

Das Lakshan Parva

Dharma Ke Das Lakshan by Dr. Bharill

Das Lakshan Parva is the festival celebrated by the Digambara Jains. In the Digambar tradition, the ten cardinal virtues, Dashlakshan Dharma, are celebrated for 10 days, starting on Samvatsari, the last day of Paryushan Parva in Svetamber Tradition Bhadrapad sud 5-14th to remind jains of the characteristics of the soul. The ten dharmas or the virtues of the soul are forgiveness, humility, straight



forwardness, contentment, truth, sensual restraint, austerities, charity, non-possessiveness, and celibacy. They are various forms of the right conduct. Before we discuss the ten Dharmas, it is important to understand two common viewpoints found in our scriptures. The Vyavahar view, in crude terms, helps you to live more easily and peacefully with the outside world. It also builds up your reserve of good deeds (punya karmas). The Nischay view helps to enhance and blossom the soul's natural qualities. In Jainism the Vyavahar view is always considered the 'by the by'. The Nischay view is considered to be the most important as it leads to contemplation and understanding of the true nature of the soul with the aim of its purification, the ultimate goal of practicing Das Lakshna. Merely practising the Vyavahar Dharmas may bind punya karmas, leading to material gain in this life and the next.

Das Dharma of Daslakshna Parva

The Dharmas are all prefixed by the word 'Uttam' (Supreme) to signify that they are practiced at the highest level by the Jain monks. The householder practises them to a lesser extent. It lasts over a period of ten days, each day being dedicated to one of the ten Dharmas. In the sections below a) stands for the Vyavahar view and b) for the Nischay view.

1) UTTAM KSHAMA (Forgiveness)

a. We forgive those who have wronged us and seek forgiveness from those we have wronged. Forgiveness is sought not just from human colleagues, but from all living beings ranging from one sensed to five

sensed. If we do not forgive or seek forgiveness but instead harbor resentment, we bring misery and unhappiness on ourselves and in the process shatter our peace of mind and make enemies. Forgiving and seeking forgiveness oils the wheel of life allowing us to live in harmony with our fellow beings. It also attracts punya karma.

b. Forgiveness here is directed to oneself. The soul, in a state of mistaken identity or false belief, assumes that it consists of the body, the karmas and the emotions – likes, dislikes, anger, pride etc. As a result of this incorrect belief it inflicts pain upon itself and is thus the cause of its own misery. Nischay Kshama Dharma teaches the soul to correctly identify itself by encouraging it to contemplate in its true nature and hence achieve the state of correct belief or Samyak Dharshan. It is only by achieving Samyak Dharshan that the soul ceases to inflict pain on itself and attains supreme happiness.

2) UTTAM MARDAV (Modesty/ Humility)

Wealth, good looks, reputable family or intelligence often lead to pride. Pride means to believe one to be Superior to others and to look down on others. By being proud you are measuring your worth by temporary material objects. These objects will either leave you or you will be forced to leave them when you die. These eventualities will cause you unhappiness as a result of the 'dent' caused to your self-worth. Being humble will prevent this. Pride also leads to the influx of the bad deed or paap karmas. All souls are equal, none being superior or inferior to another. In the words of Srimad Rajchandra: "Sarva Jeev Che Sidh Sum, Je Samje Te Thai – All souls are akin to the Sidh; those who understand this principle will achieve that state". The Nischay view encourages you to understand your true nature. All souls have the potential to be liberated souls (Sidh Bhagvan). The only difference between the liberated souls and those in bondage is that the former have attained liberation as a result of their 'effort'. With effort, even the latter can achieve liberation.

3) UTTAM AARJAV (Straightforwardness)

a. The action of a deceitful person is to think one thing, speak something else and do something entirely different. There is no harmony in his thought, speech and actions. Such a person loses credibility very quickly and lives in constant anxiety and fear of his deception being exposed. Being straight-forward or honest oils the wheel of life. You will be seen to be reliable and trustworthy. Deceitful actions lead to the influx of paap karmas.

b. Delusion about one's identity is the root cause of unhappiness. Be straightforward to yourself and recognize your true nature. The soul is made up of countless qualities like knowledge, happiness, effort, faith, and conduct. It has the potential to achieve omniscience (Keval Gnan) and reach a state of supreme bliss. Again, the body, the karmas, the thoughts and all the emotions are separate from the true nature

of the soul. Only by practicing Nischay Arjav Dharma will one taste the true happiness that comes from within.

