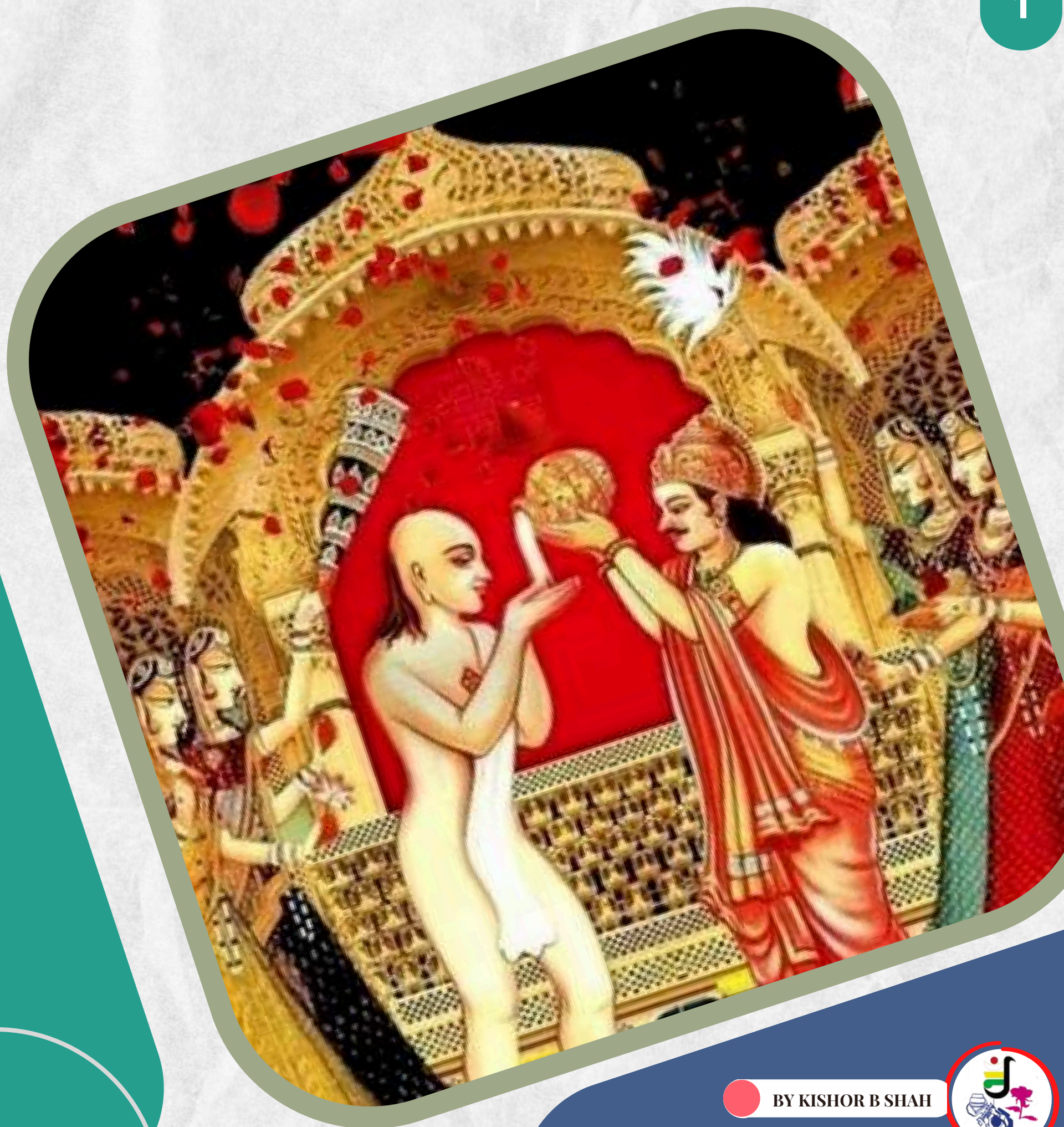




# ADINATH BHAGWAN & SIGNIFICANCE OF AKSHAYA TRITIYA (VARSHITAP PARNA)







According to Jain tradition, a period of progress, known as Utsarpini or the ascending order, is marked with all around improvements such as longer life span, prosperity, and overall happiness. On the other hand, a period of decline, known as Avasarpini or the descending order, is marked with all around deterioration and decline such as a shorter life span, and general gloom. These two periods together make one time cycle. Each Utsarpini and Avasarpini is divided into six eras called Aras, meaning the spokes of a wheel. The present time is the fifth Ara of the Avasarpini period. It is also known as Dusham (Unhappy) Ara

