

STORIES FROM JAINISM  
DR. KUMARPAL DESAI  
Third Edition  
July, 1998

PRINTED BY :

PUBLISHED BY :

AVAILABLE FROM

## STORIES FROM JAINISM

---

OUR SPECIAL THANKS FOR THIS BOOK

SHRI SHRENIKBHAI KASTURBHAI

SHRI SHVETAMBER MOORTIPOOJAK

JAIN BOARDING AHMEDABAD

SHRI GOKULDAS KAPADIA

SHRI VINOD KAPASHI - LONDON

## ROHINI

During the time of Lord Mahavir, there was a rich merchant called Dhanna who lived in a big town. Dhanna once wondered what would happen to his wealth after he died. Would his sons and daughters-in-law look after it or spend it all ? He thought of testing the wisdom and ability of his daughter-in-law. He wanted to know who was the wisest and the most prudent amongst them, because he wanted to appoint one of these women to be in charge of the household and hand over the keys of the safe.

Dhanna one day invited his four sons and their wives. They all had a grand dinner together. After the dinner Dhanna brought some uncooked rice and gave five grains of rice to each of the women.

He said to them : could you look after these grains of rice and when I ask you for them give them back ?

All four women took five grains of rice each.

The Oldest one thought : we have got whole stores full of rice. I would rather throw these grains away and when the merchant asks me to give them back, I will take five grains from the store and give them to him. Thus she threw away all five grains.

The second woman also thought it was stupid to keep these grains. She just ate them all and thought that she would give back lots of rice grains from the stores when the merchant, Dhanna, asked for them.

The third woman guessed there must be some reason why he gave these grains of rice. “I had better look after them,” she thought and so she put the grains in a jewellery box and put the box in a safe place.

The fourth woman who was the youngest and whose name was Rohini, knew what to do with these grains. She had these grains planted on a small plot of land. During the monsoon season the rice started growing and after several months of care, a crop of rice grew.

The next year Rohini took more of these fresh rice-grains and planted them on a bigger plot of land. Thus she grew more rice. In this way, after five years, she had a small field full with a crop of rice.

After five years, Dhanna came back and asked for his rice back. The oldest woman hurriedly went to the store, took five grains of rice and gave them to the merchant. The second woman did the same thing. The third woman came with her jewel-box and said, “I have looked after these grains and here they are”–

she gave these grains back to the merchant.

Finally Dhanna asked Rohini, “What about you, Rohini, where are the grains I gave you ?”

Rohini said, “I would like to give them back but you will have to arrange for the transport, because those five grains were planted and now after five good years we have a whole store full of rice.”

The merchant Dhanna was very happy on hearing this. He knew that Rohini was the cleverest and the wisest. He gave all the keys of the safe to Rohini.

(When Lord Mahavir told this story to his disciples, he explained that we too should make good use of our life. We should not waste time and therefore throw away our life which is so valuable, but instead we should do good deeds and charitable work. The five grains in the story symbolize the five vows in the Jain religion. These five vows are : non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-acquisition.)

## WIN ONE, WIN ALL

One day a monk asked Gautam Swami :

“O Swami ! How can you keep calm amongst your enemies, how can you conquer them ?”

Gautam Swami said, “First I win one enemy, then I conquer four. After that I conquer ten enemies, the rest of the enemies just disappear on seeing this.”

The monk wanted to know who these enemies were. Gautam Swami said, “The most terrible enemy is our own ego. If you win that then you will win four more, they are – anger, pride, illusion and greed. After that you will be able to win over all the good and bad things associated with the five senses, that is the temptations related to good or bad hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching. When these ten are conquered the other enemies cannot stay and are forced to disappear.”

The monk asked a final question : “There is a poisonous plant in one’s own heart. It grows and also bears fruit. How can you destroy this plant ?”

“Well, you have got to root it out so it won’t bear fruit. This plant is called DESIRE. Desire for material comfort and desire for worldly pleasures.”

