The Listening Heart
from Veerayatan

Lord Mahavir’s timeless message (vaani) is continuously echoing. That divine sound is eternally calling for the awakening of every human heart. Divinity (paramatma) dwells within all but resonates only in the devotee whose heart listens and is replete with compassion. Elevated souls connect always through the heart, not the mind. The mind can have fear, logic can be defeated, but a listening heart can immediately scale any distance in its spiritual pursuits. It is able to reach out across seven seas in a fraction of a second. The sentiment of faith, devotion, prayers, love and complete surrender to Him knows no boundaries. It is beyond time and space.

Even though the call of the divine is utterly silent, it can still be heard by a Shravak, a listening heart. The supreme call cannot be heard only through the ‘bare ears’. This external hearing does not elevate one to the peaks of spirituality. However, if heard with pure heart, the flowers of spirituality will bloom, the fragrance of compassion will spread, the sound of silence will be heard, and the rays of the divine light will glow through the listening heart.

In the glorious history of Jainism, there are two illustrious examples which bear testament to this fact. At the time of Tirthankara Mahavir’s Samosaran (the divine preaching assembly, the Dharma Sabha of Tirthankara), everyone - including rich-poor, king-pauper, gods-humans, animals-birds - would attend the eternal discourse and immerse themselves in the holy words, seeking purification by listening and through the sight of the Divine. For many, their whole life and its purpose came to fruition. One day all were rushing to go towards the Samosaran to attend the sermon of Tirthankara Mahavir. A poor old woman who was working at a rich household also enthusiastically wanted to join them but could not, as the householder who had gone to the Samosaran had left instructions for the old woman to collect a bundle of firewood. When returning with a large and heavy pile of firewood on her head, she came upon the spiritual discourse of Bhagwan. Of their own volition, her feet started leading her towards the Samosaran. On reaching she could not take her eyes off the captivating image of Bhagwan. Completely mesmerized by the words she forgot the weight bearing down on her head. She was so engrossed that she forgot the time, the place, her pain, her hunger. Indeed she forgot her very own existence. If she had been listening solely through her ears, she would have remembered the weight on her head. If she had been seeing only through her eyes, she would have realised that she was standing in the middle of the road and remembered the tasks which the householder had given her. Not only were her external senses captivated, however, more importantly it was her heart, her being which was totally engrossed. In that instance, all the worries, problems and concerns disappeared and there existed a sense of complete surrender at the lotus feet of Bhagwan.

The listening heart allows this experience. She was liberated from all the worldly dilemmas, binds. This is Bhakti Marg, the path of devotion, when your heart belongs to the divine, you belong to the divine. Likewise Gautam Swami, the most revered and most talked about disciple, surrendered his heart and completely devoted his entire life at the feet of Bhagwan Mahavir. His utmost devotion cleansed his heart and his karmas. That purity gave him the ability to go deeper within and allowed him to get closer and closer to Bhagwan. The love and compassion Gautam Swami had for Bhagwan Mahavir was so all-encompassing that when there was discussion regarding attaining liberation, Gautam Swami said without hesitation, ‘Bhagwan, I wish to remain at your feet, as your humble disciple, I do not wish for liberation as
loving you is more important for me than letting go of you. Bhakti and Mukti are all the same for me. Your presence and love has filled my heart with everlasting bliss and peace. Now liberation is of no importance for me.”