman respected the desire of his Nandivardhan and continued to live in the fold of the samsara two years longer. But to him the city or the forest made no difference. Even in his royal palace he lived the life of an ascetic. Sitting in a lonely place in the vast royal palace, he passed most of his time in meditation. Thus a year passed. From the second year he started giving alms. Every morning he gave alms for three hours. He gave away in alms gold, silver, riches and grains.

He fed the hungry. Under the Ashoka tree he himself tore five handfuls of hair. He took great vows which would bind him too. Lead the life of a monk. "From today through thoughts, words or my physical self, I will not do an evil deed, I will not have an evil deed done and I will not help anyone do an evil deed. I will perfectly purify the soul."

At the moment everyone was torn between feelings of joy and of sorrow. All were deeply moved in their hearts. Nandivardhan, the elder brother, knew the intentions of Vardhaman. So, he gave his consent though with a heavy heart. But at the time of Vardhaman's departure, he wept.

Vardhaman's mind would not any longer be tempted by mundane thoughts. He had his gaze set on the path of austerity. That is why in a mement he turned his home into a forest and a forest, his home. At the age of 30 Vardhaman renounced the world. This was a journey for the realization of the soul and the victory over the sense organs. He put off his royal dress. At that moment the great god Indra cast a fine devine raiment on his shoulder.

Mahavir set out. At that time a Brahmin named Somasharma came there. He asked for alms. Mahavir had nothing he would give. So he tore one half of the devine raiment given by Indra which was on his shoulder and gave it to him. The Brahmin left with

the devine raiment. That devine raiment was very costly. A darner said to the Brahmin, "If you bring the other half of the devine raiment. I will darn it into a full piece. It will fetch you a fine price."

The Brahmin returned and started trudging along close on the heels of Mahavir. He didn't dare to ask for the raiment. But it so happened that once the other half of the devine raiment slipped off Mahavir's shoulder. The Brahmin picked it up. Mahavir did not care for it and afterwards he never accepted a new devine raiment.

### जे ममाइअमइं जहाइ, से जहाइ ममाइअं ।

(He who abandons the attachment for possession, abandons the possession completely.)

The following incident reveals not only Bhagwan's abundant mercy but also his utter non-attachment to his own physical self. On the first night of his initiation this incident occurred which put his equanimity to the test. Prince Vardhaman was now monk Vardhaman. From the royal bed of flowers he has stepped on to the rugged and thorny path of austerity. One night while he was standing in the Kausagga posture outside Karmar town, a cowherd asked him to look after his bullocks for a short time while he was himself away. When the cowherd returned, he did not find his bullocks. Mahavir was

now in meditation and since he got no answer from Mahavir, the cowherd searched for his bullocks on the river bank, among the hills, in the deep foliage and in every nook and corner. He did not find his bullocks anywhere. Dejected and weary he came back where Mahavir was and there he saw his bullocks sitting beside Mahavir.

He flared up in anger. He took the bullock's rope and started lashing Mahavir with it. But at that moment god Indra appeared and challenged him. He said to the cowherd, "How foolish you are! He, whom you think to be a thief, is the son Vardhaman of King Siddhartha. Casting off the life of a prince, he has set out to purify his soul. Do you think he would steal your bullocks? And you are hurting the Lord."

The cowherd, the offender, fell prostrate at the feet of Mahavir. Mahavir's eyes brimmed over with abundant compassion. The great god Indra said, "Such foolish worldly persons will waylay you on the difficult path of austerity. So, let me live in your presence and remove the obstacles. During the period of your penance for the next twelve and a half years I will be by your side to look after you."

Having heard what the great god Indra said, Mahavir said, "Never has this happened and never will it happen in the life of one who seeks to realize the soul. Self-realization or self-liberation is not to be attained with the help of others. This is the ideal of one who seeks to realize the soul. 'एगो चरे खग्गविसाणकप्पों' (He proceeds alone and by his own efforts attains liberation.) The liberation of every soul depends upon his own strength, valour and exploits."