## FORGIVENESS

It was a hot summer's day. The chief disciple of Lord Mahavir, Gautam Swami, was returning to his resting place after his daily round collecting alms. The afternoon sun was very hot and Gautam was walking bare-footed as all Jain monks do.

On his way back Gautam heard the news that one of Lord Mahavir's devotees, Anand, was fasting unto death. Anand was performing the penance as prescribed by his religion. Anand was a rich merchant and a farmer and he had given up worldly pleasures in pursuit of eternal peace. Gautam went to see Anand. Anand bowed his head in respect and asked Gautam Swami,

"Sir, can any householder attain supreme divine knowledge ?"

"Surely, one can achieve this whilst doing household duties."

Anand heard this with joy and said, "Sir, I too have attained that state of divine knowledge. I can now see what is going on in this universe." Anand said this very politely as he was a man of utmost honesty and sincerity.

Gautam Swami was listening carefully. He started thinking deeply and replied, "Anand my dear, it is possible that one can attain the level of divine knowledge, but no one can reach as far as you are saying you have. You are not telling the truth. You must repent for this."

Anand said, "No, sir, I am telling the truth and in the Lord Mahavir's religion should there be any repentance for one who speaks the truth ?"

"No..."

"Then sir, it is you who should repent."

Gautam Swami was stunned by this statement. In his mind he was sure that he was right and Anand was wrong.

Gautam Swami went to Lord Mahavir and repeated the incident to him. He asked Lord Mahavir whether it was possible that Anand could have attained the supreme knowledge which he referred to, and if Anand was wrong why he should not observe the ritual of repentance.

Lord Mahavir, a propogator of truth, told him,

"Gautam; it is you who should apologise and repent because Anand is telling you the truth."

Gautam Swami was shaken by this decision :

“My Lord is asking me to go to a mere householder and apologise ! I shall keep quiet and forget about the whole incident, after all it is I and not Anand who is the true scholar and the master of scriptures.” Gautam Swami then thought again : what is the use of my scholarly knowledge if I can not conquer my own ego ? It is wrong to take so much pride in my own knowledge, I must go to Anand and apologise.

Gautam Swami did not stop for a moment, he went straight back to Anand and apologised : “Anand, you are right, please forgive me for my suspicions about you.”

Anand was moved by the humility and courtesy of this learned man. His eyes were full of tears.... “Oh my Lord, oh Gautam Swami ! It is you who is great, I too ask for your forgiveness.”

## **The Artist and his portrait**

Once there was an artist. He used to paint beautifully. He was so good that he could paint a life-like portrait.

Once he thought of painting a portrait of a man who looked like God, his eyes should reflect heavenly brightness, love, compassion and purity.

The painter started looking for such a man, whose eyes would reflect the same divinity as God's. He searched everywhere. He saw many saints and noble men. He went to palaces and to huts. He met lots of people who would talk about religion but their life was far from religious. Then, once he went into the forest and saw a farmer working on his farm.

The farmer was ploughing his field whilst singing happily. The artist looked into the farmer's eyes and saw exactly what he was looking for in this man. He drew a portrait of this farmer.

Years passed by and the artist now thought of painting another portrait. This time, he wanted to draw the face of a devil with cruel-looking eyes and a hard face.

He set out once more looking for a face that reflected wickedness. He went to many places; finally he went to a prison where he saw a prisoner who was

to be hanged in a few days. This man looked really fierce. His eyes reflected the cruelty of Satan.

The artist painted a portrait of this evil-looking man. The portrait was so life-like that the eyes in the portrait looked really violent and murderous.

The artist went to the prisoner and showed him both the portraits. First he showed him the painting of the prisoner and then the painting of the farmer. The prisoner looked at both of the paintings carefully and then began to laugh.

The painter was amazed to see him laughing and asked, "What is making you laugh so much ?" The prisoner said, "And why not ?"

"Well," the artist said, "This first painting is that of a good man virtuous farmer."

"... That is why I am laughing."

"But why ?"

