

## LESSON 23

## JAIN FESTIVALS

Generally, festivals are celebrations and jubilations characterized by excitement, enthusiasm, enjoyments and entertainments; but the Jain festivals are characterized by renunciation, austerities, study of the scriptures, repetition of holy hymns, meditation, and expressing devotion for the Paramatma. Even those people who are caught in the meshes of mundane life, according to their ability and conveniences, get free from the worldly entanglements to the extent possible and become immersed in worship and meditation. Renunciation and austerity constitute the very foundation of the Jain Dharma.

### PARYUSHAN MAHAPARVA

The Paryushana is the most important festival among the Jain festivals; and it is observed during every Chaturmas commencing on the twelfth or thirteenth day of the fortnight of the waning moon, in Bhadrapad and ending on the fourth or fifth day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in the Bhadrapad. During these eight days, the entire Jain Society becomes spellbound in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and felicity. All Jains, the young and the old perform Atthai Tap - fasting for eight days at a time. Some men and women; and even children take the vow of Paushadh Vrata also for one to eight days during these days. The spiritual preceptors read and explain in detail the Kalpasutra, the most sacred scripture of the Jains. All the members of the congregation listen to that explanation, overwhelmed with the emotion of devotion. Seven days are days of attainment and the eighth day, Samvatsari day is one of fulfillment or achievement.

### SAMVATSARI:

The closing day of the Jaina year and of Paryushana, Samvatsari, is the most solemn fast of all. Every Jaina fasts throughout the day from food and water, and the upashraya are crowded with men and women making their confessions. No outsiders can visit these gatherings without being deeply impressed with the determination of all present to carry no grudge and no quarrel over into the next year. At close of the meeting every one present asks forgiveness from his neighbors for any offence he may even unwittingly have given, and they all write letters to distant friends asking their forgiveness also. This determination to start the new year in love and charity with their neighbors they do not confine to their own community; for example, the writer used to be bewildered by receiving letters from Jaina friends and pundits who had never offended her in any way asking her forgiveness in case they had unwittingly vexed her. One cannot help feeling that this beautiful custom of the Jaina is one of the many precious things they will bring as their special tribute to that City of God into which at last shall be gathered all the glory and wealth of devotion of the nations.

Another pageant the some sect arranges is a cradle procession of Mahavira's birthday, which is now conventionally fixed for the first day of Bhadrapad.

## NAVPAD OLI

In this people do *Ayambil* for all nine days. During the days of this festival, every day, worship is offered to the Navpad; and a dramatic performance of the story of Shripal and Mayana is carried out.

## BIRTHDAY OF MAHAVIR (MAHAVIR JAYANTI)

The birthday of Shraman Bhagwan, the last Tirthankar, is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in the month of Chaitra. On this occasion, a grand chariot procession, community worship, glorification of the Lord, discussions, discourses, seminars and devotional and spiritual activities are organized. On this day, a magnificent celebration takes place at Kshatriy Kund in Bihar because Bhagwan Mahavira was born there.

## DIWLI

Diwali or Deepawali is the most important festival in India. For the Jains, it is the second most after the Paryushana Parva. For Jains Diwali marks the anniversary of Mahavira's Moksha. Mahavira attained Moksha or liberation on this day in 527 B.C. (and also of the achievement of total knowledge, omniscience, by his chief follower, Gautam Indrabhuti). The festival falls on the last day of the month of Ashvina, the end of the year as per Indian calendar (in October or November). The celebration starts in the early morning of the previous day, for it was then that Mahavira commenced his last sermon, which lasted till late in the night of Diwali. It is narrated that the eighteen kings of northern India who were in his audience decided that the light of their master's knowledge would be kept alive symbolically by lighting of the lamps. Hence it is called Deepawali, (deep means lamp), or Diwali.

The New Year begins the next day and is the occasion for joyful gatherings of Jains, with everybody wishing each other a Happy New Year.

## BHAI BEEJ (THE FESTIVAL DAY FOR BROTHERS)

When Raja Nandivardhan, the brother of Shraman Bhagawan Mahavira was steeped in sorrow and anguish on account of the latter's nirvana (attainment of Mukti) his sister, Sudarshana took him to her house and comforted him. This happened on the second day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in Kartik. This day is observed as Bhai Beej. This festival is like Raksha Bandhan. On the day of Raksha Bandhan, the sister goes to the brother and ties the Raksha; but on this day, the sister invites her brother to her house to felicitate him.

## JNAN PANCHAMI (THE HOLY DAY FOR ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE)

Jnan Panchami is the name given to the celebration that takes place on the 5th day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in Kartik (the 5th day after Diwali). This day has been fixed for the worship of pure knowledge; and on this day, by way of worshipping knowledge, fasting, taking Paushadh, devavandan (offering veneration to Gods). Holy recitations, meditation, Pratikraman etc., are carried out. Moreover the books preserved in the religious libraries are cleansed and worshipped.

### ASHADH CHATURDASI

The sacred commencement of Chaturmas takes place on the 14th day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in the month of Ashadh. The Jain Sadhus and Sadhvis remain where they happen to be on that day until the 14th day of Kartik Shukla. They have to stay there. During these four months among the Jains, many austerities like renunciation, Tapasyas, undertaking of religious ceremonies, etc., are organized. Even in respect of eating and drinking during these days, some rules have been prescribed.

### KARTIK POORNIMA (THE FULL MOON DAY OF KARTIK)

The Chaturmas that begins on Ashadh Chaturdashi comes to an end on the full moon day in Kartik. After this, the Jain Sadhus and Sadhvis begin their wandering Padyatra i.e., travel on foot. A pilgrimage to Satrunjaya-Palitana on this day is considered to be of great importance. Thousands of Jains go on pilgrimages on this day. This day also is celebrated as the birthday of Kalikalarvajna, Acharya Bhagawan Sri vijay Hemachandrasooriji who was born on this day. (In Vikram Samvat 1134 or 1078 A.D.).

### MAUN EKADASHI (THE HOLY DAY FOR OBSERVING SILENCE).

Maun Ekadashi falls on the 11th day of the fort-night of the waxing moon in the month of Margshirsh. This is an important day for Jains on which they observe total silence-Maun and carry out such austerities as Paushadh vrata, fasting, worshipping of gods, meditation etc. This is the day on which the great events relating to the one hundred and fifty Jineswaras are celebrated by means of holy recitation. The story of Suvrat Shresthi is connected with this day.

### PAUSH DASHAMI

This day is famous as the birthday of Bhagwan Parshvanath. On the 10th day of Pushya, hundreds and thousands of Jain men and women perform the Tapasyas of 3 Upavas-attham (continuous fasting for 3 days) and by means of recitation and meditation they try to attain spiritual welfare. A grand fair takes place in Sankheswar which is a sacred place for Jains. Thousands of people gather here and perform the austerity of Attham.

### AKSHAY TRITIYA

Those noble people who perform the austerity of Varsitap complete the austerity on this day by taking sugar-cane juice in the cool shadow of Shatrunjay. Bhagwan Rushabhdev performed the Parana (completion of an austerity) on this day after fasting for one year continuously. This day is considered to be very auspicious for going on a pilgrimage to Shatrunjay. This falls on the 3rd day of the bright fortnight of Vaishakh.