Mahavir proceeded all alone. Sometimes among the ruins of a building, sometimes on burial ground, sometimes in a thick forest and sometimes in a deep ravine, he set in meditation. And so he came to a vast hermitage of Duijjanta ascetics in the Moraka camp. This hermitage stood on the bank of a fine stream among green pastures. The head of the hermitage was an intimate friend of Bhagwan Mahavir's father, Siddhartha. Mahavir accepted his warm welcome and stayed there. The head of the hermitage gave him a thatched cottage to live in. Mahavir, the great monk, stayed there for the rainy season. Monsoon did not set in quite in time. So no fresh grass appeared on the pastures. Hungry cows came to graze and began to pull the hay off the thatched hut. The ascetics, drove the cows away with sticks. But Mahavir was engrossed in unbroken meditation. Attracted by the sweet-smelling substances applied to his body at the time of initiation, insects such as worms, butterflies, gnats and mosquitoes started swarming around stinging him. But Mahavir was quite detached. Other ascetics saw that while with sticks in hands, they protected their own cottages all the day long, Mahavir

did not care for his possessions at all. The ascetics began to slander him. The head of the hermitage came to know this. He said to Mahavir, "Even birds protect their nests. But you don't care though you are a prince. Why is it so?"

As he was engrossed in meditation, Mahavir did not speak. But he thought to himself, "The monk who had renounced his family was now tempted by the security of life in the cottage. It was for the sake of austerity that I renounced my home. Now entrapped in somebody else's cottage, should I forget austerity? The lamp of my austerity can shine under a tree, in a cave or among the ruins of a building." So with the consent of the head of the hermitage, Bhagwan left the cottage with all goodwill. But at that time he made five resolutions. (1) Not to stay at a place which breeds aversion. (2) Always to be in meditation. (3) The vow of silence should be observed for most of the time. (4) Not to eat more food than what can be taken in the palm of my hand. (5) Not to flatter householders. These five resolutions show Mahavir's spirit of renunciation. Like the seeds of a banyan-tree, these vows spread into the shetering tree of true asceticism in life. On account of these five vows he had to go without places to stay in. Only barren forests, ruined buildings and deserted houses became his abodes. But Mahavir was Mahavir. Neither fear nor provocation could swerve him from his path.

Continuing his journey from the hermitage of the Duijiants ascetics, Bhagwan Mahavir reached a deserted town. Most of the houses were ruined. Thus town with the bones of skeletons strewn everywhere, was known as Asthigrama - the town of bones. A fierce yaksha named Shoolapani lived in the temple on the outskirts of the town. He had such a great dislike for the smell of human body that whatever stayed in the temple over-night was sure to be found dead in the morning. The yaksha would scare and presecute the man and the man would die of fright. Fear itself is not dangerous but the fear of fear is dangerous. Even Indrasharma, the worshipper of the temple, was afraid of the yaksha. But Mahavir was not afraid of anybody. He said, "I do not fear anybody and do not cause fear to anybody. I will stay in the temple for the night."

It was now getting dark. The priest of the temple had left. Mahavir was standing in deep meditation. Shoolpani, the yaksha, appeared. He had in his hand a terrible shoola (lance) glittering like lightning. He looked like fierceness itself. Thinking that he would get a bellyful for his food, he burst into a peal of cruel loud laughter. Even the strongest men were frightened by the laughter. But like a thunderbolt Mahavir stood firm and unperturbed. The yaksha assumed the forms of an elephant, an evil spirit and a snake. He inflicted no end of wounds on Mahavir's body. By his miraculous

powers the yaksha caused severe pain in Mahavir's eyes, ears, nose, head and everywhere. But Mahavir stood firm like the Sumeru mountain.

The whole night Mahavir was visited with great calamities. At last Shoolpani, the yaksha, got dead tired. His monstrous physical strength surrendered to Mahavir's spiritual power in the end. Gradually his heart underwent a change. He bowed down at the feet of Mahavir and said, "O, Lord! Pardon me. I did not recognize you."

Mahavir said, "It is an enemy that is pardoned. You are my friend."

The yaksha was surprised. He said, "Am I a friend? And yours! How much I tortured you!"

Mahavir said, "Not only mine; you can be a friend of the whole world. Overcome by feelings of anger and spite, you were preying on human bones. But violence never gives you peace. It is only by forgiveness and love that peace is realized. I know that you bear revenge against this town. But the cure for revenge is not revenge but love."

As gentle rain falls on the hot earth so Mahavir's words pacified yaksha's bruised spirit. His heart brimmed over with the redeeming waters of love and compassion.