The prisoner said, "You fool, this first printing is *mine* and the second one is also mine. I *was* that farmer whom you once painted."

The artist was really astonished now. He began to realise that it is possible for one man's eyes to reflect both good and evil. As both God and Satan live in our hearts. The eyes which reflect divinity are capable of reflecting evil too.

## The True Preacher

Once there was a learned Jain monk who was a scholar and a good Orator. He was sitting on a special monk's platform one day, delivering his sermon. Above him there was a beautifully embroidered silk chandarva.

The monk was explaining the importance of non-acquisition. In the audience there was a man called Rupo.

The monk asked the listeners after his speech, "Did you follow what I meant ?" Everyone else said they understood what was explained to them, but Rupo said, "I did not follow sir."

On the second day, the monk explained the same principle of non-acquisition with stories and then asked the question, "Do you now understand ?"

But Rupo replied, "No, sir."

Three days passed, every day Rupo gave the same reply, "No sir, I do not understand."

The monk began to wonder why Rupo could not understand this simple principle. Then, whilst meditating, he realised what was wrong with Rupo or rather what was wrong with himself.

The next morning he came down from the platform and gave his speech without the overhead silky cover, and after his speech the monk asked the same question once more.

“Did you understand Rupo ?”

“Yew sir, now I understand,” replied Rupo.

## TRUE SHELTER

Shravasti was the name of a town and the king's name was Megharath. Once an astrologer came to the king's court. Everyone wanted to know what was written in their stars and what would happen to them in the future.

The first one to ask was the king himself who wanted to know what his fate was.

The astrologer said, “You will die, after seven days from now.” The king started dumbfounded in utter amazement.

“You will be stuck down by lightning,” the astrologer continued. What a terrible forecast ! The whole court looked sad.

Everyone gathered around and made various suggestions to save the king's life. Some suggested that the king should hide himself in a deep bunker where lightning could do no harm. Someone suggested that the king should go to a place where there were no clouds, no lightning and no rains !

The queen started crying, his princes were very sad. The king sat down meditating. He thought about life and death, about the meaning of life and true purpose of life.



Where is the real refuge ? What is a true shelter ? “Surely, religion is the true shelter, I will sit down in a quiet religious place and say prayers for true peace.”

People waited anxiously, seven days passed, clouds gathered in the sky and it became very, very dark. The sky was filled with thunder, and the lightning was so bad that people were really afraid. The king was not afraid, he sat in a lonely place, meditating and praying.

Lightning did strike but it did not strike the king. It struck hundreds of yards away from the king and did not harm him.

The king was safe.

the people of the town rejoiced as  
true shelter is the shelter of religion.

## THE THREE JEWELS

A rich merchant from India went to another country and met the king of the country. The merchant presented jewels and diamonds to the king as a token of goodwill. The king looked at these precious jewels and was very surprised to see such beautiful stones and diamonds. He said, “One day, I will visit your country.”

So the king went to India and met the same merchant again. The merchant started showing him all the jewels and diamonds. The king admired each piece and was amazed to see such a large and beautiful collection.

Meanwhile a man came and said, “Lord Mahavir has arrived in the outskirts of the town and is preaching about the three jewels in our life.”

The merchant, being a very religious person, got up at once and went outside the town where Mahavir Swami was preaching. The visitor king, who was eager to hear of these three precious jewels, accompanied the merchant.

Lord Mahavir was explaining that the real precious jewels that one should try to acquire are not those of diamonds and rubies which are mere stones.



One cannot find happiness in material things. One can only find happiness in the pursuit of these three jewels.

The first jewel is “Right knowledge”. With the aid of right knowledge we can distinguish between good and bad.

The second jewel is “Right Faith”. This jewel helps us to understand and judge better. Right faith inspires us to get the third and last, most precious jewel – which is “Right conduct”. Without this third most important jewel, the other two jewels are worthless. It is only through right conduct and good behaviour that we can achieve spiritual peace.”

The merchant and the king were stirred by this. They realised the true value of these three jewels, which are the only ones worth possessing !

