

LESSON 01

ARIHANT

- RITA:** Sir many of my friends in school talk about God. Some say their God is Krishna. While, some says their God is Jesus. They also say their God created this universe. Can you tell me something about our God?
- Teacher:** Jainism has a concept of God. Jainism says all souls have a potential to be God and it is not limited to one or a few people only. Our Gods are omniscient and omnipotent. We call them Arihantas. When their lifetime is over they are liberated and become Siddha. Siddhas are also our Gods.
- Rita:** What about the universe? Did they create the universe?
- Teacher:** No, the universe is a natural phenomenon. It is eternal which means that it was there all the time and it was not created by anybody. It will be there forever. It is endless that means it will not become extinct or will not be destroyed to zero by anybody either. So, universe was not created by our Gods or by anyone else.
- RITA:** My friends say that their God maintains and controls universe. They do favors and forgive them of their sins. Do our Gods do such things?
- Teacher:** Our Gods have no attachment or hatred for anyone. They are detached from what is happening in the universe. So they do not do any favors when we worship them. In the same way they do not control universe and also do not forgive our sins because they do not get involved into what we do. If we have committed the sins then we have to bear the results ourselves either in this life or in coming lives.
- Rita:** Sir, can you tell me a little more about Arihantas?
- Teacher:** There have been many Arihantas. In present time cycle, out of them twenty-four became Tirthankaras who re-establish the order of the Jain-Tirth formed of sadhus, sadhvis, male and female householders. Mahavira was the last and 24th Tirthankara. They followed the path themselves and showed us the same path so we also can be free from the cycles of birth and death. The Jains worship them as God. They are also known as Jinas, Vitragi, or Kevali, etc.
- Rita:** Can we say then, that Tirthankara Mahavira is a "Jain God"?
- Teacher:** Yes, Tirthankara Mahavira is one of the "Jain God". Actually all Arihantas and Siddhas are our Gods.
- RITA:** Can I become Jina?

Teacher: In Jainism we believe that along with all human beings other living beings also have the potential to become Arihant or Tirthankaras. All of them were one time like us and had all those emotions and desires.

RITA: Does Arihant word have any meaning?

Teacher: Yes, it has. You know that every name has a meaning. Kumud means "lotus", and Ravi means "sun." Similarly the word Arihant is made up of two words. They are "Ari" and "Hant." Ari means "enemy" and Hant means "destroyer". So Arihant literally means "destroyer of enemies."

Payal: But, sir, the other day you said that Jains do not hurt anyone. Then how can our Lord Arihanta be a destroyer? I do not understand that.

Teacher: Payal, you are right. As a Jain, we do not hurt or destroy anyone. An Arihantas did not destroy humans or animals or birds, etc. They did not have enemies like animals, bugs, or people like us. Arihantas did not have any enemies outside but they were from within.

Amar: The enemies within!!! I did not understand that.

Teacher: Some times we get mad at friends, brothers, or sisters for very small matters. Sometimes we hide our toys when our friends come over to our house. We also cry at the mall when our parents would not let us buy toys. Some kids show off in their class and act as if they know everything. These tendencies may look good to us at that time and we may consider ourselves smart. But those thoughts are bad for our soul. They are not good and since, they stay within us, they are our inner enemies.

Shila, does this make sense to you? Can our desires be our enemies?

Shila: Yes Sir, now it makes sense. I remember the other day when I got mad at my best friend and she stopped talking to me. A few days later, when I really needed her help to study for a test, she did not help me and I got "B" on the test. Now I realize how getting mad caused me to get "B".

Teacher: Sunil, have you experienced this kind of trouble?

Sunil: Yes, one day my sister and I were by ourselves at home. My sister got hungry and wanted to order pizza. She did not have enough money and I would not share any of my money with her because I was greedy. So she had to stay hungry. A few weeks later, our parents dropped us off at the mall to go shopping. While we were at a clothing store, I noticed a nice jacket that I wanted to buy. I checked the price, and I saw that I did not have enough money. I asked my sister, if she would let me borrow some money (because, usually she would give me). But she said "No" and

reminded me about when she wanted to order pizza and he would not give money. I told myself, if I would not have been greedy then she would have given me money to buy that jacket. Later she said, "Don't feel bad. I am not going to be like you, but remember that it is good to share than being greedy." Now I know greediness was our inner enemy.

Teacher: Does anyone else want to say anything?

Hina: Yes sir, now I realize who our inner enemies are. We should control our anger. We should not be greedy. We should not insult anyone. We should not deceive anyone. We should not be show-off. In other words, we should control our desires and temptations.

Teacher: Yes, we should work toward the total control on our desires, so that no matter what happens, we don't get mad, greedy, or arrogant, etc.

So now you see, Arihantas did not destroy people, animals, birds or bugs but they destroyed their inner enemies like anger, ego, deception and greed.

Ashish: Now I know who the Arihantas are. They destroyed their inner enemies but I still do not understand why we call them gods?

Teacher: Now, we are coming to the rest of the story. When person gets total control on desires and does not have any feeling of attachment or hatred, he becomes an Arihanta. He/she is now detached from any reactions to what is happening in this universe. When that happens he/she also becomes free from ignorance completely and also becomes all knowing. Now, he/she knows everything in the universe and can also see everything in the universe. He knows what is happening now, what will happen in the future and what has happened in the past at the same time. There is nothing that he does not know. He teaches us that we should be free from our inner desires.

When we die, we are reborn as something else in this universe. But, when Arihanta's life ends he/she* becomes liberated soul from this universe. He/she becomes a Siddha and is never born again. He/she will be liberated from the worldly cycle of birth and death forever. That is why Arihantas are called Gods.

Ashish: I still have one question. When we go to the temple our parents tell us to pray to the Gods. What are we supposed to pray to them if they do not give us anything?

Teacher: Our prayers are to admire the Jinas for being free from their inner desires. Our prayers are not to wish for rewards, but to remind or inspire us how to

live a good Jain life. We also pray to thank them for being our role models. We must try to follow their footsteps in order to achieve the supreme goal of liberation.

(* Digambara sect believes that women can not be omniscient.)

Questions:

- 1) Do Jains believe in God?
- 2) What do other religions say about their Gods?
- 3) Do Jains believe God is the creator of the universe?
- 4) What are some different names for Jain Gods?
- 5) WHAT DOES ARIHANTA MEAN?
- 6) What are our inner enemies?
- 7) Can anyone be an Arihanta?
- 8) Who is a Siddha?