Towards the end of the third Ara, Rushabhdev Bhagwan, became our first Tirthankara and is also known as Adinath (Adi means the first or the beginning and Nath means the Lord)

Adinath was a visionary, a thinker, and an inventor. He foresaw that the struggle for survival would become worse unless some system of producing the necessities of life was created. He realized that people could try to obtain what they need from nature instead of relying exclusively on nature's bounties. Being the genius that he was, he evolved the art of crop cultivation and taught people how to grow food. Thus, he ushered in what we call the age of material civilization.

To make the lives of people more comfortable, he taught them how to make utensils, cook food, build houses, make clothes, cultivate land, and to raise animals like cows and

horses. He also developed different arts and crafts whereby a variety of articles could be made from wood, metal, and stone. He also taught his daughters Brahmi and Sundari, Brahmin script and science of numbers. Thus, the first city named Vinita came into existence. This city was later known as AYODHYA

Once while he was watching a dance, the dancer suddenly collapsed and died. At that moment he realised how impermanent the world is. After dividing his vast kingdom amongst his 100 sons, Adinath took Diksha to give up all worldly pleasures. Thus, he was the first person to take Diksha in the current half of this time cycle.

Adinath meditated without any food and water for six months, then set out to accept food (Ahar). He was the first person to take Diksha in the current half of this time cycle. Since he was the first monk, no one else at the time fully knew what being ascetic entailed - for example, they were unaware about how to offer Gochari (alms). So, when Rushabhdev Bhagwan went from home to home, people did not know what to give him. The people of







Ayodhya offered him gold, jewellery, gemstones, elephants, horses, expensive garments and even their daughters to honour their beloved king. He sought only a morsel of food, but nobody offered it to him. Nobody understood that their King was looking for to receive food to ensure that the monks that would come after him get food and water in the purest form needed to lead an ascetic life.



Thus, he had no choice and fasted for thirteen months and thirteen days, or 400 days total. According to our scriptures, in one of his previous lives, he suggested to a farmer to tie a cloth over the cows' mouths to stop them eating the grass grains recently ploughed. The farmer did not untie the cloth resulting in the cows starving for 13 ghadi (approx. over five hours). Due to this incident, Adinath Bhagwan acquired karma that resulted in a lengthy fast in his next future life.

As the time passed by, the other ascetics accompanying Rishabhdev Bhagwan decided to eat fruits and vegetables naturally available and drifted away from the true ascetic way of life.

After 400 days had elapsed, without eating a morsel of food or water, Rishabhdev Bhagwan came to Hastinapur, where Shreyans Kumar - his grandson lived.

Shreyans Kumar had seen a dream during night that 'Suvarnagiri', the golden mountain had turned black, and he had brought it back its golden colour by washing it with pitchers full of milk. He narrated his dream to his father and friends, but no one could interpret its significance.



Shreyans Kumar was sitting in the balcony of his palace and brooding over the dream he saw the previous night. He then heard the noise and saw the commotion caused by happy masses who had seen Adinath Bhagwan entering the town.

Thousands of citizens of Hastinapur rushed toward Rishabhdev Bhagwan with gifts. Rishabhdev did not even look at these things and continued his graceful walk in the direction of the palace.

Shreyans Kumar welcomed his grandfather and on seeing his grandfather serene face, he acquired *Jati-smaran Jnan* - knowledge of previous births. He remembered in one of his past births, he was the







charioteer of King Vajranabh (the past incarnation of Rishabhdev). This knowledge also made him aware of the duties of laity toward ascetics – that is to offer them *nirdosh gochri*, food that is not explicitly prepared for them. He realized that Rishabhdev Bhagwan had been wandering around without food or water due to the prevailing ignorance of the people regarding ascetic norms.