## THE VOW

Once there was a king. He was very religious. He would meditate and say his prayers every day.

One night he stood still whilst meditating (KAUSAGGA). He decided to meditate until the oil lamp in the room went out.

An hour passed. A maid came into the room and saw that the lamp was about to go out, so she poured some oil into the lamp.

Another hour passed. The maid returned. She saw the king standing and meditating. She thought that it would be improper if the lamp went out and there was darkness in the room so she poured more oil into it.

Thus, the king could not finish his meditation because the lamp was still burning and he had decided that he would meditate until the lamp faded out. On the other hand the maid continued to think that it was her humble duty to pour more oil in the lamp to keep the room lighted.

This went on all night.

At sun-rise there was no need for the lamp so the maid did not fill the lamp with oil. The light of the lamp faded out.

The king now finished his meditation. Such was his determination ! Such was his vow !

## THE ANGRY SNAKE

Lord Mahavir used to go from one place to another and one town to another during his monkhood. He usually spent his time in meditation. He fasted frequently for long periods of time. He spread the ideals of non-violence, self control and penance.

Once he wanted to go to another village. There were two roads leading to that village. The longer road a comfortable and easy route. The shorter road was through the dense jungle.

Mahavir decided to take the short-cut. Some cowherds came to him and asked him not to go on that route. They told him that this particular route was dangerous as fierce animals lived there. Moreover there was a deadly snake living in the middle of the jungle. The snake, which was called Chandkaushik, would not allow anyone to cross the path.

Mahavir listened to them carefully but insisted on going on that short route. Mahavir set out to go on his journey. He was never afraid of any creatures. He was neither worried about himself nor did he care for his own comfort.

After a while, he came to an area which everyone was scared of passing. Mahavir stopped and stood

there calmly and began his meditation.

Chandkaushik, the snake came there and saw a man standing on the path. Chandkaushik could not tolerate an invasion of his territory. He was fierce with anger and had a poisonous venom. Even his looks contained venom. He hissed and blew poisonous air on Mahavir. Mahavir Swami did not move at all. He did not even look at this angry snake.

On seeing this, the snake was even angrier. He was blind with rage. He moved forward, hissing and emitting poison. He came to the lord and bit his toe.

Lord Mahavir opened his eyes gracefully. He was not hurt. White coloured blood (milk) started pouring out of his toe. The white being symbolic of his love and compassion. Mahavir Swami looked into the cobra's eyes and said "Understand Chandkaushik, understand. Peace Chandkaushik, peace."

The snake at last got the message. He realised who he was and what he was doing. He calmed down and slowly retreated into his hole.

The miraculous effect of a few words of love and kindness !

## ELACHIKUMAR

Elachikumar was the son of a rich Jain merchant. He was young and ambitious, but he lacked foresight.

Once an acrobat and his family came to the town. They performed amazing acts and tricks. The acrobat's daughter could do tight-rope walking. The father used to play a dholak-drum whilst the daughter did the tight-rope walking. This act was very popular and was the favourite of many people.

Elachikumar went to see the acrobats. He too was interested in tight-rope walking. The young daughter of the acrobat was very beautiful. Elachikumar liked her very much. He went to see her acrobatic acts again and again. He fell in love with her and blinded by her beauty.

Elachikumar went straight to her father and asked for her hand in marriage. The acrobat's father said, "Well, it is not easy. You will have to stay with us. You will have to be like us. You will have to learn our acts and tricks first; then I will think about your marriage with my daughter."

Elachikumar agreed to stay with them and learn all the acts.

Elachikumar thus left his home. His parents were very sad indeed, they urged him not to leave the house. Elachikumar, could not think about anything except that girl. He left home and joined the acrobats.

He began to learn all the acts and became an expert in a short time. He learned tight-rope walking whilst the girl played the drum. Elachikumar went from village to village and town to town showing off his skill as an acrobat.

