

RAJARSHI PRASANNACHANDRA

(राजर्षि प्रसन्नचंद्र)

A Story

Once when *Bhagawān Mahāwīr* (see end of story), together with his many disciples, was giving his discourses in a garden outside the city of *Rājagrihī*, among his disciples was *Prasannachandra*, who was once upon a time a king, but now was adorned by the jewel of perfect non-attachment (वैराग्य). The *Rājarshi* (i.e. king-asectic) was standing at one end of the garden in deep *Dhyāna* (meditation), which was carried-out while performing severe penance (तप - *Tapa*): He was standing on one foot, his two hands were held up, and his eyes were fixed on the sun!

The Lord of the kingdom of *Magadha* - of which *Rājagrihī* was the capital - *Mahārājā Shrenika*, came to know of the arrival of the *Bhagawān*, and so with his full retinue and pomp, he set forth towards the garden for the holy *Darshana* (i.e. to see the holy presence).

There were two soldiers walking at the helm of the royal procession, and their eyes fell on the *Rājarshi*. One of them said: "Blessed is this *muni* (saint)! Who can emulate him in such severe penance?" When the other heard him, he said: "My friend! What is so great about this!? He left his helpless baby-son on the throne, to do such penances; and gave all the powers of the state to his ministers; and now the ministers are plotting to annihilate the child-king. They will surely kill him and capture for themselves the kingdom of *Potanpur*, whose king was this *Prasannachandra*. Thus there will be a tragic end to his reign! So, I abhor and detest from the bottom of my heart this so called great asectic, who has not even cared for his own son! Let there be no son in this whole world, who gets a father like him!"

After the soldiers had passed, the *Mahārājā* also came to the same spot. When he saw the *Rājarshi* doing this difficult penance, he was filled with veneration and he bowed down to him. Then, he went to *Bhagawān Mahāwīr* and after bowing down to him with the utmost respect in his heart, he started listening to his holy preachings.

When the opportunity came he asked : “O Lord! How exalted is the penance of *Rājarshi Prasannachandra*! If he had passed away at the moment when I was doing my salutations to him, what would have been his next birth?”

The Lord of all the great saints (भ्रमण), *Bhagawān Mahāwīr* replied : “He would be born in the seventh hell (i.e. the worst possible birth)!”

Hearing this answer, *Mahārājā Shreṇika* was very much surprised (because he thought such severe *Tapa* and *Dhyāna* would have led to a high birth); and he asked again : “O Lord! If he were to pass away now, then what would be his next birth?”

The reply was : “In the heaven called *Sarwārtha Siddha Wimān* he would be born as a *Deva* (deity).”

The king's surprise grew considerably and he exclaimed : “Why so !?”

After a very shortwhile, one could hear the beating of the heavenly drums (*Dundubhi* – दुन्दुभि), and proclamations of Victory ! Victory! (जयनाद) in the air. When the king of *Magadha* heard this he again asked : “O Lord! what is the meaning of these sounds of drums and victory ?”

The *Bhagawān Mahāwīr* answered : “The *Rājarshi* has now achieved Omniscience (केवलज्ञान – *Kewalgnāna*), and hence has put an end to all further cycles of births and deaths. It is because of this that the *Devas* are beating the heavenly drums and gloriously proclaiming his Victory !”

Being greatly puzzled, the *Mahārājā* exclaimed : “O Sire! All these happenings are fantastic and beyond my comprehension; be gracious and kind, O Lord, and please explain to me the mystery of it all.”

Then the compassionate *Bhagawān* said : “O king, when you were coming towards me, your soldiers were talking amongst themselves; and this talk fell on the ears of *Rājarshi Prasannachandra*; and there was a break in his *Dhyāna*. He started thinking : “ Oh ! the very men on whom I put all my trust, have now become ungrateful and turned traitorous. So much so, that they are prepared to even kill my infant-child, and usurp the kingdom. Oh ! if I were only there, I would have done away with these treacherous ministers !” So thinking, there was profuse anger in his mind and this went on gathering strength. So he forgot the life-long vow (व्रत - *Wrat*) of *Sāmāyika* (सामायिक/समता) that he had taken at the time of his initiation into the life of an ascetic. He visualized the ministers all arrayed in front of him, and he further saw himself giving battle to them. He fought a most gruesome battle.....all in his own mind.....and used a numerous weapons in the process ! So doing, he found he had no more weapons left and he thought : “ Upon my head is the iron helmet; let me throw it and so kill the enemy !” In such a state of profound anger, he put his hand on his head — and this was the moment, *Shrenika*, when you did your salutations to the *Rājarshi* ; and had he passed away then, he would have gone to the seventh hell.”

