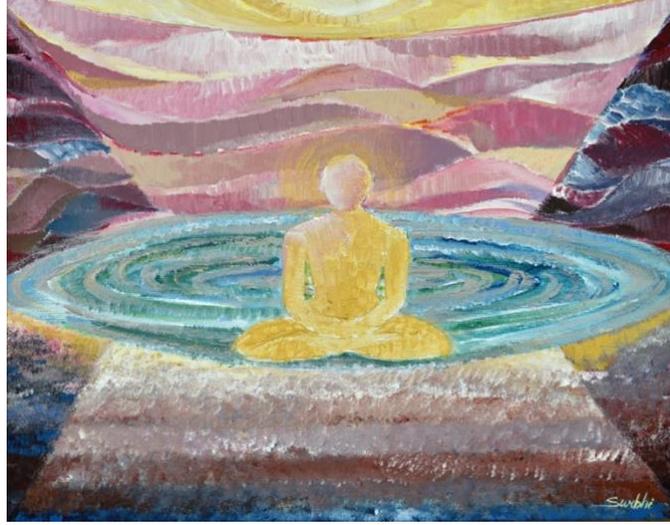


The Relevance of The Paryuṣaṇa Parva

By Parveen Jain



The Paryuṣaṇa Parva (festival) is the most auspicious festival for Jains. The festival has immense benefits for personal development, and thus, immeasurable value for the betterment of society. That is why it is called the king of all Jain festivals – Parvahirāj Paryuṣaṇa. In this article, we discuss some of the key aspects of this auspicious festival.

Cāturmāsa

During his twelve years of intense penance and austerities, Lord Mahāvīra spent most of his time away from towns and villages in forests and wilderness during the twelve-and-a-half years of his intense penance and austerities. During the rainy season, he used to stay at secluded places in villages and towns.

As we know, the monsoon rains in India are heavy, and there used to be flooding all over the place – which happens even today. Because of the rains, the ground gets saturated, it is muddy, and there are pools of water all over. As a result, a large number of small animals like rodents, snails, worms, toads, mosquitoes, lizards, snakes come to the surface. It becomes difficult to walk or sit in the wilderness without hurting some life forms.

Everything that Mahāvīra did was driven from ahimsā. Ahimsā is the foundation of the Jain tradition. In order to minimize or eliminate hurting other living beings during the four months of the rainy season, Mahāvīra started to stay at a secluded place in or near towns and villages



during his twelve-and-a-half years of intense penance, and later on, he guided his ordained disciples and laity followers to observe this practice. The four-month period starts on *Śayani Ekādaśi* (the eleventh day) of *Śukla Pakṣa* (the first bright half) of *Āṣāḍha* (the fourth month of the Jain lunisolar calendar) and ends on

Prabodhini Ekādaśi (the eleventh day) of the first bright half of *Kārttika* (the eighth month of the Jain lunisolar calendar), that is from mid-July to mid-November of the Gregorian calendar. The four-month period came to be known as *Cāturmāsa*.

He taught his followers to utilize the *Cāturmāsa* for personal improvements by engrossing in introspection, penance, austerities, self-studies, and other spiritual and religious practices. The practice has continued uninterruptedly for twenty-six centuries, and even today, all monks stay at one place and immersed themselves in heightened spiritual practices. As much as possible, many of the householders also slow down their daily routines by limiting travel, social and professional engagements, etc.

Paryuṣaṇa

Living with the self and spiritually discovering the self.

During the 4-months *Cāturmāsa* period, Mahāvīra asked his followers to leave aside the period of *Paryuṣaṇa* for deep reflection and introspection of one's own conduct and self-evaluation. The critical day to remember is that the 50th day from the start of *Cāturmāsa* is supremely auspicious for the Jain followers. The day is known as *Samvatsarī*. It falls on the fifth day of *Śukla Pakṣa* (the first bright half) of *Bhādrapada* (the sixth month of the Jain lunisolar calendar), which falls in late August or early September of the Gregorian calendar.