4) UTTAM SHAUCH (Contentment)

a. Be content with the material gains that you have accomplished thus far. Contrary to popular belief, striving for greater material wealth and pleasure will not lead to happiness. Desire for more is a sign that we do not have all that we want. Reducing this desire and being content with what we have leads to satisfaction. Accumulating material objects merely fuels the fire of desire.

b. Contentment or happiness, derived from material objects, is only perceived to be so by a soul in a state of false belief. The fact is that material objects do not have a quality of happiness and therefore happiness cannot be obtained from them! The perception of 'enjoying' material objects is indeed only that – a perception! This perception rewards the soul with only misery and nothing else. Real happiness comes from within, as it is the soul that possesses the quality of happiness.

5) UTTAM SATYA (Truth)

a. If talking is not required, then do not talk. If it is required then only use the minimum of words, and all must all be absolutely true. Talking disturbs the stillness of the mind. Consider the person who lies and lives in fear of being exposed. To support one lie he has to utter a hundred more. He becomes caught up in a tangled web of lies and is seen as untrustworthy and unreliable. Lying leads to an influx of paap karma.

b. Satya comes from the word Sat, which means existence. Existence is a quality of the soul. Recognising the soul's true nature as it really exists and taking shelter in the soul is practising Nischay Satya Dharma.

6) UTTAM SANYAM (Self-Restraint)

1. a) Restraining from injury to life – Jains go to great lengths, compared to other world religions, to protect life. This encompasses all living beings, from one-sensed onwards. The purpose of not eating root vegetables is that they contain countless one-sensed beings termed 'nigod'. During Paryushan the Jains also do not eat green vegetables to reduce harm to the lower sensed beings.

b) Self-restraint from desires or passions – These lead to pain and are therefore to be avoided.

2. a) Restraining injury to the self – This has been elaborated upon in Nischay Kshma Dharma.

b) Self-restraint from desires or passions – Emotions, e.g. likes, dislikes or anger lead to misery and need to be eradicated. They are not part of the true nature of the soul and only arise when the soul is in a state of false belief. The only method to free oneself from these is to contemplate on the true nature of the soul and in the process commence the journey to liberation or moksha.

7) UTTAM TAP (Penance)

a. This does not only mean fasting but also includes a reduced diet, restriction of certain types of foods, avoiding tasty foods, etc. The purpose of penance is to keep desires and passions in control. Over-indulgence inevitably leads to misery. Penance leads to an influx of punya karmas.

b. Meditation prevents the rise of desires and passions in the soul. In a deep state of meditation the desire to intake food does not arise. Our first Tirthankara, Adinath Bhagwan was in such a meditative state for six months, during which he observed Nischay Uttam Tap. The only food he consumed during these six months was the happiness from within.

8) UTTAM TYAG (Renunciation)

a. Contrary to popular belief, renouncing worldly possessions leads to a life of contentment and assists in keeping desires in check. Controlling desires lead to an influx of punya karma. Renunciation is done at the highest level by our monks who renounce not only the household but also their clothes. A person's strength is measured not by the amount of wealth he accumulates but by the amount of wealth he renounces. By this measure our monks are the richest.

b. Renouncing the emotions, the root cause of misery, is Nischay Uttam Tyag, which is only possible by contemplating on the true nature of the soul.

9) UTTAM AAKINCHAY (Non-attachment)

a. This assists us in detaching from external possessions. Historically ten possessions are listed in our scriptures: 'land, house, silver, gold, wealth, grain, female servants, male servants, garments and utensils'. Remaining unattached from these helps control our desires and leads to an influx of punya karmas.

b. This assists us in being unattached from our internal attachments: false belief, anger, pride, deceit, greed, laughter, liking, disliking, lamentation, fear, disgust, male sexual desire, female sexual desire and hybrid sexual desire. Ridding the soul of these leads to its purification.

10) UTTAM BRAHMCHARYA (Supreme Celibacy)

a. This means not only refraining from sexual activity but also includes all pleasures associated with the sense of touch, e.g. a cool breeze on a hot summers day or using a cushion for a hard surface. Again this dharma is practised to keep our desires in check. The monks practice this to the highest degree with all their body, speech and mind. The householder refrains from sex with anyone except his or her spouse.

b. Brahmacharya is derived from the word Brahma – Soul and charya – to dwell. Nischay Brahmacharya means to dwell in your soul. Only by residing in the soul are you the master of the Universe. Residing

outside your soul makes you a slave to desires. Kshama Vani The last day of Das-Lakshan Parva is known as Kshamavani, or day of forgiveness. This is a day where Jains offer their forgiveness to other living beings for any thoughts, speech and actions that may have knowingly or unknowingly caused any harm. The true meaning is not to have superficial forgiveness in speech, but to have that true Kshama Bhav, or deep sense of apology. Asking for kshama helps to get rid of maan (Pride). Giving Kshama allows us to get rid of anger. The apology should come from within and not merely a social formality. Nishay kshamavani means to get alert towards our soul.