In the course of his sojourn, Bhagwan again came

to pass through Moraka town. There lived in this town a hypocritical astrologer of the Achchhandaka clan who cheated ignorant and credulous people with stories of false miracles. On account of Bhagwan's presence and through the infleunce of his practice of meditation and penance, the hold of Achchhandakas abated.

While Bhagwan was going on a journey from south Vachala to north Vachala, he did his preaching of the benefit of the snake, Chandakaushika. Then a good named Sangama caused a number of torments of Mahavir, but through all these travails, Bhagwan's face shone bright like gold as if it were the mid-day sun. For six long months he caused innumerable torments to Mahavir but Mahavir constantly pursued his path of austeriety. Disappointed and dejected, Sangamadeva fell at the feet of Mahavir. Tried and defeated Sangama said in a voice choked with emotion, "I am Sangama. I did not recognize you. You are adorable even by Gods, let alone men. Wonderful is your self-control. Matchless are your forgiveness and tolerance."

Though Mahavir was tormented for six months, not a trace of it was left on the face of the great yogi Mahavir. He thought in his compassionate heart, "Alas! What will happen to this poor soul? He has burdened himself with what huge load of Karma all

because of me."

And then his eyes opened wide, with tears glistening at the ends of each of his two lotus-like eyes. Seeing the tears Sangama danced and spoke, "Oh! the pitying eyes of forgiving God will surely bless me though I have tormented him."

Kalikalsarvajnya Hemchandracharya says:

कृ तापराधेऽपि जाने कृ पामन्थरतारयोः । ईषद् बाष्पार्द्र योर्मद्रं श्रीवीरजिनेनेत्रयोः।।

(Beneficent are Bhagwan Mahavir's eyes which emit pity on his tormentors and which are wet with tears in the corners on account of his compassion for them.)

Once upon a time Bhagwan Mahavir thought that in order to cast off Karma, he should go to a place where man was man's enemy, where nobody knew what a monk was and where he had no friends and acquaintances. He wanted to put the religion of ahimsa (non-violence), the religion of love, to test. So, he went to the Anarya region named Radha where it was difficult even to survive. Here people were unkind and cruel. The bruised his body in a hundred ways. Wild dogs tore at his flesh. At that time one of his disciples said, "Shell we not keep with us a stick at least to keep them off?"

"In that case our vow of Ahimsa will be broken", said Mahavir.

There he was tormented almost to death but Mahavir did not deviate from his path at all.

It is said in the Acharanga Sutra:

सूरो संग्राम-सीसेवा, संवुडे तत्थ से महावीरे । पडिसेवमाणे करूसाई अचले भगवं रीइत्था ।

(As the body of an armoured warrior remains unwounded in war, so Bhagwan Mahavir showed great fortitude even in the midst of torments.)

In the twelfth year of his initiation, Bhagwan stood in meditation under a tree on the outskirts of the town Chhammani. An incident similar to that which had happened on the first day of his initiation happened again. Leaving his bullocks to the care of Mahavir, a cowherd left for some work. Bhagwan Mahavir who was in meditation did not say anything. Taking his silence for consent, the cowherd went away. The grazing bullocks disappeared into a thicket nearby. The cowherd returned and not finding his bullocks there, asked, "O, Monk! Where are my bullocks?" But he got no reply. He asked a second time. But Mahavir was in meditation. How would he give an answer? The cowherd's anger knew no bounds. "I have been asking so often, and you do not answer, nor do you show any other sign to reassure me about my bullocks. Are those your ears of little earthen bowls? Do you have oil poured into your ears? Those ears have done you no good, it seems. Let me fill them up." The cowherd said, and brought two straight long thorns.

The stupid cowherd pushed the nail-like thorns into the ears of the great yogi. Lest someone should pull out the thorns, he cut off their outer ends. Even then Mahavir did not stir, and nor did he give any other sign.

Then Mahavir went to the town, Madhyama. He went for alms to a Bania named Siddhartha. An expert physician named Kharaka had come to Siddhartha's place. He found the small wooden sticks pushed into Mahavir's ears and with great effort he pulled them out.

Everyone now began to slander the cowherd, who had proved to be such a cruel termentor, Bhagwan said, "This is no fault of the cowherd. I am suffering the consequence of what I have done. In my eighteenth Bhava (birth) I was a king named Triprushtha Vasudeva and it was I who had ordered moltan lead to be poured into the ears of the servant who made the beds. This is the fruit of that sin. Everyone must bear the fruit of his Karma, even he may be a mundane soul or a monk."