Over time, two significant traditions of the Jain followers emerged – *Śvetāmbara* and *Digambar*. The *Śvetāmbara* celebrations are for eight days ending on this auspicious day or a day before *Samvatsarī*. The *Digambar* celebrations, called *Daśa Lakṣaṇa*, are for ten days starting from the *Samvatsarī* day and ending on the day called *Anant Caturdaśi*.

On a positive note, having it at different times has an advantage, especially for those who have Samvatsarī and Digambar family members – they have the option of celebrating the Paryuṣaṇa for 18 days for added spiritual benefits.

We will talk about Śvetāmbara Paryuṣaṇa and Digambar Daśa Lakṣaṇa celebrations later in this article.

Note the word “celebrations.” This is unique to Jains. In general, one would relate “celebration” with partying, food, etc. That would be a celebration for the body.

For Jains, the real me is my soul, so our celebrations are for the happiness and peace of our souls.

The Relevance of Paryuṣaṇa in Contemporary Society

Jains have been celebrating Paryuṣaṇa for millennia, and it is as relevant today as it was in Mahāvīra’s time. Let’s take a look.

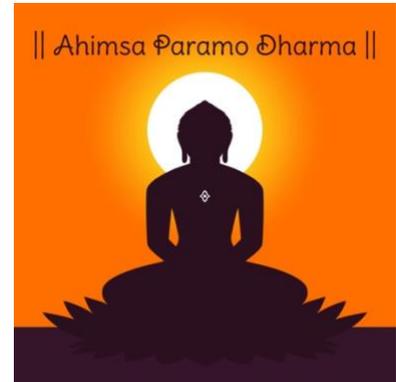
Remember that for Jains, every aspect of our faith is derived from the principle of ahimsā. When we consider the four primary vows in addition to ahimsā, they are all manifestations of ahimsā. For instance,

Truthfulness (*satya*) is nonviolence in speech,
Non-stealing (*acaurya* or *astaye*) is nonviolence in interactions,
Non- or limited possessiveness (*aparigraha*) is nonviolence in acquisition, and
Respectful conduct (*brahamacarya*) is nonviolence in conduct.

Lord Mahāvīra emphasized nonviolence in every aspect of living and our relationship with other living beings – human and non-human – and the environment. We build and strengthen our worthy demeanor by adopting for important traits of:

Compassion (*karuṇā*),
Friendship (*maitri*),
Elation (*pramoda*), and
Equanimity (*madhyasthātā*).

These are all derived from ahimsā and are all great qualities to possess.



Also, an act of violence or violation is not limited to just physical actions. Our mind, body, and speech are all cohorts in this. The deadliest act of violence actually occurs in thought when contemplate and scheme violence.

However, in general, we are conscious of these teachings, and yet we continuously divert from the path we all know is good for us. For instance,

Many times, we get angry on trivial matters,
We tend to impose our way, by insisting my opinion is the only correct one,
We indulge in politics in professional and social life – in thoughts, and not just in perceivable ways,
We improperly maneuver matters for personal gains,
We are not careful and deliberate enough in treating animals and the environment,
We feel jealous and cheated at someone's wealth, success, job, property, etc.,
We indulge in unnecessarily acquiring material objects
We commit intellectual violence by stealing someone's else work and calling it own
And so on.

We continuously do things that offend and harm others. That sometimes happens intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Sometimes it is done directly by us, some other times we have others do it for us, and yet some other times, we praise those who do it.

Many times, we engage in dubious means to achieve our objective. Even when the objective is worthy, if we deploy unworthy means, such means render it unworthy.

In our hearts. we know these actions are not suitable for our soul and us. The question is, should we continue to pile our misdeeds and sins, or should we interrupt once in a while to stop, introspect, and do a course correction.

I am sure, in our hearts, we all want to stop, introspect and course correct. We are all running all the time on high gears; we need to take some time off to slow down and take stock of where we are and where we are going. We need the time to reflect and introspect.

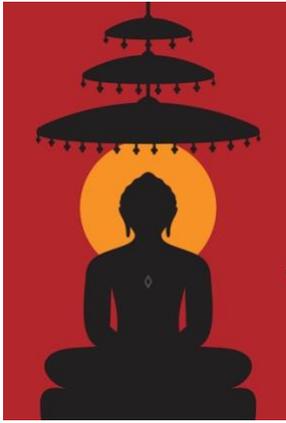
One may say that we take vacations and have family time for that purpose. But we know that that is for our bodily satisfaction.

