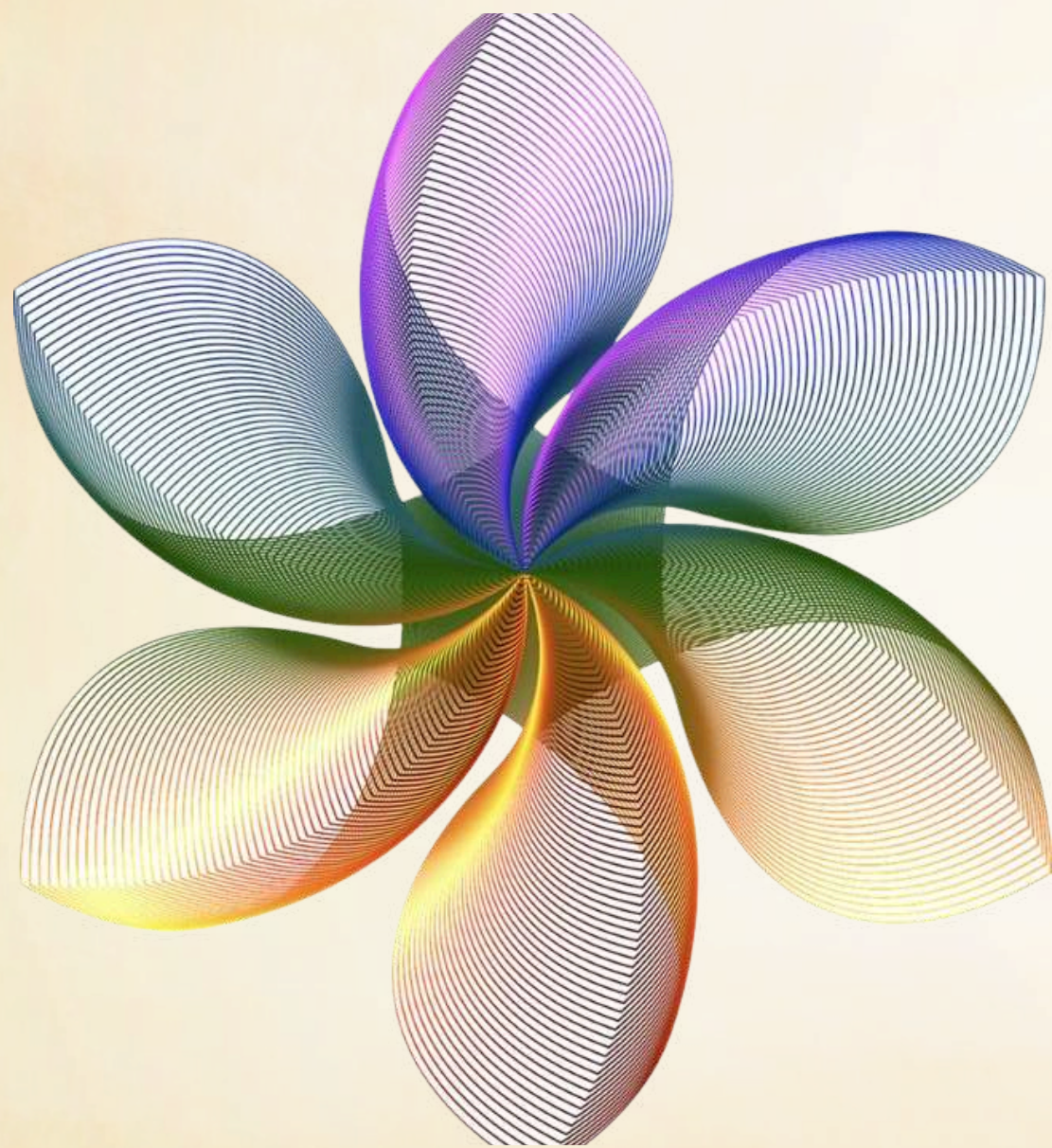


# NIRJARA



In Jain philosophy, Nirjara means "falling off, destruction, or removal of karmas from the soul" Nirjara is derived from two words: "Nir" (prefix) and "Jara" (to fall off)

As per the Jain Karma theory, each action, thought, and intention creates karmic particles that cling to the soul, and Nirjara is the process through which we shed or remove accumulated karmas from the soul, essential for breaking free from the endless cycle of birth and death.

