

# Mahavirswami Diksha Kalyanak

Kartik Vad Dassam

On this day, Jains try & do at least  
one 'mala' reciting:

“Om Hrim  
Shri Mahavirswami  
Nathay Namah”



# MAHAVIR

Mahavirswami was the twenty-fourth and last Tirthankara in the current time cycle.

As per Svetambara tradition, Mahavir was born in 599BCE in Kuṇḍagrama, a magnificent city in the heart of Vaishali kingdom near modern day Patna, Bihar, India. His parents, King Saddharta and Queen Trishladevi gave him the name of Vardhaman – which means ‘ever increasing’ – as when he was in his mother’s womb, wealth, prosperity, peace, harmony started increasing tremendously. Due to numerous incidences of courage as a child and young man, he was called ‘Mahavir’ – meaning ‘Great hero’.

At Birth, Mahavir was endowed with three kinds of knowledge – Mati Jnana – sensory knowledge, Shruta Jnana – scriptural knowledge and Avadhi Jnana – Clairvoyance. This is an extraordinary characteristic of a Tirthankara.

During the period of Mahavir birth, India’s religious and social conditions had taken a very ugly turn. The management of the caste system consisting of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras had deteriorated and had lost its influence as a social order system and had become a system of supremacy by Brahmins and oppression of the Shudras and women. Animal sacrifices were widespread in the name of religion, which was manipulated for the purpose of power and domination.

As a youth, Prince Vardhaman lived a very simple and disciplined life, completely detached to the wealth and luxuries around him. He remained immersed in deep contemplations about worldly life and the problems inherent in that. He was very concerned about the adverse situations prevalent in society at that time, which awakened a silent revolution in him.

## Mahavirswami Diksha Kalyanak

At an early age, he realized that worldly happiness and pleasures do not last forever and are based mostly on the inconvenience, miseries, and unhappiness of others. He wanted to renounce his worldly life, his possessions, and worldly pleasures in search of true spiritual happiness. However, whilst in his mother's womb, he had decided not to do this whilst his parents were alive. He was 28 years old when his parents passed away. At the request of his beloved older brother – Nandivardhan he postponed it for a further two years. In doing so he set a very noble example to the world. Even the great one should observe the normal codes of conduct and discipline. He became an ascetic at the age of 30.

No one can enter the life of renunciation without first giving up all their possessions and he wanted to set an example for others to follow. Prince Vardhamana started giving liberally to all those who came to him, for a period of one year before he actually renounced the world. He gave away every day, one crore and eight lakhs of gold coins. In addition to this, he also distributed freely jewels, precious stone, clothes etc. This unique and unprecedented charity is intended to impress on the minds of the people that charity is doubly blessed, "it blesses him who gives and also him who receives."

His family were aware that they would soon lose him. No words could express their sorrow and feeling however they understood that his destiny was greater than merely to serve just one family – his destiny was to be of service to the whole of humanity.



The law of karma is inexorable. Nobody can escape the fruit of action done in the past.



## Mahavirswami Diksha Kalyanak

At the end of the year, Prince Vardhamana had attained perfect "APARIGRAHATVA" - freedom from attachment for possession and was now fully prepared for the life of a monk. His elder brother made elaborate preparations for the initiation. All the people as well as Indra and other gods participated in the ceremony. The prince was anointed with perfumed pastes and bathed in holy waters, and was carried in a palanquin, in a grand procession.

On reaching the forest of "Jnatakhanda", Vardhamana removed his garland and ornaments. At the end of two days of fasting, at the auspicious moment called 'Vijaya' (victory), he stood under an Asoka tree and in presence of thousands of men, he took the solemn vow of renunciation. He then plucked all the hair on his head in four handfuls and the hair on the chin and lips only in one handful and threw it away. (Pancamusti Loca). The hair was collected by Indra. He then solemnly recited the words "I bow down to all the liberated souls" and assumed the life of an ascetic and life of equanimity. He took the severest vow of his lifelong acceptance of the five great vows and declared "I embark upon the lifelong spiritual practice of equanimity and I abandon all evil soul defiling activities". Indra then placed a divine piece of cloth (Devadusya) on his left shoulder.

Mahavir acquired "Manahpariyava Jnana - telepathy" - reading the thoughts of all sentient beings.