We need to take time for our spiritual healing, that is, to heal our true self – our soul or jīva. That is what the Paryuṣaṇa celebrations are for. Thus, this festival remains as relevant today as it was centuries ago – perhaps more so today than ever before.

Another way to think is that if our supreme Guru, Mahāvīra, felt the need and practiced Paryuṣaṇa for himself and his followers, its applicability is much more relevant today when, with our own doing, we have made life much more complicated and fast-paced.

How Do We Celebrate Paryuṣaṇa

The underlying objective is to create a demeanor of spirituality that is auspicious, positive, and enriching.



In view of the significance of Paryuṣaṇa, almost all Jains engage in some form of spiritual activity during the eighteen days of celebrations – eight days in the Śvetāmbara tradition and ten days in the Digambar tradition. This comprises pragmatic efforts directed towards *tapas*, *tyaga*, and *dhyana* – that is, penance, renunciation & charity, and meditation – involving one or more forms of fasting, keeping silence, renunciation, meditation, and other spiritual activities, etc. There are no prescriptive measurements for the amount of any of these activities; everyone does it according to their desire and capability. As an extreme example,

During the twelve-and-a-half years of his penance, Mahāvīra took food on only 325 days out of 4,545 days. His fasts ranged from 2-day to 6-month durations – his longest one was 175 days.

Mahāvīra had only 48 minutes of sleep during the 12-1/2 years of penance. He was engrossed in meditation (*dhyāna*) almost all the time. He addition, he stayed quiet most of the time.

Why do we practice penance (*tapas*) like fasting?

These days, we see increasing emphasis on intermittent fasting and dietary restrictions regarding both the amount and the duration. Medical professionals and healthcare specialists recommend fasting from the viewpoint of physical wellbeing.

Jains have practiced various forms of fasting uninterruptedly for millennia in recognition of its physical benefits as well as the tremendous spiritual benefits when conducted with the right frame of mind.

Earlier, we talked about the five vows of Jain dharma – nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, restrained acquisitions, and honorable conduct, and four behavioral traits of compassion, friendship, equanimity, and elation. We always ponder how do we attain or strengthen these qualities.

The answer is in self-control and restraint, and Paryuṣaṇa is all about nurturing the characteristics of self-control and restraint. The primary cause of our unworthy tendencies comes from the uncontrolled behavior of our mind that is wandering every awake moment, and our five senses – touch, sight, smell, taste, and hearing.

Amongst all of our senses, the taste is perhaps the hardest one to control. It is said that one who is able to restrain the sense of taste has come a long way in controlling oneself. That is why fasting is essential for creating and enhancing the discipline to control our senses.

Since complete fasting is not possible for everyone, there are various other ways by which we can control our food intake or limit our taste through *unnodari* (eating only a part of what the body desires for satisfying hunger), *ekaśanā* (eating one time in a day), *beyaśanā* (eating only two times in a day), *āyambila* (consuming only one time in a day with restrictions on the type of food), etc., and the major undertakings like a *varṣi tapa* (eating one day and fasting the next day, over a four hundred day period).

Why do we engage in meditation (*dhyāna*)?

The primary purpose of meditation is to restrain our minds by engaging in mindfulness – the age-old practice pioneered by the Jains and Buddhists. It is the most effective way to reach stillness by focusing the mind that is always running at the speed of light and covering unbounded territories of all sorts. Focusing the mind is one of the hardest things to achieve, and one needs the right mindset and willpower. It requires practice and commitment, but the benefits are exhilarating.



There are various ways of conducting meditation, all designed to help achieve mental stillness. For instance, from my personal experience, in the initial stages of meditation,

the mind starts replaying past events like “movies” as soon as we start the practice. These movies can be random in nature, taking us to imaginary rides of jubilant fantasies and other times to sorrowful nightmares. The mind can traverse from a few minutes to multi-years in recalling past events and similarly venture into the future. In order to minimize the impact of such strides, one needs to learn to disengage from these imaginary voyages. Once one learns not to interject or interfere in these visions, that person can start enjoying the benefits of meditation.