"The soul is like a pure jewel, but as long as it is covered with the dirt of karma, it remains impure. The purpose of Nirjara is to remove this dirt and return the soul to its pristine state."

The ultimate aim of Nirjara is to 'shed the karmic veil' so that the soul can experience its inherent nature of pure knowledge, bliss, and perfect perception. Nirjara represents the path to spiritual freedom, where the soul can attain its highest potential, free from the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth.

Nirjara is of two kinds:-

**Akam Nijara** – the automatic eradication of karma particles through their maturation. This process is involuntary, unmotivated and requires no effort.

**Sakam Nirjara** – the deliberate shedding of karmas by bringing to maturity ahead of their due time by doing penance (austerities /tap) with a goal to eradicate them prematurely. This is voluntary, motivated and requires effort.

Jain scriptures classify the twelve types of penance under two headings – External – Bahya Tap and Internal or Abhyantar Tap.

**Nirjara Bhavana**

Nirjara Bhavna is one of the twelve reflections (bhavanas) in Jainism, focusing on the shedding or destruction of karmas

The contemplation of shedding of karma by six external and six internal austerities and doing so with right knowledge and with intention of achieving spiritual elevation. Observing these external and internal austerities involve increasing awareness of the purity of our Soul, as well as highlighting the independency of the soul, to take our mind off the desires. Contemplation of Nirjara Bhavana leads to a mental and emotional transformation that in turn leads to detachment and equanimity.

"The removal of karmas through the process of austerity is called Nirjara.

The austerities consist of fasting, meditation, self-discipline, and other practices."

*Tattvartha Sutra by Umaswati*, who states that Nirjara, is not just a theoretical concept, but something that is realized through rigorous practices.

"Austerity (tapas) is of two kinds: external and internal. External austerity involves practices like fasting, meditation, and avoiding indulgence. Internal austerity involves purity of mind, speech, and action. Both are necessary for the removal of accumulated karma."

#### *Acharanga Sutra*

Nirjara is a holistic practice involving both external actions (like asceticism and self-discipline) and internal mental states (like purification of thought and intention). Both aspects are crucial for achieving spiritual liberation.