It was a cowherd who caused the first torment to

Bhagwan in Karmargrama and again it was a cowherd who caused the last torment. During the period of his austerity, he suffered a number of torments but in suffering them he always maintained his equanimity. He never had feelings of anger or aversion towards anyone, even if the man was hostile or had turned tormentor for no reason. His heart was brimming over with love for all: gods, devils, humans and beasts, even when they caused terrible torments to him. Exercising complete restraint on himself, on his mind, speech and body, Bhagwan suffered all this with complete equanimity and constantly pursued the path of self-realization. In torrential rain, in bitter cold, or in a raging storm, the unflickering lamp of his austerity constantly shone bright. Bhagwan had preached ahimsa (non-violence), but mankind was found to be slipping back into himsa (violence). The power mongers can never abandon their love for war. The victor in such wars plundered people's gold and silver and sold young men and women in the bazaar. The city of Kaushambi had recently won such a victory. Bhagwan daily went on his round, begging for alms in that city. He went from house to house but returned not accepting food from any house. In this way six months passed by. For as long a period as six months he did not accept even a grain of food. The people of Kaushambi thought that Mahavir was like a fish dying of thirst in an ocean full of water.

Everyone in the kingdom; the king, the minister, the merchant, the monk began to weigh his own Karma. Everyone began to think "What is an evil deed? What is a good deed? What is justice? What is injustice?"

One day the news came that Bhagwan accepted boiled unsplit black beans from Chandanbala who was a slave in the household of the merchant Dhanavaha. On hearing this people started streaming to the place of the merchant Dhanavaha. But aster some time they were surprised to find that the woman whom they had mistaken for a slave woman was actually the daughter of the king of Champanagar. Her mother was the sister of the king of Kaushambi. She was now a prisoner taken in the war between Champa and Kaushambi. Seeing this, people exclaimed, "How terrible is war, in which man kills his own kinsfolk."

Mahavir showed to the world the strength of the soul and of the body. Out of his austerity period of twelve and a half years, for 349 days he took only one meal a day. On all the rest of the days, he fasted without taking even water. During this period of severe austerity he performed one penitential exercises of six months. One penitential exercises of six months less five days. Nine penitential exercises of four months. Two penitential exercises of three

months, two penitential exercises of two and a half months, six penitential exercises of two months, two penitential exercises of one and a half months, twelve penitential exercises of one month each and seventytwo penitential exercises of a fortnight. For 4166 days out of 4515 days of his life of austerity, he performed penitence even without water. He journeyed thousands of miles on foot without a garment on his body, or an umbrella over his head, or shoes on his feet. Thus he proved that man's soul has tremendous strength. If your are to weigh the strength – of the whole world on one side, and the soul's strength on the other, the soul's strength excels. If a man treads the path of ahimsa and truth, he becomes Paramatma. Paramatma is none other than the soul itself. It is the soul that becomes Paramatma.

After twelve and a half years of severs austerity and unprecedented penance, Mahavir sat in meditation in a ricefield on the bank of the river Rajuvalika. It was the tenth day of bright half of the month of Vaishakha. It was the fourth quarter (3 hours' period) of the day. He was performing a two-day fast. And on this day, under a shala (teak) tree he was sitting in godohasana (cow-milking) posture (knees up and head lowered). At that time he attained Kevaljnana (omniscience). The lamp of infinite knowledge now shone bright. For a while the whole

samsara was lit up in unprecedented light. The directions became calm and purified. With a loud beating of drums, gods descended to the earth to celebrate Bhagwan's attainment of kaivalya (omniscience). Bhagwan found the path to true happiness. He became free from all confusions of samsara and all complexes of the world. All the three world: hell, earth and heaven, and all the three aspects of time, of the present, the past and the future, made their abode in Mahavir's heart. After his attainment omniscience, he came to be known as Arhata, Jaina, Veetraga.

