

LESSON 24

ARDRAKUMAR

There was an island near by Indian main land. Its king Ardrak was a friend of Shrenik, the king of Magadha. King Ardrak had a son named Ardrakumar who was brave, youthful, handsome and well behaved.

Once, King Shrenik sent a messenger to Ardrak with valuable gifts. Ardrakumar had never seen anything from India. He was impressed by the various types of gifts and was curious to learn about India. He asked king Shrenik's messenger whether his king had any son with whom he could make a friendship. The messenger told him about Abhaykumar who was the eldest and the most intelligent son of Shrenik and was also king Shrenik's prime minister. Ardrakumar was interested in establishing friendship with Abhaykumar. He therefore sent him highly valuable pearls as token of his friendship.

Abhaykumar very much appreciated this gesture. He was aware that the people of that island knew nothing about the true religion. Abhaykumar thought attracting Ardrakumar to the true religion could therefore be the greatest gift for Ardrakumar. With that in mind, Abhaykumar sent to him a very impressive idol of Lord Adinath.

Ardrakumar had never seen such an idol. For him it was simply a statue. He however faintly felt that he had somewhere seen such a shape. As he tried to think deeply over it again and again, he remembered his previous life. He remembered that he lived in Vasantpur in Magadha and had a wife named Bandhumati. Both of them had developed detachment from worldly life on hearing the sermon of Acharya Susthitji and both had renounced sexual life.

After renouncement, once as they happened to be camping he felt an urge to have sex with his wife. Bandhumati did not comply. It was merely a mental lapse on his part. Still as a consequence of that he had been born in this island where the true religion had been unknown.

Ardrakumar started devoutly worshipping the idol in secrecy. He felt very grateful to Abhaykumar for the gift of the idol and was craving to see him. His father however would not allow him to go abroad. In order to prevent Ardrakumar from undertaking any adventure, the king instructed a group of selected soldiers to keep continuous watch over him.

Over a period of time, Ardrakumar created confidence among them by his reliable behavior which caused them to relax their alertness. Meanwhile, he made secret arrangements for a ship and one day making sure that no one was watching him, he sailed to India.

Ardrakumar was keen to undo his lapse of the previous life. He wanted to take diksha and be a monk. He was warned that because of past deeds he would not be able maintain monkhood so wait till that time is over. But he decided to take monkhood anyway to defy his karmas. Therefore in spite of warning he renounced and started moving as a

possessionless Muni. Once he came to Vasantpur which was his home place in the previous life. There he meditated in a temple.

Now, Bandhumati was reborn there as daughter of a wealthy trader and was named Shrimati. While Ardrakumar was meditating in standing posture, she came there to play along with her girl friends. As a part of the game, each girl had to select one of the poles as a symbol of husband. When Shrimati's turn came, she somehow caught the feet of Ardrakumar but not knowing that it was a person she said it was her husband. Ardrakumar was taken aback by this incident. Since he did not want to get involved in any way, he left the place as soon as the girls went away.

Shrimati told her decision to her mother. Her parents explained that Jain monks do not marry and she should forget him. Shrimati stayed committed on her decision and told her parents that she would not marry any one else. As Shrimati grew as a young woman, her father started looking for a suitable match. However, she had not forgotten her play and wanted to marry that Muni. She refused to change her mind. At last her father agreed with her, but he did not know how it would be possible to locate and recognize the Muni whom she had seen only for a moment. She told her father that while holding the feet of the Muni, she had noticed a permanent mark on his foot and could therefore easily recognize him if he came around. Thereupon her father arranged for her to give alms to every Muni that passed through Vasantpur.

Giving alms to monks went on for a long time. However, Shrimati did not lose patience. Eventually, Muni Ardrakumar came there once again. As he came for Gochari (alms), Shrimati immediately recognized him by that mark and held his feet. She told him that she had selected him as her husband and had been waiting for him all this time; she could no longer live without him and would commit death, if he tried to leave.