“ As soon as his hand touched his head, he remembered that his head was hairless (for all *Sādhus*, at the time of initiation have their hair completely removed), and at once, his anger subsided. Not only that, but he started thinking. “ Oh ! I have taken a life-long vow of *Sāmāyika* and so have renounced doing any violence whatever through either the mind, or the speech or the body. Oh ! What have I done ! Oh Lord ! I have broken my *Dharma Dhyāna* (i.e. the holy *Dhyāna*) and instead was envell-opped in the clutches of *Rāudra Dhyāna* (the most impure of

all *Dhyānas*)! I have to be full of *Maitrī* (मैत्री – sympathy and friendliness) to all creatures, and in such a state where is room for *rāga* (राग – attachment) towards my son, and *dvesha* (द्वेष – aversion) for my ministers! Oh! Oh! I have done a great wrong! I am disgusted by it, and I deprecate it with all my heart! And I shall, and I am removing from my *Ātmā* such dastardly thoughts!” So, O king, when he was at this point of such a chain of thoughts, you came and asked me your second question and had he passed away at that moment, he would be born as a *Deva* in the heaven known as *Sarwārtha Siddha Wimān*.”

“Moreover, the purity of this chain of thoughts continued to increase. The successive links in this chain led to holier and holier thoughts.....till very shortly they reached their most intense stage! Hence all the four *Ghati Karmas* (घाती कर्म – namely *Gnānāwarāṇīya* – ज्ञानावरणीय, *Darshanāwarāṇīya* – दर्शनावरणीय, *Mohaniya* – मोहनीय and *Antarāya* – अन्तराय. These four are the harmful covering (आवरण) upon the pure *Ātmā* and hence are called *Ghātī*.) were destroyed, and so he has come to the condition of *Kewalgnāna* whereby he can see all the substances of the whole universe exactly as they have been, as they are and as they shall be!”

“So, O king, this shows that : “मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः – The State of one’s mind (मनवृत्ति/भाव) is the prime cause of the formation and the destruction of *Karmas*.”* So be always full of holy thoughts. Those who try to cultivate the holy thoughts shall, without fail, reach the beautytude that is *Moksha* (मोक्ष).”

*No doubt the readers will find the same echo in Shakespeare : “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” [Hemlet II-2]

MORAL :

The importance of *Bhāwa* (भाव = मनःपरिणाम) in Spirituality is very well illustrated by this story. The importance is paramount at the moment of Death: this being the reason behind the recitation of the scriptures to the dying – a practice that one finds prevalent in all religions.

Acknowledgement & Source :

The story is given in section (पर्व) ten of *Shri Hemchandracharya's* (कलिकाल सर्वज्ञ श्री हेमचंद्राचार्य) *Trishisti – shalaka – purusha – charitra* (त्रिशिष्टिशलाकापुरुषचरित्र); and the translation was gone through by *Pujya Muni Shri Tatvanandavijayji*, for which we are thankful to him.

Concept of the Tīrthankara (तीर्थंकर).

The *Jain* tradition believes that there have been and there shall be infinite (अनन्त) cycles of time (कालचक्र) on this planet. Each cycle has two parts: one descending (अवसर्पिणि), and the other ascending (उत्सर्पिणि). These are so called, because there is, during its course, a continuous deterioration/amelioration in all substances – including the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of human life; as well as the munificence and bounty of the natural wealth of this planet.

Each such half-cycle is divided into six parts called *ārā* (आरा), which are of varying time lengths. The length of each cycle is far greater than what can be counted by the scale of “numbers of years” (असंख्यात).

It is during the fourth *ārā* of every descending half – cycle and the third *ārā* of every ascending half – cycle that twenty-four *Tīrthankaras* reach Omniscience (केवलज्ञान), and then, they re-establish the Relegion (तीर्थ).

Bhagwān Mahāvīr is, for the *Jains*, the twenty-fourth and hence the last, *Tīrthankara* of the latest descending half-cycle, whose fourth *ārā* ended some 2500 years ago. He was, off course, preceded by, and shall be followed by an infinite such *Tīrthankaras*, during the course of the infinite time – cycles (कालचक्र).