

LESSON 03

STHULIBHADRA

King Shrenik belonged to Shishunag dynasty which came to an end in 460 BC. With the death of his grandson Uday, Nand dynasty took over the Magadha. There were nine Nands, one after another and Dhananand was the last king of that dynasty.

He was very greedy and eager to accumulate wealth. He was keen to know about a hidden treasure belonging to his predecessors. His old Prime Minister Shakadala, who was holding the office since the time of Dhananand's father, was supposed to know about it. Dhananand tried his utmost to get the information, but Shakadala, did not provide any indication of the treasure. He was therefore forced to retire and the administration was entrusted to other trusted ministers. Shakadala was learned and knowledgeable. Many scholars and highly placed officials liked to consult him. Hardly anyone however dared to go to him because every one was feeling afraid of the displeasure of the king. The capacity of Shakadala thus remained mostly unutilized.

Shakadala and Lachhala of Gotam gotra had two sons named Sthulibhadra and Shriyak and seven daughters. Sthulibhadra was smart, brilliant and handsome, but he was easy going. In Patliputra, the capital city, there was a beautiful young city dancer named Kosha. From the very young age, Sthulibhadra used to go to watch her concert. He developed liking for her and she too liked him. Slowly they developed strong attachment for each other. Sthulibhadra therefore left home at the young age of 18 and started living with her. The king had an intention to appoint him in the court, but Sthulibhadra was too much engrossed in love of Kosha. He had lost all political ambition and therefore declined the offer. He was so much enamored of Kosha that he did not even feel much concern for his aged father or other family members. The king had therefore appointed Shriyak in his court.

Later part of Dhananad's regime witnessed major political upheavals. In Patliputra situation was in turmoil. Lot of people were feeling dissatisfied with the administration. Many of them were looking for the end of Nand dynasty. Dhananand was therefore feeling unsecured and was suspicious of every one. He was suspicious of Shriyak too. Shakadale knew this and was much worried about the political future of his son. In order to provide proof of Shriyak's loyalty to the king, Shakadale himself courted death at the hands of his own son.

When Sthulibhadra learnt about that tragic event, he was taken aback. By that time he had spent 12 years with Kosha and had never cared for anyone else. His father's death was an eye opener. He started reflecting on his past life. Twelve long years of my youthful life! What did I get during this long period? He realized that he had not gained anything that would endure. The tragic end of his father brought home to him the reality that the life does come to an end. Is there no way to escape death? He asked himself, what is nature of life after all? Who am I and what is the mission of my life?

Dwelling deep into these questions, he realized that the body and all worldly aspects are transitory and physical pleasures do not lead to lasting happiness. He looked at his image in the mirror and noticed the unmistakable marks of lustful life. He realized that he was

wasting his youth and it was the time to retract. He made up his mind to go in search of lasting happiness. He rose and leaving the home of Kosha, he proceeded straight to Acharya Sambhutivijay who was the fifth successor to Lord Mahavira.

Surrendering himself to Acharya, he said that he was sick of the lustful life and wanted to do something worthwhile in the life. Acharya looked at him. Here was a young man of 30 who seemed to have lost the youthful vigor. The lustful life had virtually knocked him down; but brightness inherited from the illustrious father was still apparent on his face. In his sense of desperation, the learned Acharya saw hope for the Lord's religious order and accepted him as his pupil.

Sthulibhadra did not take much time in adjusting to the new pattern of life. He was now keen to make good for the lost years. He decided to devote his energy for spiritual upliftment. He started working diligently and in no time gained the confidence of his preceptor.

Sambhutivijay died shortly after that and his colleague Bhadrabahuwami took over as the head of the religious order. Under his stewardship, Sthulibhadra thoroughly studied all the available scriptures excepting Purvas. His life as a Muni was also exemplary. He had successfully overcome the sense of attachment and gained control over all sorts of gross defilement.

Once, plans were being laid down for the ensuing monsoon. Sthulibhadra and three of his colleagues who had attained high level of equanimity wanted to test it by spending the monsoon under the most trying conditions. Those three colleagues had planned to spend it in utmost hazardous situations.

One of them said that he would stay at the entrance of a lion's den; another wanted to spend it near a snake's hole; the third wanted to spend it on the top of open well. The preceptor knew about their capabilities to withstand the hardships and permitted them. He then asked Sthulibhadra about his plans and the latter said that he would like to spend it in the picture gallery of Kosha.

Acharya knew very well how tough it was to stay unattached under those highly comfortable and seductive circumstances, The way Sthulibhadra had however adapted to the new life and the severity with which he was observing the code of conduct, the Acharya felt confident about his capacity to face that ordeal and permitted him to go to Kosha.