## Mahavirswami Diksha Kalyanak



Vardhamana's renunciation was heart-rending. He was alone – no friend, companion, relative, kinsman or other ascetics. For the previous twenty-three Tirthankaras, when they became ascetics, so many others too became ascetics at the same time. Rushabhadeva – four thousand men also accepted asceticism, Vasupujya Swami – six hundred men, Mallinath and Parshvanatha – three hundred men whilst the remaining Tirthankaras accepted asceticism along with one thousand men. From the thousands who were in the processions, there was none who accepted asceticism along with Mahavir.

Mahavir accepted asceticism in the afternoon. Sumatinatha, Shreyansnath, Mallinatha, Neminatha and Parshvanatha all accepted asceticism in the morning and all other Tirthankaras, it was at Noon.

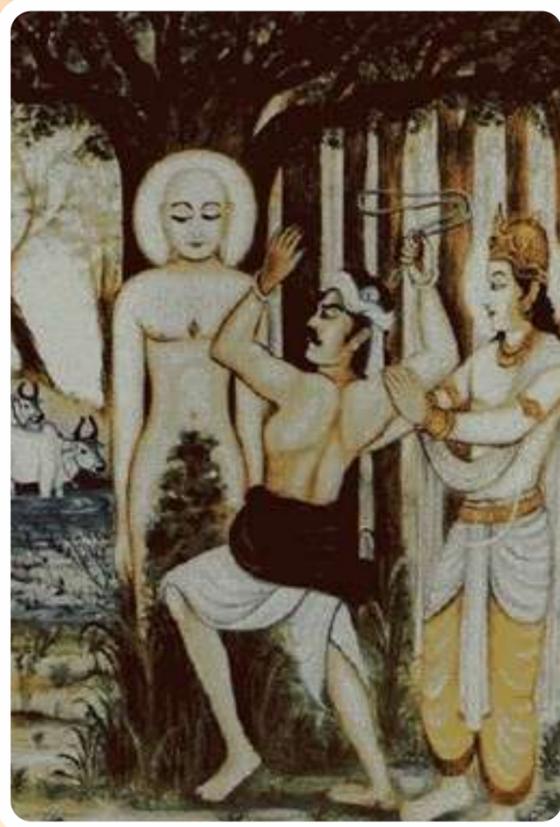
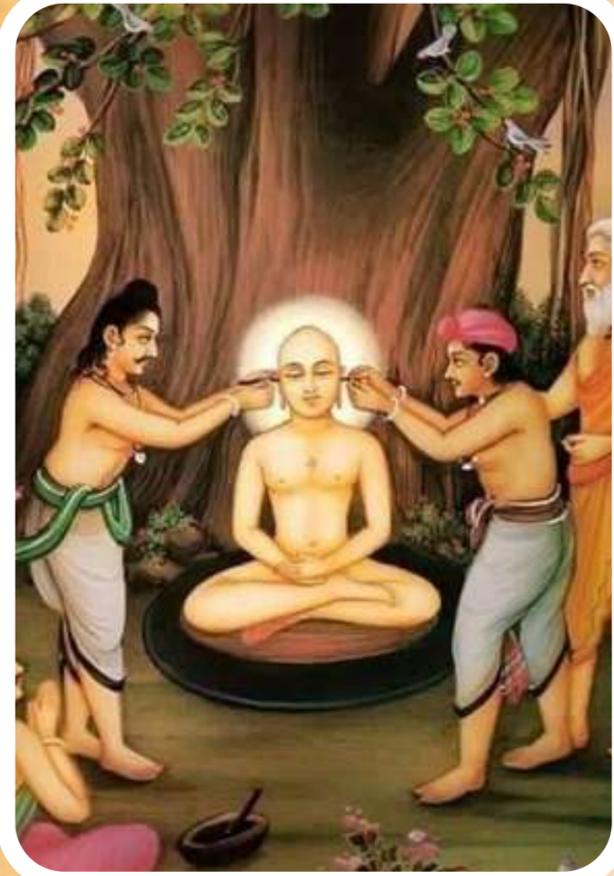
The path of a spiritual aspirant is never smooth. He must be prepared for bouquets as well as brickbats, roses as well as thorns, but he must never lose his equanimity. He must neither be depressed by one nor elated by the other. Then alone he can reach the goal.

