

LESSON 24

JAIN CELEBRATIONS

SNATRA MAHOTSAV (THE FESTIVAL OF OBLATION)

Snatra Mahotsav is the name given to the ceremony of performing oblations to the image of the Lord; worshipping the Lord with various auspicious things, making offerings to the Lord; and worshipping the Lord with songs, music and dances. It is also called Snatra Puja. The Snatra Mahotsav is performed generally every day, in most Jain temples. Showing devotion to the Lord and seeking his blessings can be done on any auspicious day or happy occasion. This constitutes an aspect of the very foundation of the Jain dharma.

ATTHAI MAHOTSAV (THE FESTIVAL OF EIGHT DAYS)

This is a festival of eight days and so it is called Atthai Mahotsav. During these eight days or sometimes five days, many devotional and religious activities are arranged in the Jain temples. The activities include such things as cleaning and decorating the temples, offering prayers to the Paramatma along with songs, music and dances, chanting of hymns of glorification, recitation of songs for worship decorating the images and organizing some other religious and auspicious activities.

SHANTI SNATRA (SPECIAL OBLATION FOR UNIVERSAL PEACE)

This activity has been regarded as the most auspicious and beneficial. This is organized on the last day of any minor or major ceremony. On this occasion, oblations are performed to the image of the Lord 27 or 108 times with absolute devotion. Moreover, worship is offered to the Lord with special and auspicious articles. As a part of this ceremony, the Mangal Kumbh (The sacred vessel) is installed; the holy light is installed; worship is offered to the nine grahas; and to other divinities. This observance seeks the welfare of all beings in the universe. On this occasion, Sanskrit shlokas are chanted and this great wish is expressed: "May felicity, bliss, cheerfulness and holiness prevail everywhere".

SIDDHA-CHAKRA-MAHAPUJAN (THE GRAND WORSHIP OF SIDDHACHAKRA YANTRA)

The Siddha Chakra Yantra is designed in some pure and holy place. The yantra is colorfully designed with wheat, green dal, black gram, Bengal gram and rice. Holy recitation, meditation, worship and prayer are carried out for the Navpad and also, worship is offered to other gods, goddesses, powers etc.

ATHARAH ABHISHEK (EIGHTEEN OBLATIONS FOR PURITY)

This activity is carried out for the sake of the purification and consecration of any old or new idol, any picture or engraved marble slab. At such times to those things 18 oblations containing different kinds of pure water, herbs and some special substances, are offered. This activity is regarded as very auspicious and beneficial.

ANJAN SHALAKA

(APPLYING HOLY COLLYRIUM TO THE EYES OF A NEW IMAGE)

The name Anjan Shalaka is given to the ceremony of decorating the eyes of new images of Jinas with collyrium made of many special substances, using in the process a gold-stick.

On this occasion, the following five auspicious events relating to the Lord are celebrated.

- 1) Chyavan- incarnation
The incarnation of the Lord in his mother's womb
- 2) Janm - birth
The birth of the Lord
- 3) Deeksha- Renunciation
The event of the Lord's renunciation of worldly life and commencement of a life of austerity, discipline and attainments
- 4) Kaivalya gnan
The event of attaining absolute enlightenment after performing austerities and Tapasyas
- 5) Nirvana

Being completely delivered from the body and the karmas

Only the event of the Kaivalyagnan is called Anjan Shalaka and it is arranged to be carried out at an auspicious and sacred period, at midnight,

The smearing of collyrium to the eyes of the image with a gold-stick can be done only by the Acharya Bhagawan, in the Jain command or by the Anuyogacharya, the one next to him

PRATHISTHA (INSTALLATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE LORD)

Pratishtha is the name given to the ceremony of installing the image of the Lord in a newly built or a renovated Jain temple. But, of course, it is absolutely essential that Anjan Kriya should be done to the new image (smearing of collyrium to the eyes of the image). This ceremony is carried out along with other celebrations for some days. The image of the Lord is installed by a noble householder at an auspicious time on an auspicious day. On this occasion many kinds of worship are offered to the sacred powers and divine objects along with singing of hymns and observances. The image installed in the temple is only a symbol; but actually it should enable people to install the Lord in their hearts.