Accordingly Sthulibhadra went to Kosha's palace and asked her to allot him the picture gallery. She was badly missing him and was glad that he had come back. She asked him to stay in the room he was occupying earlier. Sthulibhadra however insisted on staying in the gallery. She thought that he was unduly attracted to the lustful picturesque gallery, but that was a welcome sign for her. Thus feeling sure of regaining his love, she gladly permitted him to stay in the picture gallery.

Now just visualize the situation. Here was youthful Sthulibhadra living in joyfully decorated gallery in the presence of glamorous Kosha whom he had loved so long and

there was no one else to interfere. It was too tempting. Even the great sage Vishwamitra had succumbed under such conditions. To resist that temptation was the mightiest task that Sthulibhadra had undertaken. Kosha used all her skills to win back his love; she employed every trick to seduce him from renouncement, but he remained steady like a rock. Ultimately Kosha had to give up and Sthulibhadra passed the monsoon without any way being swayed by attachment. History has not recorded any other case of staying totally detached in the midst of such highly seductive circumstances.

At the end of monsoon, pupils came back to report their experience to the preceptor. First came the Muni, who had successfully stayed at the entrance of lion's den. The preceptor was glad with his performance and congratulated him for undertaking the hard task. Then came the Muni who had stayed near the snake's hole. He was also congratulated for the difficult task. Then came the one who had spent his days on the top of the well. The preceptor congratulated him too.

When Sthulibhadra reported his tale, the preceptor was thrilled to listen that. He rose from his seat in all praise and hailed Sthulibhadra for performing a Herculean task. Other pupils could not make out why the preceptor was so much impressed by performance of Sthulibhadra who had stayed at ease in most comfortable situation. Acharya explained that it was a feat that no one else could do.

The first Muni said that he could easily do it the next monsoon. The Acharya tried to dissuade him from his intent, because it was beyond his capability. The Muni however persisted and decided to show his ability to face that situation.

The next monsoon that Muni went to Kosha's place. The lustful pictures of the gallery were enough to make him excited. When he saw glamorous Kosha, his remaining resistance melted away and he begged for her love. Kosha could do anything for Sthulibhadra, but she had no regard for this Muni. She could easily make out his caliber. In order to teach him a lesson she however agreed to make love, if he could bring for her the diamond studded garment for which Nepal was known.

The Muni was so overcome with the lust that he immediately proceeded to Nepal overlooking the fact that Munis are not supposed to travel in monsoon. With considerable difficulty he procured a garment and coming back to Patliputra he gleefully handed it to Kosha. He was now thrilled with the expectation of getting her. She however used it for wiping her feet and threw it away in garbage.

The Muni could not make out what was wrong with her. "Are you crazy, Kosha? Why are you throwing away the precious gift that I have brought with so much difficulty?" He asked. "Then why are you out to throw away the precious life of monkshood that you have obtained at heavy cost?" Was the reply of Kosha? The Muni realized his foolishness and went back to the preceptor to report his miserable failure. From then onwards Sthulibhadra became the acknowledged leader of all the pupils.

Sthulibhadra had now to learn the 14 Purvas. Bhadrabahuwami thought that he deserved that and started teaching him. By the time, Sthulibhadra had finished 10 Purvas, they

happened to come to Patliputra. Sthulibhadra's sisters, who also had renounced, came to see him.

Sthulibhadra knew it and thought to show them his miraculous capability. Thereupon he assumed the form of a lion. As the sisters came to his room, they were scared to see the lion. They felt afraid that the lion might have eaten him away. They reported it to Bhadrabahuwami. He could make out what had happened and asked the girls to go back to the room. Sthulibhadra had resumed his original form and the sisters were gratified that their great brother was alive and safe.

Bhadrabahuwami was however annoyed that Sthulibhadra had used his capability for such trivial purpose. He therefore refused to teach him further.

Later on, there was a long lasting famine in north India. In that condition of acute shortage it was not easy for the Munis to properly observe the code of conduct. Many of the Munis therefore migrated to south under the leadership of Bhadrabahuwami. For those who remained behind, it was hard to exactly remember the texts of scriptures composed by Lord's Ganadharas. There came about varying versions of the scriptures.

A convention was therefore held at the end of famine at Patliputra. The convention prepared a generally acceptable version of the scriptures. Since this was done under the stewardship of Sthulibhadra, his name stands very high in the annals of Jainism. Even at present his name is recited next to Lord Mahavira and Gautamswami.

Acharya Sthulibhadra lived thirty years as a householder, twenty as a Jain monk, and forty-nine as head of the Jain Order until 308 B.C he converted several Mauryan rulers to Jainism and was another a great scholar of the time.

Acharya Sthulibhadra died 219 years (according to some account 215 years) at the age of ninety-one after the nirvana of Bhagwan Mahavira, 312 BC