

## LESSON 14      TIRTHANKARA MAHAVIRA

Tirthankara Mahavira's twenty seven lives are commonly described in Svetambara tradition. They start with him acquiring samyaktva in the life of Naysar.

In Naysar's life once he went to forest to get woods. At lunch time before taking a food he desired that it would be nice if he can offer food to someone. Being forest it would be difficult to find anyone. But he climbed the tree and looked for anyway. To his surprise he found a few monks walking a little distance away from him. He went there and he requested to accept food from him. Since this food was not made for them and being lunch time they accepted food. After finished eating, monks told Naysar that they had lost the path and if he could show them how to get to the next town. Naysar walked them to the direction leading to next town. When he was departing from them monks thanked him and told him that he has shown them the path to get the next town they would like to explain the path of the soul. He has never heard about soul before so he said, please, explain. They told him about the soul and how we all wandering in worldly life and how we can be free from this wandering. He developed faith in their words. He attained samyaktva. After finishing this life he was born as heavenly angel.

After the completion of life as an angel, Nayasara was born as Marichi the son of emperor-Bharat who was son of first Tirthankara Rushabhdev (Adinath). As a young man when he heard the sermon of Rushabhdev and he renounced the worldly life and was took diksha under him.

During monkhood he has to holy walk from place to place, Marichi was unable to bear the high heat and thirst during the summer. He was disgusted with the perspiration. Being frustrated he thought: "What should I do as self-control is quite unbearable?" He got tempted by physical comforts. He hesitated to return home but he decided to give up monkhood and wore the dress of a Sanyasi (recluse). He wore the ocher colored robe and made tilak of three horizontal lines across the forehead. He used an umbrella, wore footwear, accepted anything indiscriminately and stopped plucking his hair. Even after these changes he maintained his faith in principles of Jainism and he preached that Rushabhdev knew the true religion. If someone wanted to be initiated or ask for diksha he would refer them to him.

Once Bharat asked Rushabhdev "Is there anyone in your assembly who is destined to be Tirthankara?"

Rushabhdev said: "Your son Marichi who wears the dress of a recluse, though slack in conduct will be the last among the twenty-four Tirthankara during the present time cycle and will be known as Vardhamana Mahavira. Besides, he will be the first Vasudeva named Triprishtha and a supreme ruler named as Priya Mitra in the city of Mooka in Mahavideha". Bharat was rejoiced to hear this. Bharat paid his farewell to Rushabhdev and hurried towards Marichi and said: "I bow down, not to your attire as a recluse but to you whom I know to be the twenty-fourth Tirthankara. You are also going to be the first Vasudeva and also Priya Mitra, the supreme ruler in Mahavideha". Marichi became

puffed up with the ego about his noble family. Marichi who used an umbrella wore wooden footwear and ochre-colored robe felt happy out of ego and while dancing with joy he exclaimed: "How great is our family! My grand father is the first Tirthankara of this age, my father is the supreme ruler and I would be the first Vasudeva!" As his ego reached the climax, he was bound to fall. The scriptures mentions: "Never be proud of wealth, power, etc., but be humble like the tree which bows down when they bear fruits. Or else the next life or lives would have adverse fortune."

Then one time Marichi fell sick and sought the help from the monks of Rushabhdev but because he had left diksha they could not help him. He started wondering what would happen when he would get older and sicker. So he decided to prepare faithful disciples under him. After recovering, he started preaching the teachings of Rushabhdev. Marichi inspired Kapila, the royal prince to accept the life of an ascetic. "Why don't you practice what you preach?" asked the prince.

"It is beyond my capacity." replied Marichi.

"Does this mean that what you follow at present is not religion?" asked the prince.

Marichi was puzzled what to answer to persistent Kapila. He was afraid that a true answer would drive away the prince from initiation under him. He was unwilling to express his limitations. However he said, "O Kapila, religion is here as well as there." Finally he initiated Kapila as a disciple. As he misguided Kapila from the truth and he died without repentance for misgiving he lost of chance getting Jain religion for many lives.

Then after going through many lives as non-Jain in sixteenth life he was born as Vishvabhuti. In this life Vishvabhuti renounced life and took Jain diksha. Again, here under the influence of anger he asked for the masculine power for the fruits of his austerities and was born as Triprishtha Vasudeva in eighteenth life. In life of Triprishtha Vasudeva he built more bad karmas and again lost Jain religion for next few lives till twenty third lives as Priyamitra. He took Jain diksha and in twenty-fifth life he was born as Nandanakumar in the city of Chhatra. Here he again took Jain diksha and performed special austerities and acquired Tirthankara Namkarma and in twenty-seventh life he was born as Vardhaman to be twenty-fourth Tirthankara. As per Svetambara tradition, because of ego in Marichi's life he was conceived in the womb of Devananda, a Brahmin woman and had to remain as a fetus for eighty-two days. Then Indra, the ruler of heavenly angels got the fetus removed from the womb of Devananda and transplanted the same in the womb of Trishla, the queen of King Siddhartha.

Here he as was born as Vardhaman and he became 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankara Mahavirswami.

So from the past lives of Mahavirswami you can see what kind of roles Pramad, Kashaya and Mithyatva have played.