Why do we observe austerities (*tyāga*)?

The four delusional passions of anger, ego, deceit, and greed (together called *kaṣāya*) and two unworthy tendencies of attachment (*rāga*) and malice (*dveṣa*) are the main reasons for an individual’s spiritual downfall. Out of these, greed could be considered the hardest to control. In that sense, it is the worst. It is the catalyst that breeds the other undesirable traits.

For instance, when we long for something, say some property or wealth, or a political or career position, and we don’t get it, we could start indulging in adverse activities. We become angry and spiteful and deploy deceitful or malicious means to achieve what we desire, whether or not it is legitimately ours.

We all saw what happened on January 6 in the US Capitol this year (2021).

Greed does not end with materialistic articles. It extends to everything in life – a student’s greed to be 1st in class at any cost, a Guru’s greed to ordain more disciples than anyone else, a person’s greed to become most famous, etc.

The practice of austerities strengthens our resolve to mitigate greed. The act of renunciation awakens us to restrain our unnecessary desires and motivates us to adopt pragmatic non-possessiveness.

Our supreme teachers and Ācāryas structured Paryuṣaṇa to grant us more than one way to build self-control, which is essential for diminishing our tendencies of anger, ego, deceit, and greed. Take the example of anger; an uncontrolled outburst can lead to serious consequences that we generally regret afterward. By fostering self-control, the outcome can be changed significantly.

For instance, when we are angry, we can control ourselves and not take any action for some time – 1-hour, half-day, or a day, and take that time to reflect or not think about the

incident. By the time the waiting period is over, one may decide to take a different course of action, including none at all. Many times, the angry person may be ready to forgive the person who caused the anger.

There are immense benefits of self-restraint, such as peacefulness, friendliness, and happiness. The benefits are not just outwardly; they are for the inner self as well. Self-control gives us the necessary time to rethink and recharge our batteries of worthiness.

Activities During Paryusana Celebrations in Śvetāmbara Tradition

During the eight days of Paryuṣaṇa celebrations in Śvetāmbara tradition, the practitioners study the Kalpa Sūtra scripture and listen to its recitation and explanation by learned ones like monks, nuns, and scholars.

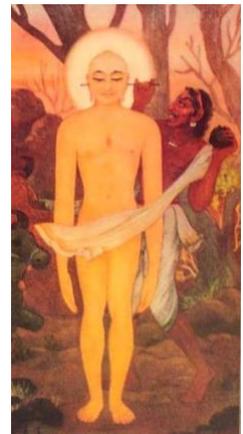
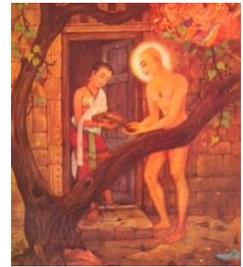
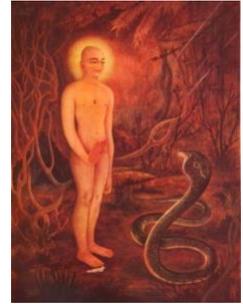
The Kalpa Sūtra provides a vivid outline of Lord Mahāvīra's life and the lineage of his disciples. In addition, the scripture offers brief references to the lives of Lord Parśvanātha, Lord Ariśthanemī, and Lord Adinātha.

Mahāvīra's life is full of incidences that are immensely inspirational and motivational. For instance,

Mahāvīra's interaction with the Candakauśika serpent is a treatise on the effects of delusional passions like anger on one's spiritual journey and how the cycle of karmas hurts our progression. Candakauśika's change to meritorious demeanor speaks to the power of Mahāvīra's logic and reasoning.

The Candanbālā episode in the last year of Mahāvīra's penance is a shining example of how he deployed ahimsā, compassion, and personal penance and restrained to illustrate the plights of women, slaves, and other suppressed minorities. His nonviolent efforts led to massive social transformations and were emulated by Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. ML King, and others.

The episode involving cow herder near the end of Mahāvīra's intense penance shows how he endured the pain and suffering caused to him as retribution for the pain and atrocities his *jīva* had caused to others in previous lives. Mahāvīra demonstrated how one's suffering in the present life is the



result of one's own doing. When experiencing the suffering, by being equanimous, how one can avoid collecting more unworthy karmas to escape more sufferings in future lives. These and many other episodes from Mahāvīra's life are narrated and studied during the Paryuṣaṇa to learn and improve one's own conduct.

