



Introduction

In the Jain tradition, a Tirthankar is a person who has attained a very high spiritual state and enlightenment because of their spiritual practice over many lifetimes. The word Tirtha-n-kar means one who creates a *tirtha*, a canal or ford to cross the ocean of suffering after multiple births and deaths, to be liberated after enlightenment. Tirthankars came to this world after attaining a high level of spiritual evolution, to complete their spiritual work in this last lifetime and then help others cross the infinite cycles of birth and death. There have been twenty-four Tirthankars in this age. Although the lives of Tirthankars are highly venerated in the Jain tradition, their great examples do not exclusively belong to a particular religion or nation, but to the common treasure house of human wisdom.

Dhyana, loosely translated as meditation, has been the central practice of spirituality in Jainism, along with the Three Jewels. These three jewels are right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. They create one's path to liberation. Jainism believes that liberation can only be achieved through *Dhyana*. *Dhyana* means

paying attention, leading to contemplation, meditation and the removal of karma to attain ultimate purity.

There are four types of Dhyana in Jainism – *Shukla Dhyana* (meditation on purity), *Dharma Dhyana* (meditation on virtues), *Artha Dhyana* (meditation on objects of desire) and *Raudra Dhyana* (meditation on violence, possession, untruth, or theft). The first one, *Shukla Dhyana* (meditation on purity) is the best type of meditation for attaining the spiritual goal of liberation. It takes one to complete freedom beyond aversion and attachment.

Freedom from desires and attachment is an essential part of liberation as per the Jain tradition. To achieve this, the Heartfulness Cleaning practice can help. In both Jainism and the Heartfulness way, importance is given to the process of Cleaning past impressions and through regular morning meditation, one can arrive at a state that deflects the formation of future impressions, thus preventing *Ashrava*. In the Heartfulness way, different methods are employed by the Spiritual Guide and the Trainers for cleaning, depending on the intensity of impressions.

The millions of Heartfulness practitioners around the world will benefit immensely from knowing about the lives of the Tirthankars of Jainism. The immense austerities they undertook without any aid, and the sacrifices they made, make us appreciate the help we

receive from the yogic Transmission or *Pranahuti* in Heartfulness practices. Meditators in the Jain tradition can also take the benefit of pranahuti in their meditative practices.

Out of the twenty-four Tirthankars, the last one is Vardhman Mahavir, well-known in history. The stories of the earlier Tirthankars have the fragrance of mythology and poetic imagination, like the Puranas of India. However, it is interesting to note that the first Tirthankar, Rishabha Dev, is mentioned even in the Vedas and Puranas and indicated by the seals unearthed from the area where the Indus Valley civilisation thrived. There are depictions of a human being with no ornaments or clothes, in deep meditation, with a bull at his feet, which is the symbol of Rishabha Dev.

What matters to us most are the great human virtues displayed by the Tirthankars. It is the values they represented that are important in those stories. We start with Rishabha Dev and end with Vardhman Mahavir, who was a contemporary of Lord Buddha.



