

The Jain Festivals

Generally, festivals are celebrations and jublations characterized by excitement, enthusiasm, enjoyments and entertainments; but the Jain festivals are characterized by renunciation, austerities, study of the scriptures, repetition of holy hymns, meditation, and expressing devotion for the Paramatma. Even those people who are caught in the meshes of mundane life, according to their ability and conveniences, get free from the worldly entanglements to the extent possible and become immersed in worship and meditation. Renunciation and austerity constitute the very foundation of the Jain Dharma.

Paryushan Mahaparva

The Paryushan is the most important festival among the Jain festivals; and it is observed during every Chaturmas commencing on the twelfth day of the fortnight of the waning moon, in Bhadrapad and ending on the fourth day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in the Bhadrapad. During these eight days, the entire Jain Society becomes spellbound in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and felicity. All Jains, the young and the old perform Atthai Tap - fasting for eight days at a time. Some men and women; and even children take the vow of Paushadh Vrat also for eight days. During these days, the spiritual preceptors read out and explain in detail the Kalpasutra, the most sacred scripture of the Jains. All the members of the congregation listen to that explanation, overwhelmed with the emotion of devotion. Seven days are days of attainment and the eighth day is one of fulfillment or achievement. In this manner, the Samvatsari Mahaparva the annual festival is celebrated. Listening to the holy voice of the spiritual preceptors when they explain the 1250 fundamental Sutras; performing the Samvatsarik Pratikraman, (the annual atonement) for seeking the forgiveness of those people whom one hates or against whom one nurses a grudge; forgetting all hatred and spite-these, constitute the Samvatsarik aradhana -the annual atonement.

Navpad Oli

This has been described under the section, dealing with austerities. During the days of this festival, every day, worship is offered to the Navpad; and a dramatic performance of the story of Shripal and Mayana is carried out.

Mahavir Janma Kalyanak

The birthday of Shraman Bhagwan, the last Tirthankar, is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in the month of Chaitra. On this occasion, a grand chariot procession, community worship, glorification of the Lord, discussions, discourses, seminars and devotional and spiritual activities are organized. On this day, a magnificent celebration takes place at Kshatriy Kund in Bihar because Bhagwan Mahavir was born there.

Diwali

Diwali is celebrated on the new-moon day of Kartik. On the night of that day, Mahavirswami attained Nirvan or deliverance and attained to a state of absolute bliss. The Lord discarded the body and the bondage of all Karmas on that night, at Pavapuri and attained Mukti or deliverance. Chaturdasi (the fourteenth day of the bleak fortnight of Kartik), the full-moon day and the new year (the first day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in Kartik - These three days are celebrated with Paushadh, fasting, special repetition of holy hymns, and meditation. People should fast on the Chafurdasi (14th day) and the new-moon day and listen to the Uttaradhyayan Sutra which contains the final message of Lord Mahavir. The whole of the night of Diwali should be spent in the recitation of holy hymns and in meditation on Shraman Bhagwan Mahavir. In the early morning of the first day of the new year, Ganadhar Gautam Swami, the first disciple of Lord Mahavir attained absolute enlightenment. The Jains begin the new year with a glorification of Lord Gautam Swami; and listen with devotion to the nine Stotras holy hymns and with listening to the auspicious Rasa (epical poem) of Gautam Swami from their Guru Maharaj.

Bhai Beej - The festival day for brothers.

When Raja Nandivardhan, the brother of Shraman Bhagawan Mahavir was steeped in sorrow and anguish on account of the latter's nirvan (attainment of Mukti) his sister, Sudarshana took him to her house and comforted him. This happened on the second day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in Kartik. This day is observed as Bhai Beej. This festival is like Raksha Bandhan. On the day of Rakshabandhan, the sister goes to the brother and ties the Raksha; but on this day, the sister invites her brother to her house to felicitate him.

Gyan Panchami - The holy day for acquiring knowledge

Gyan Panchami is the name given to the celebration that takes place on the 5th day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in Kartik (the 5th day after Diwali). This day has been fixed for the worship of pure knowledge; and on this day, by way of worshipping knowledge, fasting, taking Paushadh, devavandan (offering veneration to Gods), holy recitation, meditation, Pratikraman etc., are carried out. Moreover, the books preserved in the religious libraries are cleansed and worshipped.

Ashadh Chaturdasi

The sacred commencement of Chaturmas takes place on the 14th day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in the month of Ashad. The Jain Sadhus and Sadhvis remain where they happen to be on that day until the 14th day of Kartik Shukla. During these four months among the Jains, many austerities like renunciation, tapasya, undertaking of religious ceremonies, etc., are organized. Even in respect of eating and drinking during these days, some rules have been prescribed.

Kartik Poornima - The full moon day of Kartik

The Chaturmas that begins on Ashadh Chaturdashi comes to an end on the full moon day in Kartik. After this, the Jain Sadhus and Sadhvis begin their wandering Padyatra i.e., travel on foot. A pilgrimage to Shatrunjay-Palitana on this day is considered to be of great importance. Thousands of Jains go on pilgrimages on this day. This day also is celebrated as the birthday of Kalikalarvajna, Acharya Bhagavant Srivijay Hemachandrasooriji who was born on this day. (in Vikram Samvat 1134 or 1078 A.D.).

Maun Ekadashi - The holy day for observing silence

Maun Ekadashi falls on the 11th day of the fort-night of the waxing moon in the month of Margshirsh. This is an important day for Jains on which they observe total Silence-Maun and carry out such austerities as Paushadh vrat, fasting, worshipping of gods, meditation etc. This is the day on which the great events relating to the one hundred and fifty Jineswaras are celebrated by means of holy recitation. The story of Suvrat Shresthi is connected with this day.

Paush dashami

This day is famous as the birthday of Bhagwan Parshwanath. On the 10th day of Pushya, hundreds and thousands of Jain men and women perform the tapasya of 3 Upavas-attham (continuous fasting for 3 days) and by means of recitation and meditation they try to attain spiritual welfare. A grand fair takes place in Sankheswar which is a sacred place for Jains. Thousands of people gather here and perform the austerity of Attham.

Akshay Tritiya

Those noble people who perform the austerity of Varsitap complete the austerity on this day by taking sugar-cane juice in the cool shadow of Shatrunjay. Bhagwan Rishabdev performed the Parana (completion of an austerity) on this day after fasting for one year continuously. This day is considered to be very auspicious for going on a pilgrimage to Shatrunjay. This falls on the 3rd day of the bright fortnight of Vaishakh.