A rich Brahmin named Somil arranged for a great yagna (Sacrificial rite) in the middle region of Pavapuri. Famous ritualistic scholars from all over India came to participate in it. Among them were scholars well-versed in fourteen vidyas, scholars such as Indrabhooti, Agnibhooti and Vayubhooti. Each one of them had 500 disciples. Two scholars named Vyakta and Sudharma had come from Kollaka. The scholars named Mandika and Mauryaputra had come with 350 disciples each from Maurya district. Four other scholars named Akampita, Achalabhrata, Metarya and Prabhasa were present in that assembly. These eleven scholars were very eminent among the scholars in India but they were full of feelings of suspicion and ignorance and were groping in the dark. At that time

Bhagwan Mahavir came to Pavapuri. Gods constructed a Samavasarana (the lecture-hall) for the occasion. Gods, devils, human beings and even beings of lower order like the animals – all went to listen to his sermon. At that time these scholars began to discuss the scriptures with Mahavir. But omniscient Bhagwan having known their doubts in advance stated them in their own words and resolved them. Consequently, all the eleven scholars took initiation and became Bhagwan Mahavir's ganadharas (leading disciples propagating his teachings). Then they went on a journey to Magadha, Mithila, Koshala and Kalinga. Thousands of men and women became their disciples. Great learned Brahmins such as Indrabhooti Gautama and Sudharma, Kshatriyas such as Udavi and Maghakumar, Vaishyas such as Dhanna and Shalibhadra, Shoodras such as Metaraja and Harikeshi became Mahavir's ascetic disciples.

His followers came from all walks of life, from among kings and princes to ordinary persons. In all 14000 monks and 36000 nuns were initiated at Lord Mahavir's hand. A very large number of laymen and lay- women were his disciples.

Lord Mahavir founded a *sangha* or congregation of all these. Such an organization is called a *tirtha*. So he came to be called Tirthankar. There has been no Tirthankar after him. Mahavir had completely

conquered the pulls of attachment and aversion, and so he is also known as Jina. The followers of Jina are Jainas.

Let us examine Lord Mahavir's concept of a nirgrantha monk, (a monk free from all ties) of his Shasana (dispensation). This monk must have a free mind replete with noble thoughts. He must be constantly observing the vow of ahimsa. He should not experience any of the complexes of samsara, complexes of mind, having their source in personal relationship or in ideas of the egoistical self. He should not idle away a single moment. For food, clothing and shelter, man feels himself obliged towards a number of people in the Samsara. A nirgrantha monk is free from this dependence. As he always journeys on foot, he does not need a chariot, a cart or a horse. As he does not wear shoes on his feet, he has not to search for a shoe-maker. As he himself tears his hair, he does not need a hairdresser. His life is independent and free. He considers the difficult path to be a comforting one. The monk has only one aim before him. Explaining this aim Bhagwan Mahavir says: "How many obstacles an elephant leading an army in a battle suffers! How many wounds he suffers! Still he goes on. In the same way the monk progresses. The elephant does not care about being bound, cut to pieces or killed. His mind is fixed on the aim. Similarly the monk does not care about anything but proceeds on and on in the life of austerity."

Bhagwan Mahavir's style of sermonizing was jnata style. It was a simple but poignant style explaining his point of view allegorically.

Once during his monsoon sojourn in Rajgraha he told this story :

People often keep animals to provide for their days of fasting. Take the example of the lamb who is pampered and fed so well by the master that he becomes fat as a pig. It believes that it is extremely happy. It eats, drinks and makes merry, while other lambs wander in search of food and die of hunger.

Meanwhile a guest comes to its master's house. Its master takes the healthy and stout lamb and kills it. He cuts it into pieces and makes a tasty dish. The lamb now feels sorry the guest ever came."

Bhagwan Mahavir tells us this story to make us meditate on the true nature of life. The guest is none other than old age which visits everyone. The knife is the knief of death which kills everyone.

But it is the duty of man to wake up in time before old age and finally death overtakes him.

Mahavir gave his sermon in Ardhamagadhi, the language of the laity or the lay-man. His last monsoon

sojourn was in Pavapuri. A number of kings had assembled there at the time. It was now the seventy second year of Mahavir's life. On hearing the news of Bhagwan Mahavir's nirvan every house in Pavapuri was steeped in sorrow. After a silence of twelve long years the saviour had spoken. Not after two or five hundred years, not even after one or two hundred years, not after seventy-five years, but only after seventy two years Lord snapped the bond that had stood in the way of his complete liberation. However sweet the moonlight may be, this cannot change the fact of its being an aspect of the black night.