With due reverence he requested Rishabhdev Bhagwan, "Prabhu! I am honoured by your presence. I have just received 108 pitchers full of fresh sugar-cane juice (Ikshu juice) that are pure and suitable for you in all respects. Kindly accept the juice and break your fast." Rishabhdev Bhagwan extended his cupped palms and Shreyans poured the sugar-cane juice from a pitcher. The power of a Tirthankara is such that not a single drop of sugarcane juice fell on the ground. Rishabhdev Bhagwan broke his fast and the skies reverberated with the sound of divine drums and divine applaud, "Hail the alms giving!" The gods also showered gems, flowers, and perfumes. It is said that the very 'concept of giving / donation' evolved on this day at Hastinapur

Sugar cane is known as Ikshu in ancient language of Sanskrit. As Rishabhdev Bhagwan ended his fast with 'Ikshu aahar', he became popular as Ikshvaku and his lineage and dynasty came to be known as Ikshvaku dynasty.

The day of this parna is known as Akshaya Tirthya. (Also known as Akha Teej). "Akshaya" means never diminishing or inexhaustible, and "Tritiya" refers to the third day of lunar month, Vaishakha.

Akshaya Tritiya has lot of religious significance:

- It is the birthday of Lord Parashurama, one of the ten Dashavataras of Lord Vishnu.
- It is the starting day of Treta Yuga after Satya Yuga.
- It is the day when Sudama offered Aval to Lord Krishna, who in turn blessed him with bountiful wealth and happiness.
- Lord Krishna gave the Akshaya Patra to Draupadi when the Pandavas started for the Vanavasa, so that they always had food in abundance.
- Veda Vyasa started writing the epic Mahabharata.
- The Holy Ganges descended upon the Earth.
- The annual Rath Yatra in Puri Jagannath begins on this day.





The Day of Akshaya Tithiya is worshipped and said to be auspicious in Jainism because it is said to have established the very first "AHAR CHARYA" a methodology to prepare and serve food to Jain ascetics.

In Jainism, fasting is considered a form of penance as it purifies body and mind, and leads to renunciation and asceticism. It helps maintain self-control through abstinence from the pleasures felt through the five senses. It allows the shedding of karma through sacrifice.

Today, in commemoration of Adinath Bhagwan's fast, many Jains complete a Tap (penance) called Varshitap. In keeping with tradition, those who complete the Varshitap break their fast, with fresh sugarcane juice on the day of Akshaya Tithiya – hence it is often referred to as Varshitap Parna. It is believed that religious gifts bestowed on Akshaya Tithiya become inexhaustible. Many Jains even today, observe a fast to commemorate our first Tirthankara Adinath on Akshaya Tithiya and end their fast with sugarcane juice.

Giving Gochari (alms) to Jain Ascetics is considered as one of the noblest acts for a layperson. In this manner, even if we cannot follow the ascetic life, we can show our reverence by offering alms to Jain monks and nuns

### **Akshaya Tithiya in UK**

The day of Akshaya Tithiya has a great significance in Jainism. In this country, we are not fortunate enough to have the presence of Jain Ascetics to offer 'Ahar Charya' or 'Gochari'. However, we as a Jain community can celebrate this pious occasion by donating food, prepared by the community members, to the needy and homeless people – fill their faces with smiles and content in their hearts. This is something that the young & old in our community can get involved in and help raise the profile & spread the message of Jainism in UK.







In Hastinapur, Uttar Pradesh, this is the ancient STUPA, believed to have been built by Shreyans Kumar to mark the exact location of the place where Adinath Bhagwan did his Varshitap Parna on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya. This stupa has been renovated from time to time and at present is covered with scenes showing the Parna of Adinath Bhagwan.



One Anna coin issued by the British Indian Government in the year 1818 on the occasion of Jain festival of Akshaya Tritiya. The coin depicts Rishabhdev Bhagwan accepted sugarcane juice from King Shreyans Kumar and breaking his fast.