DHWAJAROHAN (HOISTING THE HOLY FLAG)

On the day of the installation of the image of the Lord; and every year on the day of the annual celebration of the event, a new flag is hoisted on the tower of the temple. On that day, at the time of the worship of the flag it is hoisted. On this day the Satrah Bhedi, the 17 kinds of worship of which Dhvaj puja is one are read out with an orchestra. At the time of the Dhvaj puja, the flag is hoisted.

RATHYATRA (THE HOLY CHARIOT PROCESSION)

Rathyatra means taking the resplendent image of the Lord in a procession, in a chariot

along the main roads of the city or town so that all people might have a darshan of the Bhagawan's radiant face. The Rathayatra is accompanied by a band (of musicians and players on various instruments) and by thousands of devotees, and by the fourfold society of Jains. It is a procession of sublime radiance. It is called in spoken dialect Varghoda but its actual name is Rathayatra or Chaityayatra. Chaityayatra means having a darshan and worshipping the Chaityas or temples in the City.

SANGH YATRA

The Sanghyatra is the holy travel of the fourfold Jain society on bare foot from place to place. They wander thus from place to place, having a darshan of the Jain temples; and worshipping them; going on a pilgrimage to various places of pilgrimage; disseminating and preaching the dharma; and helping the people in distress. This is called Sanghyatra. During this Yatra six very important rules should be scrupulously observed. Hence, it is also called Charipati sanah or Padayatra sangh.

- 1) Samyaktva Dharan
They must take the vow of righteousness, with reverence and devotion.
- 2) Ekasana
They must eat food only once a day.
- 3) Bhumishayan
They must sleep on a carpet on the ground and should not sleep on a bed; and a mattress.
- 4) Brahmacharya
They should keep off sensual and carnal delights.
- 5) Padyatra
They should travel on foot (bare foot).
- 6) Sachet Tyag
They should not consume any raw and green vegetables.

The Padyatra carried out in accordance with these six rules really becomes a journey towards salvation. It marks the end of the journey of worldly life, but the longest journey is the journey inward.

MALAROPAN (HONOURING WITH A GARLAND)

Any one who organizes a padyatra; and bears all the expenses relating to it; and carries out Upadhan (austerity) first earns the honor of being garlanded. The ceremony of offering a garland to a devout person acquires great significance because it is accompanied by the performance of some special austerities and by the recitations of mantras or holy hymns. Some times an offer is made for a higher amount and the people who pay the highest amount generously are first garlanded. The securing of a garland in this manner is a sign of being blessed.

UDHYAPAN (CELEBRATION OF COMPLETING AN AUSTERITY)

Udhyapan is the ceremony of expressing a feeling of gratitude for having been able to complete an austerity or spiritual activity without any impediments. In the spoken dialect this is called Ujamana or Ujavana. This ceremony is performed by giving away articles useful for the temple; articles useful for the dissemination of knowledge; and things useful for the Sadhus and Sadhvis. The ceremony comprises the exhibition and the

donation of these articles relating to knowledge to the temple and to the life of austerity. The devotees offer at the time of the completion of the vow, with joy, the ornamental canopy, embroidered velvet back-curtain with gold and silver-thread design for the image of the Lord in temples and for the platform in Upashraya.

SADHARMIK VATSALAYA (JAIN COMMUNITY DINNERS)

All those who meditate on and remember the Navkar Mantra and who have devotion and reverence for Shraman Bhagwan Mahavira gather at a place and dine together and feed one another. This celebration is called Sadharmik Vatsalya. On this day, worship of the Lord and other devotional activities are organized. These community dinners are controlled by the code of Jain customs and practices. It is called Swami Vatsalya or

Apart from this other religious activities such as worship and undertaking of spiritual activities are done or arranged. Of course, the responsibility of organizing activities during all festivals is undertaken by pure minded and devout Shrawaks. The Sadhus provide only the necessary guidance for these activities.

In all the Jain festivals, prayers are offered for the peace, felicity and prosperity (spiritual) of oneself, of society, nation and the whole universe. The following activities are given special importance: giving charity to the poor and the needy; rendering help; giving fodder and water to animals; giving grain to birds; giving free medicines to the sick and the disabled patients because in the Jain Dharma, benevolence is given the first place.