

Paryushan and Das Lakshana Parva

Generally, festivals are celebrations characterized by excitement, enthusiasm, and enjoyment; Jain festivals are characterized by renunciation, austerities, study of the scriptures, and repetition of holy hymns by reciting Sutras and Stavans, meditation, and expressing devotion for the Tirthankars.

Paryushan is the most important festival in Jainism. It is observed during the month of August and/or September. The Shvetāmbar sect observes it for 8 days while the Digambar sect observes it for 10 days where it is known as Das Lakshana Parva. During these eight or ten days, the entire Jain community becomes engrossed in spiritual and religious activities.

Literally, Paryushan means "coming together from all directions". This symbolizes growth and transformation.

The word "Paryushan" has several meanings:

- Pari + Ushan = all kinds + to burn = to burn (shed) all types of karmas. Our scriptures have prescribed twelve different types of austerities (tap) such as fasting, to reduce our Kashāyas and thereby eliminate our karmas.
- Another meaning of "Ushan" is to stay closer. We stay closer to our own soul (remember the qualities of our true soul) by doing Swādhyāy (self-study), meditation, and austerities during Paryushana.
- Pari + Upashamanā = Upashamanā means to suppress, mainly our passions (Kashāyas - anger, ego, deceit and greed) from all sources.

The purpose of life according to Jain teachings is to realize oneself, as well as to experience wholeness, peace, compassion, and reverence for all life. Therefore, the real purpose of Paryushan is to purify our soul by observing and correcting our own faults, asking for forgiveness for the mistakes we have committed, and taking vows to minimize our faults. During Paryushan we should strive to minimize our worldly affairs so that we can concentrate on the qualities of our true self.

Paryushan is a period of repentance and confession for the undesirable acts of the previous year, and to practice austerities that help minimize our passions and vices, which shed accumulated karma. Austerity, the control of one's desire for material pleasures, is a part of spiritual training. During this period, some people fast for the entire period of eight or ten days, while others fast for shorter periods, although the Jain scriptures recommend a minimum three day fast. However, it is considered obligatory to fast on the last day of Paryushan. Fasting usually involves complete abstinence from food or drink, but during the daytime, drinking of water that has been boiled and cooled in the morning is permissible. If one cannot fast for the whole day, eating only one meal also counts as limited fasting.

There are regular ceremonies in the temple and meditation halls during this time. During the first three days of Paryushan the Sādhus and Sādhvis deliver sermons related to the five activities that lay people (Shrāvaks and Shrāvikās) are required to do during Paryushan.

Five Essential Activities of Paryushan:

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| 1 | Amāri Pravartan | Leading a non-violent life, working towards a non-violent world, and supporting animal welfare activities |
| 2 | Sādhamik Vātsalya | Respecting fellow human beings and supporting humanitarian activities |
| 3 | Attham Tapa | Observing fasts for the last three days of Paryushan |
| 4 | Chaitya Paripāti | Visiting different Jain temples, Jain libraries, Upāshrays, and supporting other charitable and religious organizations |

- 5 Kshamāpanā Repenting our sins, forgiving others and requesting forgiveness from others

In the Shvetāmbar tradition, the Kalpa Sutra, a Jain scripture that includes a detailed account of the life of Bhagawān Mahāvīr and other Tirthankars' is read to the congregation from the fourth through the last day of Paryushan.

On the fifth day the auspicious dreams of Bhagawān Mahāvīr's mother Trishalā are celebrated at a special ceremony. The final day of Paryushan, known as Samvatsari, the day of repentance of our past sins and forgiveness to others, is the most important day of Paryushan.

The Digambar tradition calls this festival Das Lakshana Parva and observes it for 10 days. Each day is dedicated to one virtue.

10 Religious Virtues:

1. Kshamā Forgiveness
2. Mārdava Humility
3. Ārjava Straightforwardness
4. Shaucha Contentment - absence of greed
5. Satya Truth
6. Samyam Restraint of all senses
7. Tapa Austerities
8. Tyāg Charity
9. Ākinchan Non-possessiveness
10. Brahmacharya Chastity or Celibacy

Some traditions read the Tattvārtha Sutra, an ancient Jain scripture that covers the entire Jain philosophy, is read to the congregation. The scripture has 10 chapters and one chapter is read every day.

The last day of Paryushan (Samvatsari) and the first day of the Das Lakshana Parva (Kshamā) is the day of forgiveness, and the most important day for all Jains.

This is the day when all Jains repent for their past sins, ask for forgiveness from family, friends, enemies, and especially from those with whom they have struggled, for hurting them in any way either knowingly or unknowingly during the past year. It is essential to our spiritual advancement that we do not harbor ill will or hold grudges beyond a year. Hence, the annual occasion for repentance and forgiveness is the most important day in Jain tradition.

By meditating and purifying ourselves during these eight days of Paryushan or ten days of Das Lakshana, we come to realize ourselves. We call the Festival of Paryushan, the Festival of the Soul; when we forgive, we become one with the light of our soul.

On the last day those who have observed rigorous fasting are honored, especially to encourage others to follow their example.

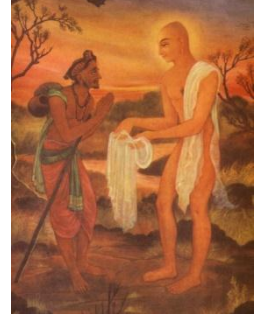
Listening to the Kalpa Sutra, Tattvārtha Sutra, or some other scripture, taking positive steps to ensure the welfare of all living beings, developing the feeling of brotherhood towards fellow human beings and forgiveness for all living beings, doing penance, visiting neighboring temples, libraries, and Upāshrays are all important activities during this time.

After performing Samvatsari Pratikraman or Das lakshana celebration, Jains request forgiveness from all living beings in person, via telephone, or via mail. One example of such a request in writing is shown below:

**On This Auspicious Occasion of
KSHAMAVANI
We Beg Forgiveness
For Our Intentional and Unintentional
Wrongdoings
Michchhä mi Dukkadam**

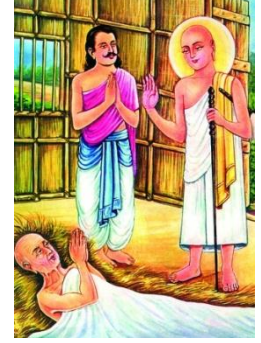
Charity at Its Peak

Ascetic Mahävira donates a piece of heavenly cloth to poor. The cloth was left on his shoulder by Lord Indra, the king of heavenly gods, after his self initiation. (Shvetämbar Tradition)



Humility at Its Peak

Guru Gautam Swami requests Anand Shrävaka (a lay person) for his forgiveness because he had doubted his Knowledge (Jnänä) and Truthfulness



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