Worshippers now thronging around Lord Mahavir. Rishis were blowing conch-sheels. Indra, the chief among gods, was busy making preparation for the nirvana celebration. But the hearts of gods and of human beings were full of grief. For they knew that Lord Mahavir's divine self would now no longer be visible and his pious word would no longer be heard. The great god Indra also wished that Bhagwan should put off his nirvana.

The great god Indra said to Bhagwan, "This constellation suggests an inauspicious fate. Would you please not put off your nirvana for a while? This is very easy for you who are omniscient and omnipotent."

Mahavir realized Indra's illusion. He said, "Indra, your love for my physical self makes you speak so.

All things, the cause of my birth, the function of my body and the aim of my life have ceased to be. Let alone a moment of my life, even a fraction of a moment is burdensome."

Some people thought that whatever Bhagwan might say, he would not accept nirvana so soon. Maharshi Gautama, the prime disciple of Mahavir, had gone elsewhere to deliver a sermon. They thought that Bhagwan would not pass away when his prime disciple was away. But breaking the subtle bond of the body, Lord Mahavir attained nirvana.

On hearing the news of Bhagwan's nirvana, the enlightened Gautama burst into tears. His lamentation was so touching that even the hardest of hearts would melt. It is easy to console an ignorant person. Here was the lamentation of the highly enlightened one. Even Indra did not know how to pacify Gautama.

Meanwhile the sadness on the face of the enlightened Gautama was changed into delight. Joy spread where there was sorrow. Indra could not understand this change. The enlightened Gautama said, "Oh! Bhagwan's nirvana has taught me more than what his life did. He often advised me to be independent, to rise above all bonds of dependence. He advise me to go to the inner world where there is no teacher and no disciple. But then I had great

attachemnt for Bhagwan's physical self. My worship was physical rather than spiritual. That is why he kept me away at the time of nirvana with a view to teaching me that austerity for surpasses all attachment or narrow love."

Thus for every soul Bhagwan Mahavir brought the message of eternal happiness. This is what he did more than 2589 years ago. But the message still purifies the world.

Let us realize the importance of the revolution that he effected before we move on to a consideration of the message of Bhagwan Mahavir. He made scriptures accessible to the masses. In those days religion was discussed only in Sanskrit, the language of gods. The masses could not understand it and this was considered to be the mark of its greatness. Knowledge which could be understood by the laymen was considered to be ordinary and vidya which could not be understood was considered to be great. This mistaken idea prevailed everywhere. It was considered to be bad thing to discuss religion.

Mahavir's preachings were understood by all and opened for all the door to the salvation of the soul.

In order to give freedom to women Lord Mahavir made two great reforms; he recognized brahmacharya (celebacy) as a vow and he said that if a woman gets initiated as a nun, she can became free from all bondage. He discarded the importance of gender and castes and established the importance of good conduct. कम्मुणा ढांभणो होइ, कम्मुणा होइ खत्तिओ । यहसो कम्मुणा होइ, सुद्दो होइ कम्मुणा।।

(One is born a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya or a Shoodra according to one's karma.) Thus he led stoodras out of the darkness of slavery and lifted them up from beastliness to godliness. He said that a man or woman of any caste could practise religion. In fact he said that a monk should not be at all conceited regarding his appearance, caste, knowledge, penance, and celibacy. This was Bhagwan Mahavir's great social revolution. He changed the whole situation. This true insight given from the depth of his soul made a permanent impact on the society. Bhagwan Mahavir fearlessly and firmly expressed his thoughts and liberated people from the bonds of a certain class of people, from the practice of violence and mental slavery. He led the society out of the bonds of the caste system. He completely revolutionised the concept of the high and the low. He revolted against the convention which laid down that woman should be under her father's protection in childhood, under her husband's protection in youth and under her son's protection in old age. Now onwards, the distinctions of caste or gender shall not obstruct the development of the soul. Under the aspect of the soul, all are equal.

Brahmin or Shoodra, man or woman, young or old — whoever makes efforts can attain liberation. It was in order to justify this that he made Chandanbala his first nun. He helped man overcome the dependence on fate and on the grace of God. He preached that man should make efforts and said, "However great a god may be and however good his heaven may be, if man shows his humanity even a god bows at his feet. That is why man should insist on truth and love. It is by his deeds, his virtues and his efforts that man can be great. For this, birth, family and caste are of little use."