In addition, many people emulate the ascetic lifestyle during this period. They engross themselves in various religious and spiritual rituals. Some actually stay in the *upashraye* (the dwelling place of monks and nuns) to live like an ascetic.

In addition, people practice Patikramaṇa (discussed later) once or multiple times a day, every day.

On the eighth day of Samvatsarī, people perform elaborate Patikramaṇa for more-profound self-evaluation, reflection, remorse, and repenting. This is done privately as well as in group setting. After the Patikramaṇa, people ask for and grant forgiveness to each other in a highly spiritual, friendly, and peaceful setting.

Activities During Paryusana Celebrations in Digambar Tradition – Daśa Lakṣaṇa

Daśa Lakṣaṇa refers to ten indicators of virtuous conduct – the ten virtues all Jains strive for.

Supreme forgiveness (*uttama kṣmā*) to mitigate anger

Modesty or humility (*mārdava*) to mitigate ego

Straightforwardness (*ārjava*) to mitigate deceit

Contentment (*ṣauca*) to mitigate greed

Truthfulness (*satya*)

Self-Restraint (*saṃyama*)

Penance and austerity (*tapas*)

Renunciation (*tyāga*)

Non-attachment (*ākincaṃya*), and

Supreme conduct (*brahancarya*)



As we can see, each of the ten virtues is crucial to foster a character for wholesome living. During the ten days of Daśa Lakṣaṇa celebrations, monks, nuns and scholars discuss these virtues in detail – one each day. In the absence of learned ones, some practitioners study the scriptures themselves. The discussions and readings are mesmerizing.

On the last day, called Anant Caturdaśi, people ask for and grant forgiveness to each other.

In addition, throughout the 18-days of Paryuṣaṇa, people perform daily temple rituals and *pujās* in both Śvetāmbara and Digambara traditions.

Forgiveness

Since Paryuṣaṇa is the festival of forgiveness, let us talk about the concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness means truly absolving oneself of all the effects and ramifications of the acts of aggression – actual as well as perceived. It applies to both seeking forgiveness and granting it.

When asking for forgiveness, saying “I am sorry” is just the beginning. We must genuinely feel remorseful of our acts of aggression and commit to not repeating the same or similar offense, directly or indirectly. Directly means being actively involved in carrying out the act and indirectly means having someone else do it and/or praising someone who commits the act. One must be prepared to abide by these feelings of remorse and commitment not to repeat those. The act of seeking forgiveness is unconditional whether or not the offended party agrees to grant forgiveness.

Granting true forgiveness is not easy either – it could actually be more demanding than asking for forgiveness. “I accept your apology” is just the beginning. We must overlook the



offensive act and harbor no ill feelings anymore towards the offender. Those ill feelings must be converted to feelings of friendliness or neutrality.

In either case, we feel a lot of peace after asking for forgiveness or granting it. This is the point where we forget the fateful incident and move on – or give it a sincere try. It may take us time to get to that stage, but with effort, we can do it.

Forgiveness is essential for inner peace, and meditation and mindfulness can play critical roles in getting there and remaining calm afterward. Forgiveness is necessary to minimize anger in life. Jain thinkers have done a tremendous amount of work in this area, and so has the western philosophical body. It is fascinating to study the “art of forgiveness.”

Samvatsarī

Samvatsarī is a very special day. The name implies annual transition when we end the spiritual perseverance of the previous year and begin the new year for the same. It is also the day when we repent our sins and misdeeds of the previous year and commit to being better in the coming year. This, the auspicious 50th day from the start of Cāturmāsa, marks the end of Paryuṣaṇa celebrations in Śvetāmbara tradition and beginning of the same in Digambar tradition.

Although the whole festival of Paryuṣaṇa is about forgiveness and nurturing friendliness, the Samvatsarī day is a special one. The highlight of the day is the major Patikramaṇa, which is conducted privately and in group settings. At the end of the Patikramaṇa, everybody asks for and grants unconditional forgiveness to each other.

