

## LESSON 08

## TIRTHANKARA MALINATH

In ancient times there was a city named Veetshok in the Maha-Videha area. Mahabal was the king of this city. He had six very close friends since childhood. All those seven friends were so close that they did everything together. None of them will do anything on one's own without consulting others.

Once, Dharmaghoshsuri, a well-known Acharya of that time, came to Veetshok city. King Mahabal listened to his sermon and was very impressed. He realized soul's true nature and renounced the worldly life. All his six friends also renounce along with him. King Mahabal and his six friends became disciples of Dharmaghoshsuri.

As monks, these seven friends observed austerities and restraints together. Mahabal, however, wanted to gain more Punya than his friends and therefore secretly observed more austerities. For instance, if it were agreed by all of them to observe one fast, Mahabal would fast for the second day, under the disguise of a stomach disorder, or any other excuse. If it were agreed upon to fast for two days, Mahabal would fast for three days on similar grounds, and so on. Moreover, he also secretly performed special twenty austerities through which he acquired Tirthankar Namkarma and was thus destined to become the 19th Tirthankara of the current time cycle. All of them continued to observe increasing austerities during that life and eventually attained the heavenly abode.

After completing the heavenly life span, the six friends of Mahabal were born as princes and became kings in due course. All of them came to be known for their valor and boldness. One of them was the king of Ayodhya, the second in Champa, the third in Hastinapur, the fourth in Kampilypur, the fifth in Shravasti and the sixth in Kashi. All these places were located in the present states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

At that time, King Kumbha was ruling over the city of Mithila. When his queen Prabhavati became pregnant, she saw 14 dreams. (Mothers of all Tirthankaras see 14 dreams when they are pregnant). Since Mahabal had earned the Tirthankar Namkarma, his soul descended in the womb of Prabhavati. As he had, however, indulged in deception by secretly observing more austerities, he was destined to be born as a female. (Digambara sect believes that Lord Mallinath was a male). Accordingly, Prabhavati gave birth to a daughter, who was named Malli. Later, Prabhavati also had a son, who was named Malladin.

Their parents fondly raised Malli and Malladin. Malli was exceedingly charming and beautiful and grew to be a very attractive girl. Malladin respected her as the elder sister. Kumbha wanted to give them the best education and therefore entrusted their training to highly respected teachers who taught them all the required arts and crafts. Malladin learned all the martial arts and became a bold and brave youth. Malli mastered all the fine arts and became a very talented and accomplished princess.

Once it was decided to set up an art gallery in Mithila. A marvelous building was constructed for this purpose and all the well-known artists were invited to draw pictures

for the gallery. One of them, who had come from Hastinapur, had the exceptional ability to prepare an accurate portrait of anyone by merely seeing one limb of that person. He once happened to see the toe of Malli and just from that, he drew an accurate portrait of Malli on a wall. That portrait vividly displayed every detail of the princess. It was so lifelike that when prince Malladin came to see the gallery and happened to look at the portrait, he felt as if his sister was standing there and actually folded his hands as a token of his respect to her.

When it was brought to his notice that it was merely a portrait, he was curious to figure out how the artist could obtain every minute detail of her body. Thereupon he was informed that the artist had achieved a skill whereby he could draw the full portrait of any one merely by looking at any one limb. It was no doubt a very rare accomplishment. The prince could, however, make out that knowing the secrets of one's body could be misused for blackmailing, and the art thus posed a serious threat to privacy of the people. He therefore wanted to prevent the use of that art. Accordingly, the artist was asked to give up his art in return for a prize. The artist however didn't agree. He insisted upon his right to draw. In order to prevent the misuse the prince ordered that the thumb of the artist be cut off and then he will be allowed to go anywhere he liked.

The artist was very angry and displeased and decided to take revenge. He went to Hastinapur, and there, he got hold of an artist who could draw the portraits as per his instructions. By doing this, he arranged to prepare a yet more attractive portrait of Malli and presented the same to the king of Hastinapur, who had a rivalry towards the city of Mithila. The king was very much impressed by this portrait. He fell in love with Malli and decided to marry princess Malli. He therefore sent a messenger to Mithila with a marriage proposal.