The girl's father was quite happy about his act but he wanted more money too. So the father put forward one more condition to Elachikumar.... "You will have to please a king with your act in order to get a big prize from him. You will have to earn more money to support all of us. Once you do that, you will be able to marry my daughter."

Elachikumar was determined to do this. They went to a town whose king was interested in acrobatics. They invited the king to come and watch them perform.

The king came with the other prominent men of his court. The act began. Elachikumar climbed up the poles and started walking on the tight-rope. The girl played the dholak as usual.

Elachikumar balanced himself with a long bamboo pole whilst walking. He walked the entire length of the rope without any difficulty. Everyone applauded loudly once he had finished.

Elachikumar came down and bowed to the king, hoping that the king would give him a prize. But instead the king said I have not yet seen your act properly, do it again.

Elachikumar was tired but he had no choice, so he went up again and started his act. The girl played the dholak again.

Actually the king was thinking to himself that if this man fell on the ground and died, then he could take this girl and have her as his queen. The king was also blinded by the beauty of this girl. He asked Elachikumar to go on to the rope again and again. The king hoped that Elachikumar would fall and die.

Elachikumar went up the poles, for the fifth time. By now he had guessed what the king was trying to do. He hated king and also hated himself. It was his love for the girl that made him leave his parents; it was this love made him, a young businessman, an acrobat. Where was he going ? What was he doing ? And the king ? He too is bad, he wants me to die in order to have this girl.

Elachikumar was thinking this whilst trying to balance himself on the rope. He was now very unstable and very tired.

Meanwhile his eyes fell on a house nearby. In that house, there stood a young monk who had come for his food. A young and very beautiful woman of the household was offering him food. The monk only accepted what was necessary for survival. He would not even take specially prepared sweet dishes.

Elachikumar saw that the monk did not even raise his eyes to see the woman who was giving him the food. The monk was obviously not attracted or disturbed by this young and pretty lady. Elachikumar could not help comparing his deed with the monk's.

“Indeed, I have fallen !” he thought, “How low can one sink ? This monk has denied himself all the comforts and luxuries of life. He would not think of marrying or even looking at this young woman.”

Elachikumar attained true knowledge. And he did come down. He came down to the earth of reality.

He later chose to balance a monk and spread the ideals of Jainism.

## THE ELEPHANT AND RABBIT

In a deep and dense jungle, there lived an elephant. He was the leader of all the elephants in the jungle. Frequently fires used to break out because of the hot weather. One day the leader of the elephants had an idea which could save himself and other animals from a big fire. He chose a sizeable area of land, removed all the trees and shrubs from there and cleared the land completely. He thought that when the fire broke out, it would not reach the central point of this flat and barren land and so it was safe.

Now it so happened that a fire did break out in that forest. The leader of the elephants hurriedly came to this cleared land and stood there to save himself from the fire. Other animals also came and stood around him. Soon the whole place was full of all different types of animals.

The intensity of the fire was severe and the whole forest started burning.

There was a little rabbit in the forest. The rabbit tried to save his own life by running around the piece of land. He could see that all the animals were keeping away from the fire by standing in this place.

The rabbit also tried to find a spot to stand on but there was none.

Meanwhile the leader of the elephants raised one of his legs because it was itching. When he did so, the little rabbit realised that this was a place where he could stand and so he stood there.

The leader of the elephants, on seeing this could not put his foot down, if he did so the little rabbit would have been crushed to death. So he had to keep one leg up all the time, as the elephant did not want the rabbit to die under his foot. He was a truly kind elephant. He wanted the little rabbit to live so he kept his foot raised all the time and protected the little rabbit.

The fire raged for almost three days and during this time, all the animals stayed on this flat land. The elephant continued to keep his foot high in the air, saving the little rabbit.

When the fire was over, all the animals went away. The rabbit saw that the elephant was in great pain. The poor elephant's foot was completely stiff and when he tried to put his foot on the ground, he could not do so. He just fell to the ground and died in pain. However, he had no bad feelings towards this little rabbit. The elephant really knew what AHIMSA (non-violence) was.