It was hard for Ardrakumar to resist her plea. He recalled the warnings at the time of his renunciation. He realized that his renouncement was untimely and he was destined to lead worldly life for some time. He therefore agreed to marry Shrimati.

After some time, Shrimati gave birth to a boy. While his son was still young, Ardrakumar once again thought of renouncing the worldly life. He asked Shrimati to let him go on his mission as she could happily lead her life in bringing up the son. Shrimati did not like the idea of his leaving, but she did not find any reason to stop him. She sat at her spinning wheel with tears rolling over her cheeks. When the boy inquired, she said that his father wanted to leave and they would have to live the lonely life.

Innocently, the boy decided to bind his father's feet so that he could not leave and he tied his feet with the rounds of yarn. Ardrakumar was so overwhelmed with the innocent love of the boy that he decided to stay for as many years as the rounds of thread were on his feet. There were twelve rounds. He, therefore, stayed with them for twelve more years.

After twelve years, Shrimati gracefully permitted him to renounce. Ardrakumar, who was now known as Ardrakmuni, was very keen to be a pupil of Lord Mahavira who was in

Rajgruhi at that time. He was also very eager to see Abhaykumar. He therefore proceeded towards Rajgruhi.

On the way he came across the men who were entrusted by his father to keep watch over him. They could not face his father because of their failure to keep proper watch. They had therefore followed him to India and were looking for him. As it was not possible for them to go back to their country, they were passing their time aimlessly and were surviving on burglary. Ardrakmuni felt compassion for their fate and advised them to lead renounced life like him. They considered him as their master and were willing to listen to him. The Muni advised them to join him to go to Lord Mahavira for becoming his pupils.

Later on, they passed by a settlement (hermitage) where the Muni saw meat being sun-dried. On inquiring he learnt that people over there had a strange notion about nonviolence. They thought that they should survive on meat of elephant, because by killing only one animal they could get enough food for all of them to survive for many days. The settlement was therefore known as elephantine settlement. One elephant was tied in its compound for being slaughtered.

As Ardrakmuni realized the fate of the elephant, he overcame with compassion for the animal. That compassion induced a spark in the elephant to pay his homage to the Muni. He broke the tie and ran towards the Muni. All the people got scared and tried to hide in safe place to protect themselves from the wrath of the animal, but the Muni stood there unafraid.

As the elephant was rushing straight towards him, the people thought that the Muni would get killed. The elephant however slowed down and calmly approached the Muni and gently put his trunk at Muni's feet. Ardrakmuni blessed him. Then, feeling free and gratified the elephant went away towards the forest. The people (hermits) got very enraged at the Muni who had apparently caused them the loss of their food.

The Muni explained to them that they had misunderstood the concept of nonviolence. There is no nonviolence without compassion. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin. Violence is carried out at two levels i) gross violence and ii) subtle violence. We should make a distinction between these and gross violence should therefore be made between

There is too much gross violence in killing an animal with highly sensitive nervous system. Animal life has far greater sensitivity than plant life. As long as a person breathes, observing absolute nonviolence is not possible. Therefore, to begin with nonviolence should be taken as total avoidance of all gross violence and resorting to minimum possible subtle violence that may be necessary for survival. Killing an elephant amounts to very gross violence and cannot be justified.

The hermits understood the truth of his teaching and repented for the violence that they had indulged in. Since they were receptive, the Muni explained to them the true religion

in detail. In the end, they decided to become his followers. The Muni however advised them to go to Lord Mahavira for becoming his pupils.

At last Ardrakmuni arrived in Rajgruhi. He first went to Lord Mahavira's assembly and offered his obeisance to him.

Then he met Abhaykumar and expressed his utmost gratitude for drawing his attention towards the true religion by sending the idol of Lord Adinath. Abhaykumar humbly stated that you were destined to be enlightened and he was simply instrumental in bringing it about. Abhaykumar showed his deep reverence for the Muni and paid homage to him.

The Muni joined Lord Mahavira and performed austerities and got rid off all karmas and ultimately attained salvation.