Patikramaṇa

Literally, Patikramaṇa means returning or retreating from violations. It is a structured practice to reflect, assess, confess, and repent personal shortcomings and introvertly commit to making personal improvements. Our teachers have prescribed four types of Patikramaṇa – a daily Patikramaṇa for introspection of our deed in the previous 24 hours, a fortnightly and a quarterly Patikramaṇa for the corresponding periods, and finally the annual Patikramaṇa on the Samvatsarī day. In short, these are all self-scrutinizing and self-cleansing exercises to cease misadventures and wrongful deeds.

It is important to note that, for Jains, all living beings are alike in terms of the body-soul relationship. Thus, the act of forgiveness is directed towards all living beings, known and unknown, and not just the family and friends, and includes the vegetation and environment. Also, an act of violence or violation is not limited to just physical actions; we can hurt others by our speech as well. But the deadliest act of violence actually occurs in thought when we contemplate and scheme violence.



We can imagine that being the annual event, Samvatsarī Patikramaṇa is the most elaborate one for seeking forgiveness from all living beings, including the environment, and for our actions in mind, body, and speech.

The process of Patikramaṇa involves:

1. *Samāyika* (equanimity): Commitment to stay in equanimity and focus on the spiritual exercise.
2. *Stavana*: (praising): Thinking of our Tīrthaṅkaras and singing their glory.
3. *Vandanā* (veneration): Expressing reverence to divinity – our great teachers: Arihanta, Siddha, Ācārya, Upādhyāya, and Sādhu.
4. *Alocanā* and *Patikramaṇa*: (assessment, confession, and repentance): Then, we think of our Guru, and in their witness conduct:
 - a. Accept that during the course of my daily life, I have committed misdeeds and sins in mind, body, and speech against all kinds of living beings.
 - b. Take stock and actually reminiscing the mistakes I made – because that is the only way I could even try not to repeat the same.
 - c. Repent, ask for forgiveness, and commit not to repeat the same mistakes again.
 - d. Build an understanding that others have committed similar sins against me, and I forgive them.

On a personal note,

- Accepting to have committed mistakes is not easy but it is straightforward.
 - Reminiscing is harder.
 - Repenting, asking for forgiveness, and committing not to repeat are even harder. But it is essential.
 - Genuinely forgiving others is the hardest.
5. *Kāyotsarga* (removing attaching to body): Then, we attempt to dissociate from our body, and we fixate on our inner self – the soul.
 6. *Pratyākhāna* (disallowance of evil deeds and allowance of good deeds): And, finally, we take a vow to try our best to give up something. It could be a tangible entity like not shopping, or intangible like resolving not to get angry (disallowance) or keeping a fast at specific frequency (allowance).

During the Patikramaṇa, in view of the emphasis on forgiveness, we repeatedly recite:

Tassa Michhāmi Dukkaḍam

Meaning,

I have no intention of hurting you or causing you misery.

Which implies,

May all of my improper actions be of no consequence, or

May all of my transgressions be forgiven.

In addition, in view of the emphasis on the universal friendship, we repeatedly recite:

*khāmemi savva jīvā, savve jīvā khamaṅtu me |
mittī me savva bhūesu, veraṁ majjhaṁ na keṇai ||*

This is known as Kśāmpānā Sūtra (Universal Friendship Sūtra), and it means,

I forgive all the living beings, I plead for forgiveness from all of them,

I am in friendship with all the living beings, I have animosity towards no one.

Thus, we can see that the entire Patikramaṇa is dedicated to self-evaluation and then committing to eradicate or minimize all personal shortcomings.

In conclusion, being normal human beings, we do not always succeed in fulfilling our commitments made during Patikramaṇa, but an honest and objective realization is a big step towards achieving that. We got to keep in mind that this is not once in a lifetime exercise. If we repeatedly do it genuinely and make serious attempts to improve ourselves, we are on the right path. The spiritual journey is not a one-life process; we need to keep building it life upon life. Mahāvīra reached the pinnacle of spirituality after an umpteen number of lives, and we might have a long way to go.

Let us promise ourselves to work on it with all our strength and become better in mind, body, and speech.

Jai Jinendra.

