

LESSON 10

MAHAVIRA

In Jain tradition there were twenty-four Tirthankaras in this half time cycle. Mahavira was the twenty-fourth Tirthankara. There were twenty-three Tirthankaras before him. He was born on thirteenth day of bright half of the month of Chaitra in 599 B.C. at Kshatriyakunda (Digambara tradition mentions it was Kundalpur) that was a part of the well-known Republic of Vaishli in North India.

His father's name was King Siddhartha and his mother's name was Queen Trishla. They were very religious people and were the followers of Tirthankara Parshvanath.

Queen Trishla had fourteen dreams (Digambara tradition mentions sixteen dreams) when she conceived Mahavira. While she was pregnant, the wealth of King Siddhartha and everybody in the kingdom grew. The parents considered that this growth was because of this baby. So when the baby was born he was named Vardhaman, which means continuously increasing.

As a child he was very bold and once while playing he saved his friends from a snake. At another time, when Vardhaman was playing with his friends, a heavenly angel joined them in the disguise as a young boy. According to the rules of the game Vardhaman rode on that boy's back when his turn came. While he was riding on the boy, boy turned into a monster to scare him. Vardhaman did not get scared but defeated the monster. The heavenly angel then appeared in his true form. He praised Vardhaman for his boldness and called him "Mahavira" meaning very brave.

Though Mahavira was born with worldly comforts and luxuries but they never attracted him. He lived a simple and detached life. He was married to princess Yashodhara and had a daughter named Priyadarshana.* When his parents died he decided to be a monk. He asked for permission from his brother. His brother was still mourning the loss of their parents so he requested Mahavira to wait for a couple of years before leaving.

Mahavira waited for two more years during which he led a totally detached life. After realizing this, his brother gave him permission to become a monk. Mahavira was thirty years old when he gave up his worldly life and all worldly activities and became sadhu on the 10th day of dark half of the month of Magshar **569BC**.

As a monk, he spent most of his time in austerity and meditation. He tolerated a great deal of physical pain and remained calm and peaceful in spite of the various kinds of tortures. He never lost his calmness nor did he develop hatred for anyone. One of the most harsh one was when a very poisonous snake, Chandkaushika bit him. He was so compassionate that he showed it the path for spiritual uplift. He also forgave all others who caused him pain.

He lived a highly strict and austere life for twelve and a half years and at the age forty-two he attained omniscience (Kevaljnan) 557 B.C. He became Jina, the twenty-fourth

Tirthankara of the present era. As omniscient, he knew everything of the past, present and future at the same time.

As last Tirthankara he revived the religious order (Tirtha) consisting of sadhus, sadhvis, shrawakas and shrawikas. There were 11 ganadharas in his religious order (sangh). Shri Gautamswami was the first Ganadhara. This order became known as the Jain Sangh.

After offering guidance to the Jain sangh and public for thirty years Tirthankara Mahavira attained Nirvana (liberation or salvation) in 527 B.C. at the age seventy-two on 15th day of the dark half of the month of Kartik** at Pavapuri. Nirvana means that he became completely free from getting reborn again. His soul was now free from this world. It is as if the wheel of the cart has stopped rolling. Now he became a Siddha and his soul reached at Siddhashilla, where all other Siddhas have abode and he will enjoy ultimate bliss forever as he no longer accumulates karma.

(* Digambara believes that Mahavira was not married. ** 15th day of the dark half of the month of Kartik of that time of colander is equal to 15th day of the dark half of the month of Aso in current Indian calendar.)