After his initiation into the life of a renunciate, Mahavira proceeded to a village called Asthikato to begin his quest for kevala-jnana. Thereon, he immersed himself into intense penance and austerities for over twelve years – to be precise, twelve years, five months, and fifteen days (4,545 days) – some Jain scholars believe the duration of penance was one month longer, that is, 4575 days.

During his penance, Mahavira displayed complete non-attachment towards every material thing. His attitude of non-attachment also extended to his own body, although he never detested or deliberately abused his body because of his deep respect for his bodily existence. Mahavira propounded that a living being can attain enlightenment only through the human body, which is impossible in any other mode of living beings' existence – even as the heavenly beings – and hence, his deep regards for his own body.



## Mahavirswami Diksha Kalyanak | Mahavir's Severe Penances



Jain Agamas have used the term 'Ayatyoga' – meaning concentrated activity of the mind, body and speech to describe Mahavir spiritual practices. During his penance, Mahavir was ever vigilant to his soul and totally indifferent to all things other than self. He was totally absorbed in his self that he never experienced hunger, thirst, heat or cold. His mind, intellect, senses, concerns all moved in one direction of 'the self' for self-realisation and liberation.

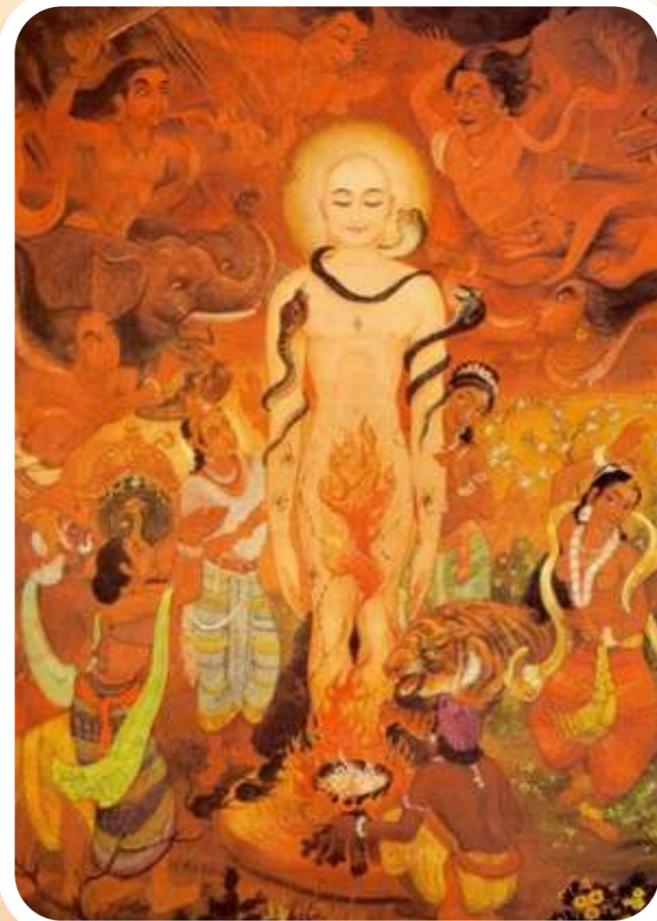
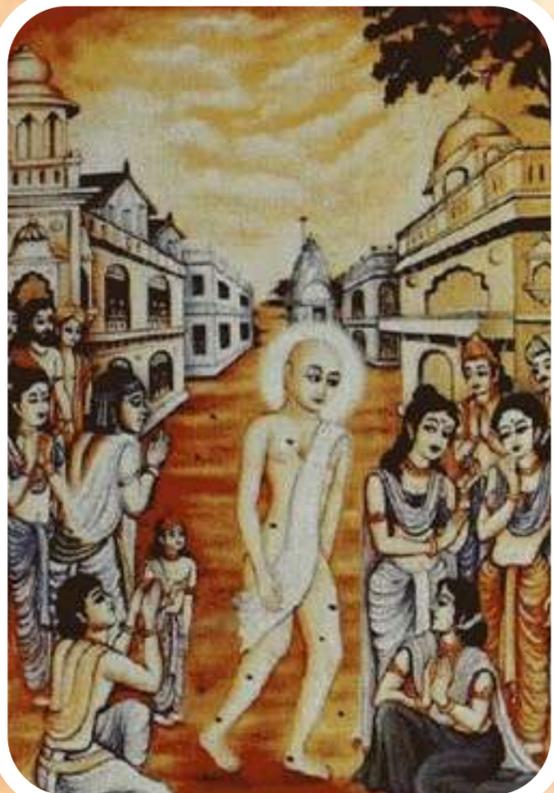
Some highlights of his rigorous penance of over twelve years are:

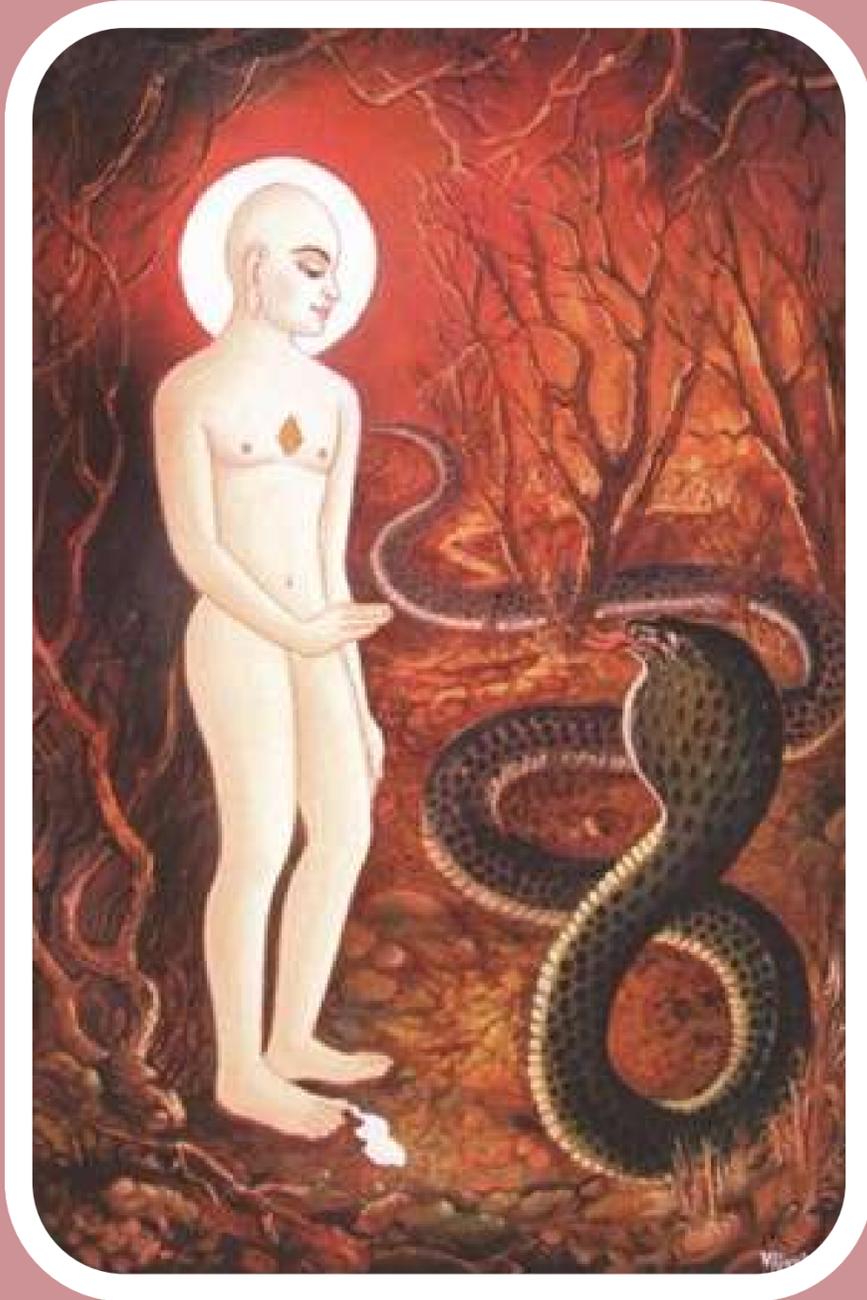
- Mahavir fasted without water (nirjala upvasa) most of the time and took meals with or without water on only three hundred and twenty-five (325) days out of 4545 days of his penance. His fasts ranged from two days to six months each. He lived on three grains for eight months. Fasting was not a ritual for him as generally perceived today.
- Mahavir only accepted 'Prasuka' and 'Niravadya' food i.e food that is not cooked specifically for him and is given to him totally in an non violent way. He eat the food with complete control of his passions.