In due course, the above mentioned kings of Ayodhya, Champa, Kashi, Kampilypur and Shravasti also came to know about the exceptional beauty of Malli and all of them sent their proposals to marry Malli. Malli's father Kumbha was put in an embarrassing position upon receiving those six proposals. After considering these proposals, he did not find any of them as suitable for Malli and rejected all of them. Thereupon all the six princes decided to attack Mithila in order to get Malli. Kumbha boldly faced them with all his might, but he could not stand against the combined strength of the invading forces. He therefore retreated to his capital and closed the city gates, to defend the city from within. The invading forces then laid a siege to Mithila. The city could not withstand the siege from all those kingdoms. This was indeed a problem.

When Malli came to know of the problem, she dwelt deep into the matter. She had an enlightened mind and realized that the root of the problem lay in her earlier life. She remembered that she was Mahabal and those six princes were her close friends. She also remembered how all of them had become the disciples of Dharmaghoshsuri and how she had secretly observed more austerities. She realized that due to their deep affection for her in previous life they were so keen on marrying her.

Malli therefore decided to tackle the issue to bring the truth home to those friends. She

requested her father not to worry about the problem and leave everything to her. She remembered that her palace had a hall with six doors leading to the center of the hall. She arranged for setting up well-furnished rooms across from each door. The access to each room was arranged in such a way that a person coming towards anyone of them could not see another person proceeding towards another room. The doors of the hall were fitted with fine screen through which people sitting in the rooms could glance at the center of the hall.

Princess Malli, on the other hand arranged for a lifelike statue of herself so that anyone looking at the statue will believe that it is Malli herself. The statue was hollow with a hole at the top, which could be covered tightly. That statue was placed in the middle of the hall and a maid was asked to put a morsel of food twice a day within its cavity and to close its top immediately.

Then she requested her father to send invitations to all six princes to come to the hall to meet her. The invitations were so planned that all of them would come to the hall in the evening and wait in the rooms assigned to them. At the appropriate time, all the princes came and occupied their respective rooms. As they glanced through the screen, they immediately noticed the beautiful statue of Malli. Each of them took it as Malli herself and anxiously waited for being called inside. They also noticed that Malli was far more beautiful than they had expected and immediately fell in love with her.

As they were waiting, Malli entered the hall through a secret channel and standing at the back of the statue, she opened the top. The food that had been put inside had become rotten and gave foul odor. It was so obnoxious that every prince had to cover his nose. Thereupon Malli presented herself and asked why they could not face the smell of the person whom they love so much. They admitted that they could not bear that foul odor.

Mali then explained that the very food that she used to eat was put within the statue. The food in her body did not stink merely because there was soul inside which prevented the rotting. When soul leaves the body, her body too would start to smell. It is the nature of the body to degenerate, decay, and disintegrate. As such, what is the purpose of getting attached to a body, which is going to face that fate sooner or later? Is it not worthwhile to pursue something that is going to be ever-lasting?

As the princess stood there in amazement, she asked them to remember who they were in their previous lives. Then she said that all of them were close friends and were doing everything together. Upon hearing this, they saw their previous lives. That raised the sense of detachment for the worldly state and all of them decided to renounce in order to further the spiritual pursuit that was left undone in the earlier life.

Very elaborate arrangements were then made for the renunciation ceremony. Malli ascended in a special palanquin made for the purpose and went to Sahasramravan. Then, descending from the palanquin, she gave up everything and adopted self-initiation. She had very little Karma left on her soul. All those Karmas were destroyed in very little time and she attained omniscience on that very same day. Thereafter she moved around

the country for a long time to show the path of liberation to others. Ultimately she attained liberation on Mt. Sametshikhara.

**Key Message:**

Body is merely a temporary vehicle to carry the soul. Soul is eternal while body eventually dies. When you die, your soul simply goes to the next body, unless of course you have attained liberation. Physical beauty is very superficial and is independent of the soul inside the body. Malli made this point through the statue and the spoiled food idea.