Mahavir saw that celibacy is something greater than the vow of possessionlessness. Celibacy is not only an external function of accepting or abandoning external objects; it is essentially spiritual restraint. Similarly, penitence is the only way of severing the bonds of karma. Thus he established the overwhelming importance of penance in life. Thus Bhagwan liberated man from mental slavery. He valued man's own effort above fate. He expounded that active efforts are preferable to dry erudition. Fighting against age-old customs and blind faith, Mahavir proved the importance of freedom of thought. He fearlessly accepted what he thought to be true.

Like the monk, the householder has his own duties to perform. He said, "It is a false belief that the monk

alone should practise religion and the householder can enjoy himself. Like the monk, the householder should practise religion. While the monk should thoroughly and strictly observe vows, the householder should observe vows as far as he can. Thus there are five great vows for the monk and five small vows and seven *shikshavratas* (vows of penitence) for the householder. If a person observes these vows he would be triumphant. Don't kill beasts for sacrificial rites. Don't conceal scriptures. Don't hate the enemy."

Bhagwan Mahavir showed that the differences of creeds and sects are subsidiary and every creed has relative truth. He preached that man should never cause, harm to anyone. He gave the doctrine of anekantavada to promote tolerance in thought. He taught syadvada to promote harmless speech. He showed the importance of possessionlessness in society.

He said,

"घम्मो मंगलमुक्किट्ठं, अहिंसा संजमो तवो ।
देवा वि तं नमंसंति जस्स घम्मे सया मणो।।"

(Religion is superemely auspicious. Non-violence, self-control and austerity are its characteristics. Even gods bow down to him who always rejoices in religion.)

Bhagwan prescribed some rules for attaining the salvation of the soul. These rules are vows. There are five great vows.

The first great vows is *ahimsa* (non-violence). Bhagwan Mahavir said, "If you kill someone, it is yourself to kill. If you dominate someone, it is yourself you dominate. If you torment someone, it is yourself you torment. If you harm someone, it is yourself you harm." A wise man knows this and so he does not kill, dominate, or torment anyone. *Ahimsa* is the basis of the Jain Religion. Other religions have adopted *ahimsa* but they have not given it the importance that the jain religion has given. Other religions have not examined *ahimsa* so subtly as the jain religion has done.

The concept of *ahimsa* has emerged from logical thinking and experience. The concept of *ahimsa* has emerged from the doctrine of the equality of all souls. Everyone wants to live; nobody likes to die. Everyone wants happiness; nobody wants unhappiness. The very thought of doing harm produces Karma. So, according to Jain philosophy, himsa and ahimsa depend upon the doer's thoughts. Where there is pramada (neglectful idleness or sloth) there is always himsa. Untruthful speech and deeds are himsa. To give someone a shock or to be corrupt is also *himsa*. It is from *ahimsa* that truth, non-stealing, celibacy and possessionlessness emerge. Himsa enters first in thought, then in speech and then in deeds. That is why they say that war is born in the hearts of men. The quest for *ahimsa* is echoed in *anekantavada*.

In Jain philosophy ahimsa is said to be the supreme religion and *himsa* is considered to be the source of all evil and of all miseries. Mahavir's ahimsa is not limited to humankind, in extends to all living beings. It believes in unity of life and regards all living beings to be equal. He who can be cruel to animals can be cruel to human beings. Cruelty is not only an aspect of external behaviour but it is also an inner evil tendency. He who is cruel at heart will behave cruelly with animals as well as human beings. He who is compassionate at heart, will behave compassionately with all. Moreover, the Jain religion believes in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The soul is in one yoni (existence) today; it may be in another yoni tomorrow. It may be a fly today and a man tomorrow. This being so, man has no right to harm non-human living beings even. One should behave sympathetically with all-friends as well as enemies. Such is the importance of *ahimsa* in Jain philosophy.

> तुंगं न मंदराओ, आगासाओ किसालयं नत्थि । जह तह जयंमि जाणस्, घम्ममहिंसासमं नत्थि।।

(Nothing is higher than the Meru Mountain; nothing is vaster than the sky. Similarly, there is no religion as good as *ahimsa*.)