- Meals by Tirthankaras are always taken in their hands. However, in order that other ascetics could keep wooden vessels for their food, Mahavir accepted alms only once in wooden vessel in his lifetime.

- Mahavira spent most of his time in meditation (dhyana) and remained quiet (mauna) most of the time. If he ever spoke, which was rarely, he spoke, full of compassion and wisdom.

- Mahavira lived in solitude, except for a couple of years when Gosalaka accompanied him.



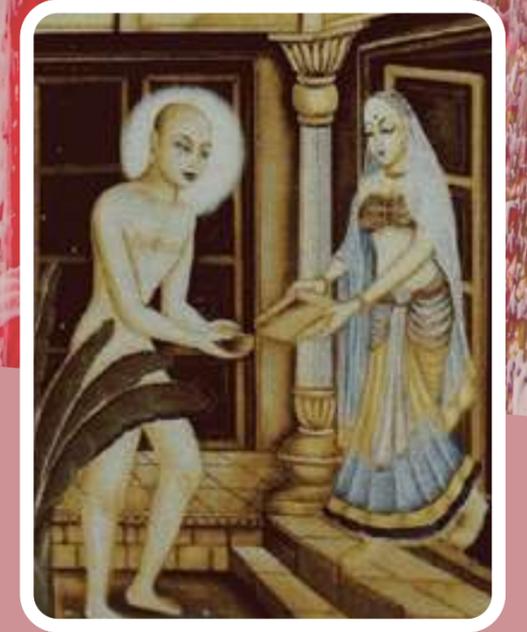


Mahavira had only forty-eight minutes of sleep during the entire duration of his penance. He conquered the need for sleep through meditation and the quest for self-awakening. Whenever he felt drowsy, he took a deep breath and shook off his lethargy.

Mahavira was always on the move to avoid developing any affinity towards any place or people. Except for the four months of rainy season every year, when he remained at one location, he stayed most of the time in uninhabited areas. While moving from one place to another, he did not stay for more than one day in a village and no more than five days in a town.

Mahavira respected his bodily existence, but to forsake attachment (moha) towards his physical being, he cultivated the attitude of "giving up the body" (utsrsta-kaya) and "renouncing the body" (tyakta-deha) during his penance. He endured illnesses and bodily injuries without seeking any medical help.

Mahavira faced numerous adversities that tested his commitment to nonviolence. Nature, animals, and insects caused hardships like severe weather, biting him, and crawling over him, respectively. The humans caused some suffering out of jealousy or ignorance. And gods and demons caused some more to test, disturb, distress, torture, and humiliate him.

