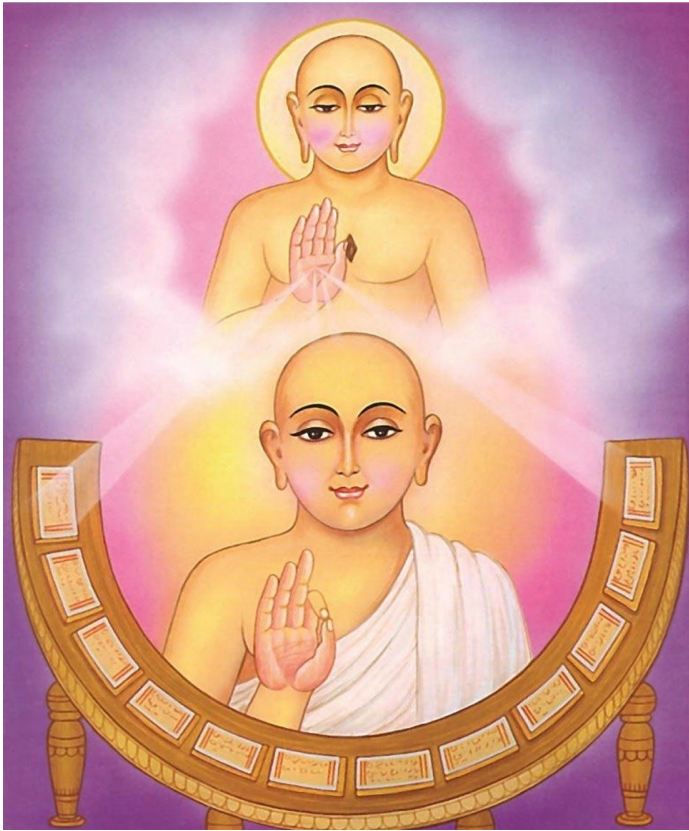


# Ganadhar Sudharmaswami



Ganadhars are the immediate disciples of a Tirthankar. All of Bhagawan Mahavir's monks were divided into 11 groups and each group was placed under a Ganadhar. When Bhagawan Mahavir attained Nirvana, only two of the eleven Ganadhars were still living, the first Ganadhar, Gautamswami and the fifth Ganadhar, Sudharmaswami. Of the two, Gautamswami attained keval-jnan the day after Mahavir's nirvana. It is a Jain tradition that a kevali monk or nun remains in a meditative state for the rest of his/her life and does not provide a leadership role to other monks. Hence, Sudharmaswami became the leader of all of the ascetics and the entire Jain community.

Sudharmaswami was the son of a learned Brahmin named Dhammil and his wife Bhaddila. They lived in a village called Kollag, now known as Kollua, in the state of Bihar. Dhammil and Bhaddila had both been longing for a child, and Bhaddila worshipped Goddess Saraswati faithfully. It is said that the goddess, pleased by her devotion, blessed Bhaddila by promising her a highly accomplished son. Soon after that, Bhaddila became pregnant, and in due course gave birth to a son named Sudharma. He was born in 607 BCE, making him eight years older than Lord Mahavir. Sudharma grew up under the loving care of his parents. At an appropriate age, he went to a well-known ashram, where he diligently studied the Vedas, Upanishads, and all other Hindu pieces of literature. By the time he returned from school, he was famous and well respected as a learned brahmin pandit.

He then started his school, which became a center of great learning. Over 500 pupils from all over the country came to study under his tutelage. As a well-known Brahmin scholar, Sudharma was invited to the same yajna conducted by Somil over which Indrabhuti was to preside. After Indrabhuti left to debate with Mahavir, his brothers and other eminent attendees left as well, one by one becoming Mahavir's disciples. Soon, it was Sudharma's

turn. Sudharma believed that every living being would reincarnate into its own species. In other words, human beings would be reborn only as human beings. His theory was based on the analogy of plant life. An apple tree produced seeds from which only other apple trees could grow, so living beings should only reincarnate into the same species. Bhagawan Mahavir welcomed him too and understood his thoughts. He calmly and patiently explained to Sudharma that human beings could be reincarnated as humans or heavenly beings or even as animals depending upon their karma. He addressed all of Sudharma's doubts and explained to him the theory of karma. Sudharma saw the wisdom of Bhagawan Mahavir's words and was convinced by the explanation, and he too became a disciple of Bhagawan Mahavir along with his five hundred disciples. As a Ganadhar of Bhagawan Mahavir, he came to be known as Sudharmaswami.

In the following years, Sudharma swami always sat in front of Mahavir during his discourses and carefully listened to everything Bhagawan Mahavir had to say. This enabled him to compose Mahavir's teachings in the form of Jain scriptures known as Agams. After Mahavir's nirvana in 527 BCE, the leadership of the Jain order was left to Sudharmaswami. During the next 12 years in which he remained at the helm, he efficiently managed the Jain order set up by Bhagawan Mahavir and spread his message far and wide. Shwetambar tradition believes that during this period of his stewardship, Sudharmaswami organized Bhagawan Mahavir's teachings into 12 scriptures, known as the 12 Anga Agams. These original scriptures (Agams), are collectively known as Dwadshangi. Dwadasha means 12, and Anga means limb (part). Many of the Agams are composed in the form of questions asked by Jambuswami (Sudharmaswami's disciple) and the replies given by Sudharmaswami which are representative of Bhagawan Mahavir's words. Sudharmaswami attained omniscience in 515 BCE and attained nirvana in 507 BCE at the age of 100. After attaining omniscience, the religious order was entrusted to his principal disciple, Jambuswami.