

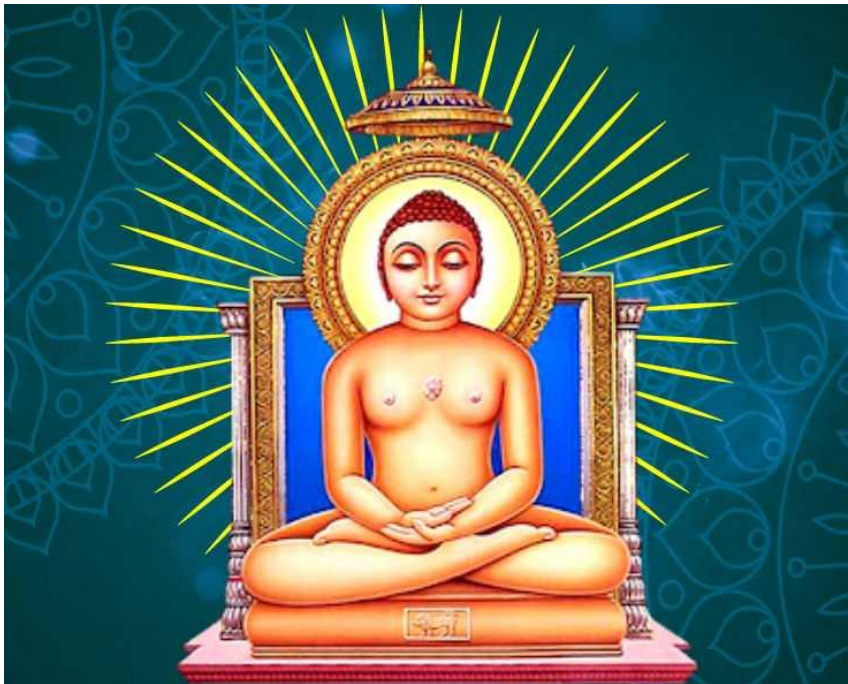


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Vardhaman Mahavira

India is a great country to which prestigious historian AL Basham liked to call as wonder that was India, by looking at its social, religious, cultural and geographical aspects. In epic of Mahabharata this great land is described as -"यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्नेहास्ति न तत्क्वचित्" Which means What is found here exists elsewhere; what is not here exists nowhere else, so India was a world miniature.

The ancient religion of India, Hinduism, played a vital role in shaping one of the world's greatest civilizations. It enriched this land of Bharata with profound philosophy and wisdom, elevating both individuals and society. To describe practicality and greatness of Hinduism the famous orientalist Max Müller once said, "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions, I should point to India".¹



Over the time, even the most virtuous religions can drift from their original teachings. Human flaws, societal changes, and power struggles often lead to practices that no longer reflect their true purpose. Friedrich Nietzsche pointed out that religious institutions tend to

betray their original ideals as they grow in influence. Many religious malpractices arise from a mix of factors—centralized power, cultural traditions, overshadowing personal faith, resistance to change, financial corruption, and political interference. When religion is used as a tool for power rather than a guide for truth, it loses its real meaning and purpose.

In post Vedic age factors such as social inequalities, especially the rigid caste system, expensive ritualistic practices, concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of a privileged few, and the method of killing an animal to appease the Gods I.e. Bali, made a fertile ground for change in the right direction.

Against this background, Vardhamana—later known as Mahavira—was born in 599 B.C. in Kundalgram, Vaishali (present-day Bihar), to King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala. He gave his people a weapon mightier than any sword—not violence, but of truth and non-violence. With his teachings and philosophy, they waged a war for freedom against imperialism without spilling a single drop of blood.

At 30 years of age, he abandoned his home and accepted the ascetic life of a monk and uttered “Namo Siddhanam” (I bow down to the liberated souls). Mahaveer spent the next twelve years in deep meditation and silence, giving up all earthly desires. He travelled through Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh, following the path of non-violence. Finally, under a Sal tree near the Rijuvaluka (now Barakar) River, at the age of 43 he gained perfect knowledge i.e. Kaivalya jyan and became a Jina, one who has conquered all indriya.

Mahaveer held Samavasarana (a preaching Meetings) to spread his knowledge among the common people. Including his eleven main disciples, hundreds of monks, and thousands of followers joined Mahavira. To guide them, he created the **Sangha**, a four-part community that included Sadhus (male monks), Sadhis (female monks), Shravaks (male householders), and Shravikas (female householders). All four groups were open to people from all backgrounds. Many famous kings and leaders followed him, such as King Chetaka of Vaishali, Kings Shrenik, Bimbisara, and Ajatshatru of Rajagriha.

Bhagwan Mahaveer saw men and women as spiritual equal, challenging social norms. He taught that every being can attain liberation, regardless of gender. Happiness or suffering comes from one’s own thoughts, words, and actions, not birth or status. His karma theory—“As you sow, so shall you reap”, emphasizes justice, self-determination, and personal responsibility.

Bhagwan Mahaveer taught that true peace and freedom come from living a simple, honest, and kind life. He highlighted non-violence (Ahimsa), respecting different viewpoints (Anekanta), and not being attached to material things (Aparigraha). To achieve liberation from cycle of births, he preached the ‘Triratnas’ (Three Jewels)—Right Faith (Samyak Darshan), Right Knowledge (Samyak Jnyan), and Right Conduct (Samyak Charitra), which help people see the truth, gain wisdom, and live righteously. In his words:

**"णाणं ण गेयं ण च अरियं, ण चेव विणा अचरं भविस्सइ।
ण चेव अचरं भवे मक्ख, ण चेव विमोक्ख विणा अयं।।"**

There's no knowledge without right faith, no conduct is possible without knowledge, Without conduct, there's no liberation, And without liberation, no deliverance.) - Mahavira (UTTARADHYAYANA SUTRA, CH. 27, VERSE 30)

As he said, 'Faith and knowledge are like two wings; without them, the soul cannot fly high.' He also laid down Five Vows: non-violence (Ashimsa), truthfulness (Satya), not stealing (Asteya), self-control (Brahmacharya), and limiting possessions (Aparighaha). He taught, Knowledge without ethics is dangerous, like a sword without a handle.

जो अगमं अणुओ समणो, सो न अत्ताणं परं वा जाणइ।

A sramana devoid of the knowledge of Agama does neither know himself, nor others. -Mahavira (Pravasanasara, 3/32)

By following these principles, one can live with kindness, self-discipline, and inner peace, freeing the soul from suffering because the more you possess, the more you are possessed.

Ahimsa (Non-violence) is the highest principle of Bhagwan Mahaveer's teachings, forming the very foundation of the Five Fundamental Vows. Without Ahimsa, the other vows lose their meaning, leading to harm, conflict, and suffering. Great minds across history have upheld this truth. Mahatma Gandhi declared, "Ahimsa is not mere non-killing; it is a state of love that embraces all creation." Buddha taught, "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned."

These words highlight's that violence—whether in thought, speech, or action—leads only to destruction, while non-violence nurtures compassion, self-discipline, and inner peace.

By giving treasure of such great practical principles, philosophy and way of life Mahaveer attained Nirvana (freedom from birth and death) in 527 B.C. at the age of 72. After a life of non-violence, truth, and self-discipline, he achieved complete liberation. He passed away in Pawapuri, Bihar, His teachings helped to shape India's rich spiritual and moral values, inspiring generations to live with kindness and honesty. His message of peace and righteousness continues to guide the nation, reminding us that true greatness comes from wisdom, compassion, and doing what is right for others.

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