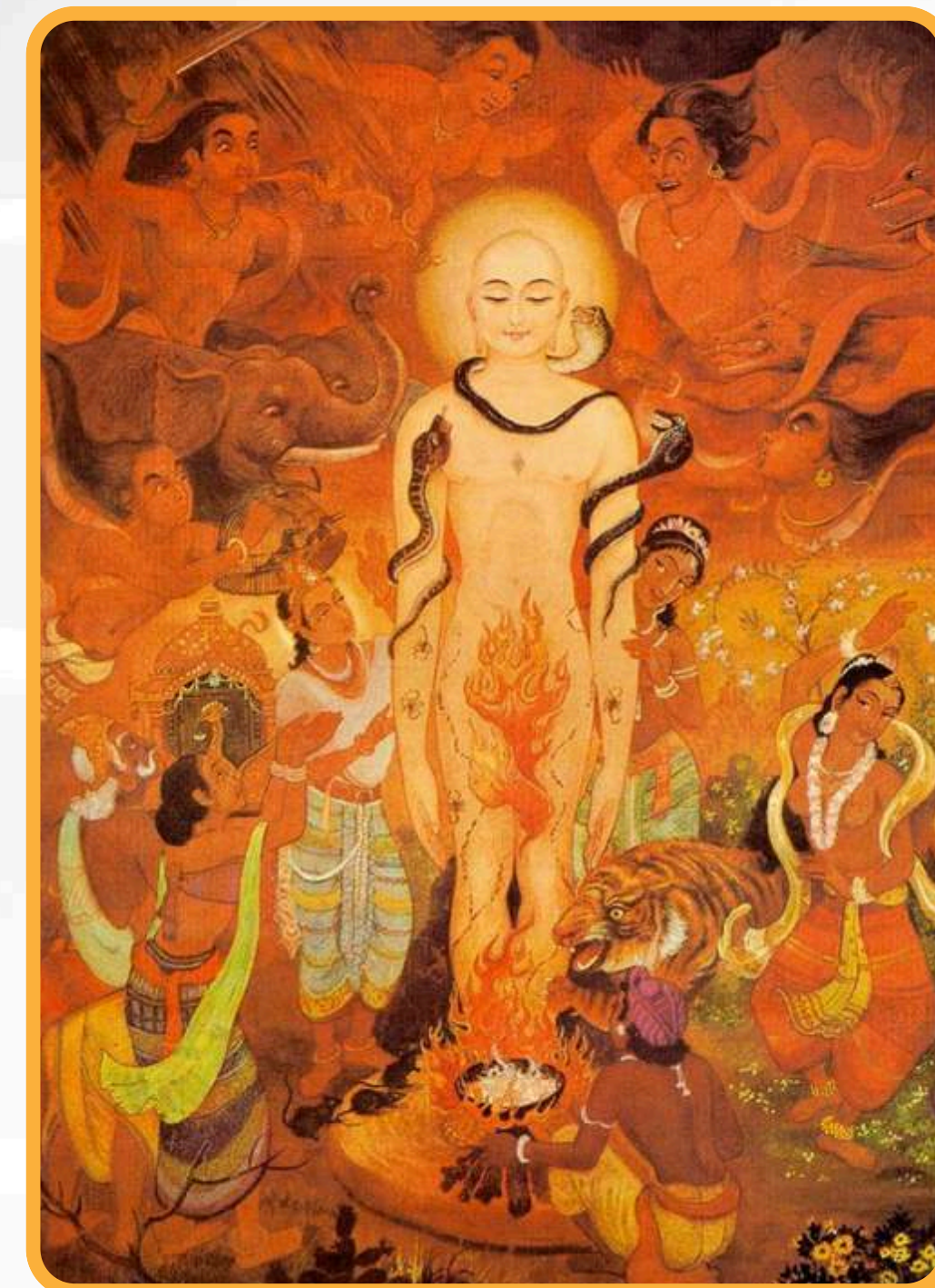
"The mind that is constantly engaged in purifying itself through meditation and renunciation of passions is the one that brings about the destruction of karmas. Such a mind is the true essence of Nirjara."

*Pravachanasara by Acharya Kundakunda*, who is stating that Nirjara is not merely about physical penance, but about an internal purification process that requires concentration, meditation, and a surrender of attachments to worldly desires. Mental discipline is important to achieve Nirjara.

"Lord Mahavira, through relentless austerity and fasting, endured the hardships and burned away the karmas accumulated over countless lifetimes. His example shows that true Nirjara is achieved through perseverance and renunciation."