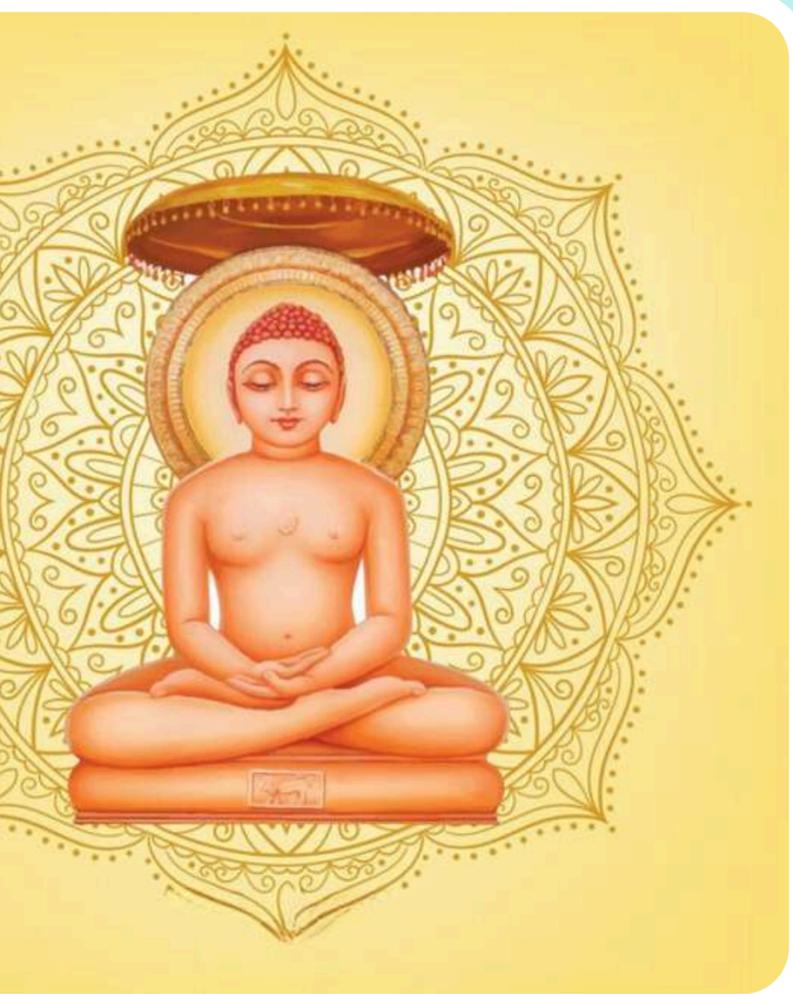


Adversities like Yaksha in Astigama, who tortured him for an entire night by assuming demonic and animal forms, Chandakaushik who was pacified by Mahavir, shepherd in Chamani village who hammered nails into his ears, at many places the villagers were hostile and very violent.

He endured everything with compassion (karuṇa), unyielding nonattachment (anasakti), friendliness (maitri) and equanimity (madhyastha). He maintained an uninterrupted demeanor of joyfulness (pramoda).



# Mahavirswami



Mahavira always remained calm, composed, and tranquil. He gained complete control over his mind, body and speech by restraining his senses and mental trepidations. By the end of his penance, he completely discarded his hurtful karmas (ghatiya or ghatika karmas)—jnanavaraniya (knowledge-inhibiting) karma, darsansaraniya (perception- or awareness-inhibiting) karma, antaraya (hindrance-causing) karma, mohaniya (delusion-causing) karma. At the same time, he eliminated his passions of anger, pride, deceit, and greed (kaṣaya).

After twelve years, six months and fifteen days of observing severe asceticism, he attained omniscience – keval-jnana. He spent the next thirty years showing the path of liberation – Moksha – which consists of the three jewels of Jainism – right perception, knowledge, and conduct.

In 527BC, when the 4th era of the current time cycle was about to end, and the 5th era was about to begin, Mahavir attained nirvana – moksha at the age of seventy-two.

Mahavir Bhagwan's life was full of compassion, Ahimsa, truth, equanimity, austerity coupled with meditation of the purest form and highest order, culminating in the attainment of Moksha – Liberation from the cycle of birth and death. He lived and experienced and then in his doctrines showed the path to salvation. What is required is the proper assimilation of his doctrines and translation into action.

Mahavir made religion simple and natural, free from elaborate ritual complexities. His teachings reflected the internal beauty and harmony of the soul. Mahavira stressed the importance of a positive attitude in life. Mahavira's message of the Five Great Vows (Pancha Mahavrata), Nonviolence, Truth, Non-Stealing, Celibacy, and Non-Possessiveness, is full of universal compassion.

Mahavir emphasized that all living beings, irrespective of their size and shape, are equal and we should love and respect them. His messages of Ahimsa, Anekantavada, and acceptance of the essence of austerity, speech and action are relevant today and will be forever.

## Sources:

Insights into Jainism Exhibition by Kishor B Shah  
Parveen Jain - Intro to Jain Philosophy | Acharya Mahapraya - Sramana Mahavira | KC Jain - Lord Mahavira & his Times | Pratiba Jain | Ashok Singh - Sadhna of Mahavira | Dr S Muni - Spiritual Practices of Mahavira Gokuldas Kapadia - Tirthankara Mahavira

