

SKYwriting

Swami Kuvalayananda Yoga Foundation Newsletter

No. 22

July – December, 1997



Mahāvīra as a Siddha
Miniature Paintings
of the Jaina Kalpasūtra
Freer Gallery of Art
Washington, DC

Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra

(599-527 B.C.), 542-470, 549-477

LIFE SKETCH

Name	Mahāvīra (Vārdhamana Jñātṛputra)
Father's Name	Siddhārtha (Sāmanta)
Mother's Name	Trīśālā (Priyakarini)
Birth Date	599 B.C.
Sex	Male
Caste	Kṣatriya (Warrior)
Place	Vaiśālī, Vihāra, INDIA
Marital Status	Married
Lifespan	72 Years

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

Home

Mahāvīra's parents were wealthy. They were followers of Parśvanātha. Both were religious.

Mahāvīra's mother persuaded him to marry Yaśoda. He was blessed with a daughter, Priyadarśanā.

Education

He was educated to be a warrior.

Caste

The Kṣatriyas were dissatisfied with the Brahmins, their religious practices, and their philosophy.

Other events

The death of his parents deeply influenced his life.

REACTION

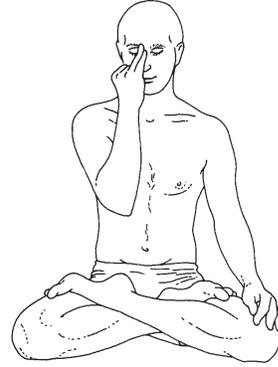
At the age of thirty, Mahāvīra realized the futility of worldly life. He left home, with the permission of his brother, Nandivardhana.

PRACTICES

He practiced severe austerities for about twelve years. He meditated, wandered and begged. He was detached from worldly desires. He attained Kaivalya (enlightenment) under an Aśoka tree. He was forty-two years of age.

He became the 24th Tīrthaṅkara. Literally, Tīrthaṅkara is a fordmaker from material bondage to freedom.

UJJĀYĪ + Breathing with Sound (Second Stage)



Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative pose.

Take breath in through both nostrils with partial closure of the glottis, in a controlled way, as in the first stage.

Place your thumb at the right nostril, keeping the ring finger and little finger at the bridge of the nose, preferably with the ring finger touching the point between the eyebrows.

Exhale through the left nostril, again with partial closure of the glottis, slowly and rhythmically.

Suggestions

1. Start this practice only after mastering the first stage.
2. Increase the number of cycles gradually and cautiously.
3. Avoid forceful and sharp exhalation.
4. While switching from Pūraka (inhalation) to Recaka (exhalation), let it be smooth, like a wave.
5. Avoid unnecessary movements of the body.
6. Keep your face calm and pleasant.

Results

The results are the same as for the first stage, but it gives you better control in regulating your breath.

Discussion and References

According to tradition, Pūraka, Kumbhaka, and Recaka are prescribed for the general practice of Prāṇāyāma with a ratio of 1:4:2.

That is, if Pūraka is eight counts, Kumbhaka will be thirty-two counts, and Recaka will be sixteen counts. This practice seems to provide Pūraka and Recaka ratios of 1:2 without much effort.

For example, if you inhale through both nostrils in a specified period of time, logically it will take double the time to exhale through one nostril, using the same force. Therefore, Ujjāyī is considered a preliminary practice in learning to regulate the Pūraka and Recaka phases.

Ujjāyī is the effortful lifting (Ākṛṣya) of the breath from the navel.

A Teacher's Guide for Beginning Yoga, Chapter XXVII

ॐ सूर्यो मे चक्षुषिः ।

चक्षुर्हृदये ।

हृदयं मयि ।

अहममृते ।

अमृतं ब्रह्मणि ॥

om sūryo me cakṣuṣiḥ /
cakṣurhṛdaye /
hṛdayam mayi /
ahamamṛte /
amṛtam brahmaṇi //

OM

Surya (sun) dwells in my eyes;
the eye in the heart;
the heart in me;
I in immortality.

Immortality dwells in Brahman.



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Man was endowed with two ears
and one tongue, that he may listen
more than speak.

