

LESSON 03

PRACTICES OF JAIN RELIGION

As per Jain tradition, Jain religion has been an eternal phenomenon. There had been ups and downs but it has been always there. Jain religion was also known as Nigantha, Nirgrantha or Shraman Religion in earlier time. Every Tirthankara Bhagwan reestablished or revitalized the Jain order. They understood that everybody was looking for happiness but they also knew that while staying in this worldly life happiness is very short lived or happiness may look on the surface but under it is a volcano of unhappiness. So they lead us to total happiness in our lives by showing the spiritual path. They also realized that it would be very hard for everybody to follow one path because everybody is different. So they made two main categories amongst us; 1) Ascetics and 2) Householders. In ascetics fall sadhus and sadhvis while in householders fall male and female householders. Group or congregation of 1) sadhus, 2) sadhvis, 3) male householders, and 4) female householders are called Jain Sangh. Principles remained the same but they readjusted the rules for both groups as per necessity for that particular time. At this time we follow the rules laid or rather shown by Tirthankara Mahavira, 24th Jina of this half time cycle. Right now we have no Jina present on our part of universe so the acharyas are the head of congregations and if need arise they may alter the structure to carry out Jain principles shown by Jina. The rules to be followed by monks and nuns are stricter than those of householders. These both groups are called:

- 1) **Deshvirtti group (Follower of Partial Restraint)**
- 2) **Sarvavirtti group (Follower of Full Restraint)**

1) **Deshvirtti** is formed of two words.

- i) Desh means some part or to some extent, and
- ii) Virtti means to give up or restraint.

So Deshvirti means giving up of harmful or sinful activities to some extent. Householders fall in this group.

The householders have family, economical, social, state and national obligations and responsibilities and because of that it will be harder for them to follow the Jain practices to the fullest extent. Tirthankara Bhagwans knew it and that is why they established twelve minor vows (Anuvrat) for householders. The householders must follow these vows and even though progress could be slow but steady spiritual pursuit will lead to the target. The twelve minor (Anuvrat) vows are:

- I. **Limited Non-Violence Vow** in which non-violence is observed to some extent.
- II. **Limited Truthfulness Vow** in which Truthfulness is observed to some extent.
- III. **Limited Non-Stealing Vow** in which Non-Stealing is observed to some extent.
- IV. **Limited Celibacy Vow** in which Celibacy is observed to some extent.
- V. **Limited Non-Possessiveness Vow** in which non-possessiveness is observed to some extent.
- VI. **Geographic Limitation Vow** in which geographic limitation are set to some extent.
- VII. **Consumption and Occupation Limitation Vow** in which consumption of items and occupation to be done are set to some extent.
- VIII. **Purposeless Activities Limitation Vow** in which purposeless activities are

- observed to some extent.
- IX. **Self-control and Equanimity Vow** in which self-control and equanimity is observed to some extent.
 - X. **Day to Day Additional Limitation Vow** in which day to day additional limitation are set to some extent.
 - XI. **Monkshood Exposure Vow** in which monkshood type activities are done for a day or so.
 - XII. **Selfless Offerings to Unexpected Guests Vow** in which selfless offerings to unexpected guests is done to some extent.

As householders we follow these vows to the best of our abilities in a given situation. We may take one, two or all-12 vows as per our situation and capacity. By doing so our life style would have minimal sinful or harmful activities. This will also make us realize that we still have to rise above to practice Sarvavirti, which will ultimately lead us to the liberation. We must remember that practicing just deshvirta will take much longer time before we can achieve liberation but would be better than not practicing any vows.

Sarvavirti is also formed of two words. i) Sarva means total and ii) Virti means to give up or restraint. This means totally giving up of all sinful or harmful activities. These kinds of practices are easily carried out by our sadhus or sadhvis because they have no family, economical, social, state and national responsibilities and obligations. They now look after their own souls. They also guide householders to spiritual path. They take five major vows. The vows of the Sarvavirti are called Major vows (Maha Vratas). They are:

- I. **Absolute Non-Violence Vow** in which non-violence is observed to full extent.
- II. **Absolute Truthfulness Vow** in which truthfulness is observed to full extent.
- III. **Absolute Non-Stealing Vow** in which non-stealing is observed to full extent.
- IV. **Absolute Celibacy Vow** in which celibacy is observed to full extent.
- V. **Absolute Non-Possessiveness Vow** in which non-possessiveness is observed to full extent.

Sadhus and sadhvis live very strict life and follow these vows to the fullest extent. By following these vows they are not subjected to any harmful or sinful activities in their life. That is why not only they do not collect new karmas or collect very minimal new karmas but also get rid off whatever old karmas they have. From ordinary sadhus they rise to be Upadhyaya, Acharya, Arihanta and ultimately to be Siddha. Their life becomes purer and purer which ultimately leads to faster liberation.