Another great vow is truth. I will not practise untruth, I will not make someone practise untruth and I will not help someone practising untruth. It is

said in Prashnavyakarana that truth is God. It is said in *Acharanga Sutra* that the wise person who obeys truth conquers death. The human heart experiences truth. Mahavir's life was governed by experience which was the fruit of his own austerity. That is why he says if we ought to believe in his word, it is not because he is omniscient; every soul can attain to that status if it practises true austerity- This is his preaching. Bhagwan Mahavir himself could attain to the status of Tirthankar only after his austerity of the previous 27 bhavas (modes of existence) followed by his penance of twelve and a half years. So, he preached we should be always watchful and abstain from untruth. He who tells a lie is never trusted. You should be careful to see that you do not speak untruth. One should speak things which are free from shortenings, and speak only when necessary. Harsh language should be avoided. Regarding a *nirgrantha* (monk), he said, "The nirgrantha will speak thoughtfully because if he speak unthoughfully, untruth may be spoken. He will abandon anger, for in anger he may speak a lie. He will abandon greed, for untruth may be spoken out of greed. He will abandon fear, for untruth may be spoken out of fear. He will abandon joking and mocking, for untruth may be spoken for fun."

Think of him who is so much concerned about truth. Neither can fire burn him nor can water drown

him who speaks the truth. Jain philosophy has thought comprehensively about truth. To insist that what you speak is the only truth is a sort mental himsa. The generous view that there can be a grain of truth in what the other persons say, is anekantadrishti, for truth is relative. As you have full faith in what is truth from your viewpoint, so the other person has faith in what is truth from his point-of-view. Thus anekantavada equally tolerates and coordinates all viewpoints of life, in a spirit of cooperation. This is the true method involving ceaseless endeavour to search out truth. To regard everything from a relative point-of-view and to see an element of truth in everything—this is anekantavada. Not 'mine is truth' but 'truth is mine' should be our motto.

Bhagwan Mahavir's life is full of incidents showing that 'truth is mine'. It was he who sent his chief disciple, the enlightened Gautama, to Shravaka Ananda to ask for his pardon. In those days numerous disputes had arisen. In order to prove his contention to be true, everyone was trying to refute the contentions of others. Bhagwan Mahavir taught us to support rather than refute the views of others.

He said, "Only if you make your unilateral view multilateral, the veil covering your vision will be removed and you will have a clear and unmistakable view of pure truth." Thus Bhagwan Mahavir tried to quench the fire of disputes. For this he gave an illustration how the seven blind men look at the elephant. This anekantavada will make man think from the other man's viewpoint and consequently half of the miseries of the world will disappear. Anekantavada leads us to the path of co-ordination and of annihilation of opposition.

The third great vow is the vow of non-stealing. Man should abandon all kinds of stealing. We should not take anything that is not freely given to us. Nor should we make anyone take what is not given to him. Nor should we help anyone take what is not given to him. He said that not even the teeth-scraping straw should be taken by a monk without its owner's permission. Nor does he make someone take it, nor give his consert to it, let alone taking big things. A monk should take care to see that he takes only innocent things acceptable to him. This means that he should be aware of the acceptability or non-acceptibility of a thing before taking it.

The fourth great vow is that of celibacy. Bhagwan Mahavir added this fifth great vow to the four great vows of Parshvanath and established its distinct importance. He said that all the physical and mental miseries of the world are caused by thirst for sensual pleasures, for all sensual pleasures are ultimately

painful. A river may be flowing but it is always contained betweens its two banks. Similarly, the stream of life needs restraint. If this restraint is accepted willingly, the monk will remain happy and joyful. So, Bhagwan Mahavir said, "You should control yourself. You should restrain your soul. He who lives in lust, greed and sensual pleasures ultimately suffers miseries for a long time. Not even the enemy that cuts your throat does that much harm to you as your soul engaged in evil conduct does to you. So, natural restraint gladly accepted, is the source of happiness, peace and transquillity."

The fifth great vow is of possessionlessness. Possession is the source of evil. Possession is not only the acquisition or accumulation of things but also the temptation and the attachment to things. This possession is the source of all the five evils viz. himsa, untruthfulness, stealing, sensual pleasure and attachment. Today we see that the chief cause of the boundless miseries of the present world in man's uncontrolled tendency to possess. Man believes that possession brings happiness. But in fact possession is the cause of the miseries and bondage. Possession makes a man a slave of external things. As the bee sucks honey from the flower without destroying it, so the welfareseeking man does the last possible harm to another in his worldly life. Thus expounding the