HASDAI BEN HAMELEK VEHANAZIR

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TEACHING

Some think that Mahāvīra founded Jainism. Others believe that he brought Jainism into the limelight; that he injected life into a tradition started by Pārsvanātha in 850 B.C.

Jaina is a follower of a Jina (victor). Their are two groups within Jainism, the Digambaras and the Śvetāmbaras. The Digambaras were naked by tradition, while the Śvetāmbaras wore white.

When Mahāvīra was born, he had two choices – to be a theist or an atheist. He modified the religion to encompass both theist and atheist ideas. This view is reflected in his *Syātavāda*. Syāt means maybe, perhaps. Syātavāda is an assertion of probability.

Mahāvīra taught Samyak Śravaṇa, that proper listening is the key to understanding the truth.

The goal of a Jain monk is to free his soul from the bondage of material existence. Karma (activity) is considered to be the cause of this bondage. If the activity is reduced and ultimately stopped, further Karma will not be accumulated. Ascetic practices will destroy the Karma that is already present. Renunciation is the hallmark of Jainism.

The goal of Jainism is to realize “where the man is at” – to become Paramātman (a perfected soul).

All Jains take five vows: Ahimsā (non-injury), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (not taking or receiving anything), Aparigraha (renunciation of possessions), and Brahmacharya (chastity).

Ahimsā became the main vow for the followers of Jainism. Jain monks observe this vow so deeply that they carry a broom, sweeping a path as they walk to avoid stepping on small creatures, and they cover their mouths with a cloth to avoid breathing in the tiniest beings.

The Śvetāmbara scriptures are about forty-five in number. Most of these are in Ardha-Māgadhī, the language of the people. Eleven texts are the oldest and most important. These are a collection of sermons and dialogues of Mahāvīra called Aṅgas (limbs).

The Digambaras believe that the original oral teachings of Mahāvīra have been lost. Their texts were composed by the leaders of the group to preserve the message of the Tīrthaṅkara.

FINAL MESSAGE

Mahāvīra died on Āśvina Amāvasyā (September/October new moon) at the age of seventy-two in a village now known as Pāvāpurī in Bihar. He left eleven original disciples, Gaṇadhara (leaders of the assembly), 14,000 monks, 36,000 nuns and 377,000 lay followers.

Mahāvīra was the only Tīrthaṅkara who remained naked. He accepted both men and women into his order. He raised the status of Ātman to Paramātman. He did not accept a Creator God.

When his first pupil Gaṭautama was away spreading the message, Mahāvīra

left his body. He left a message for Gaṭautama, “Tell Gaṭautama – You have crossed the river. Why are you still standing at the bank? Gaṭautama, you left wealth, wife, and all worldly possessions. And now you have attached to me.” At that moment, Gaṭautama realized that he had complete knowledge.

It is said Mahāvīra left his home with one cloth, thinking that less the material, less the problem. He would sleep on it, wear it on his body, etc. One day a naked beggar asked for the cloth. Mahāvīra gave him half of it, thinking that he could manage with half a blanket. He went further, and the half-blanket caught in a rose bush. He started laughing. He thought, “The beggar took half and now the bush wants the other half! The animals and birds remain naked. I am a man. I can manage this way as well.” And so Mahāvīra became Digambara (naked).

सीसं जहा सरीरस्स, जहा मूलं दुमस्स य ।
सच्चस्स साधुधम्मस्स, तहा ज्ञाणं विधीयते ॥
(समण-सुत्तं)

Sīsaraṁ jahā sarīrassa, jahā mūlaṁ dumassa ya.
Savvassa sādhudhammssa, tahā jhāṇaṁ vidhīyate.
(Samaṇa-Suttaṁ)

As the head in the human body and the root of the tree are important, in the same way, the root of all the Dharmas (laws of nature) of a sage is Dhyāna (meditation).

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

Born in a rich family. Educated as a warrior. Married. Blessed with a daughter. Lost his parents. Rebelled against the tradition. Left home. Practiced austerities. Became enlightened. Returned to society. Served humanity for thirty years. Taught reverence, love, and compassion for all. Six million Jains of both the Digambaras and Śvetāmbaras groups still follow him. He was a contemporary of Gaṭautama Buddha.

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From the forthcoming book,
Explorers of the Truth
by Vijayendra Pratap

Your suggestions are welcome.