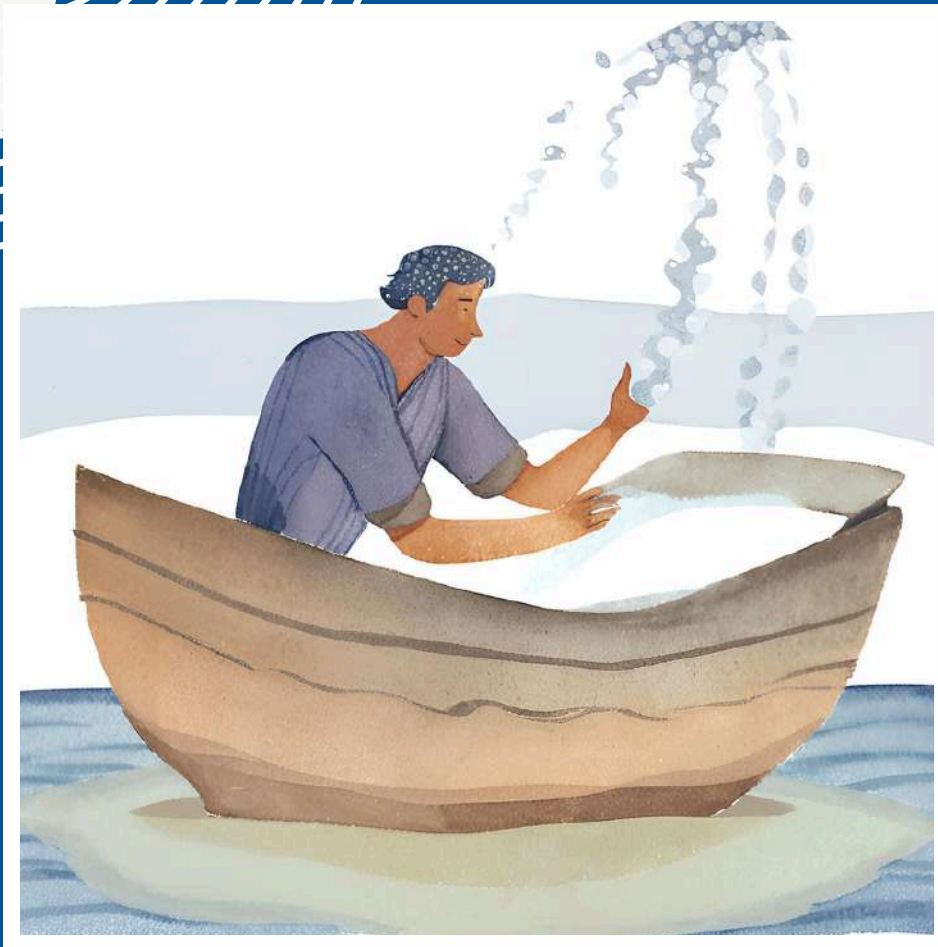
*Kalpa Sutra* - Lord Mahavir, the 24th Tirthankara, is often cited as an exemplar of the practice of Nirjara. His life was one of extreme austerity, including long fasts, meditation, and non-attachment to the physical world. For 30 years, Mahavir lived as a Prince in the lap of luxury but was immune to it. Following his diksha – renunciation, as mentioned in the Kalpa Sutra, he faced numerous hardships and adversities with absolute equanimity and without raag (attachment) or dwesh (aversion). His ultimate goal was to purify the soul by destroying the karmas that had bound him to the cycle of birth and death

## NIRJARA IN THE JAIN SCRIPTURES



The boating metaphor effectively illustrates the process of Nirjara in Jain philosophy:

- The boat represents the soul, while the water already in and entering the boat symbolizes the accumulation of karmas in our present life and previous lives.
- Discovering the rising water level in the boat is akin to realising the accumulation of karmas in the soul
- Sealing the hole in the boat represents **Samvara** or stopping the influx of new karmas.
- The water in the boat needs to be removed. This can be achieved by allowing the water in the boat to evaporate in the heat of the sun on its accord – symbolizes '**Akam Nirjara**'
- The boatperson working hard to bail out the water symbolizes '**Sakam Nirjara**'
- The removal of water from the boat symbolizes – **Nirjara** - the shedding or destruction of accumulated karmas from the soul
- Completely emptying the boat of water parallels the process of shedding all karmas, leading to moksha or liberation



This metaphor highlights that Nirjara requires active effort, similar to the deliberate action of bailing water out of a boat. It also illustrates that Nirjara follows Samvara (stopping new karma influx) in the spiritual journey, emphasizing the importance of both preventing new karmas and removing existing ones.

"We all live with attachments to worldly life, because we believe that our happiness comes from worldly things and people. This attachment to worldly life enhances the influx of karmas. Tapa, or tyag is about releasing the belief that anyone or anything outside of us is responsible for our happiness. This belief that leads to dependency on anything external - beyond our Soul - is called Mithyatva.

Observing austerities or tapa are inner and outer practices, and involve increasing awareness of the purity of the soul, along with the independency of the soul, to take our mind off desires."

*Extracted from an article by Hema Pokharna*