1.
Rishabha Dev

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Banyan tree

Symbol:
Bull

2.
Ajit Nath

Deeksha Vriksha:
Baobab tree

Symbol:
Elephant

3.
Sambhav Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Sal tree

Symbol:
Horse

4.
Abhinandan Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Chironji tree

Symbol:
Monkey

5.
Sumati Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Beautyberry tree

Symbol:
Curlew

6.
**Padmaprabha
Swami**

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Banyan tree

Symbol:
Red Lotus

7.
Suparshva Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Siris tree

Symbol:
Swastika

8.
**Chandra Prabhu
Nath**

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Alexandrian Laurel tree

Symbol:
Crescent Moon

9.
Suvidhi Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Bael tree

Symbol:
Crocodile

10.
Sheetal Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Java Fig tree

Symbol:
Shrivatsa

11.
Shreyans Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
**Blackwood tree
or Ebony tree**

Symbol:
Rhinoceros

12.
Vasu Puja Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Wild Cinchona tree

Symbol:
Buffalo

13.
Vimal Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Jamun tree

Symbol:
Boar

14.
Anant Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
**Peepal tree or
Sacred Fig tree**

Symbol:
Falcon

15.
Dharma Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Flame of the Forest

Symbol:
Vajra

18.
Arnath Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Mango tree

Symbol:
Nandavarta

19.
Malli Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Ashoka tree

Symbol:
Kalash

20.
**Muni Suvrat
Bhagwan**

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Golden Champa tree

Symbol:
Tortoise

21.
Nami Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Bullet Wood tree

Symbol:
Blue Lotus

22.
**Arishtanemi
(Nemi) Nath**

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Indian Willow tree

Symbol:
Conch

23.
Parshwa Nath

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Fire Flame bush

Symbol:
Snake

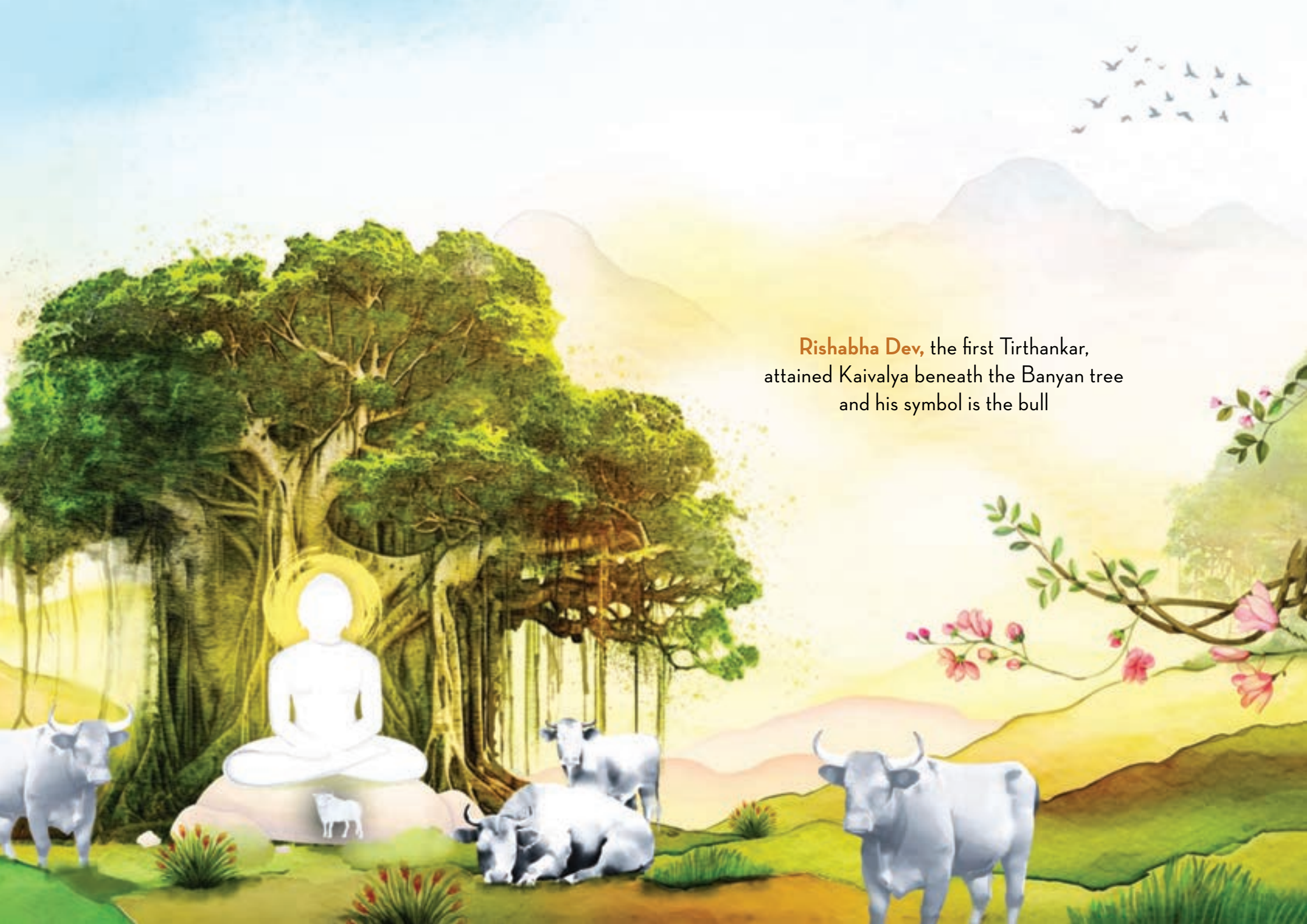
24.
Vardhman Mahavir

Deeksha-Vriksha:
Sal tree

Symbol:
Lion



The 24 Tirthankars of Jainism



Rishabha Dev, the first Tirthankar,
attained Kaivalya beneath the Banyan tree
and his symbol is the bull



Rishabha Dev (Adinath), the Pioneer

Balance spiritual and material life

The first Tirthankar was Rishabha Dev. He was also called Adinath and was one of the earliest kings of the Ikshvaku Dynasty, to which Lord Rama of the Ramayana also belonged. Adinath means the 'First Master' or 'First Guru' in the Jain tradition. Apart from Jain scriptures, even the Vedas and the Buddhist scriptures mention his name as a great king. The Rig Veda and the Yajur Veda mention this great figure of ancient Indian spiritual history.

Dr S Radhakrishnan, Professor of Comparative Religions at Oxford University and a former President of India, mentioned that the Yajur Veda contains references to three Tirthankars: Rishabha Dev, Ajit Nath and Arishtanemi. Shri Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur, also known as Babuji, the author of *Efficacy of Raj Yoga in the Light of Sahaj Marg*, talks of a sage who lived seventy-

two generations before Raja Dashratha of the Surya Vamsa or Ikshvaku Dynasty and it was this sage who discovered Raja Yoga. However, he does not mention the name of that sage.

Rishabha Dev was born to King Nabhi and Queen Maru Devi in Ayodhya.

There are generally five major auspicious events that are celebrated in the life of a Tirthankar. They are the *Panch Kalyanak*, ‘panch’ meaning five and ‘kalyanak’ meaning auspicious events. They are *Garbha Kalyanak* which is the event when the Tirthankar’s soul is conceived in the mother’s womb. The second event is the *Janma Kalyanak* when the great Tirthankar’s soul is born in the mortal world. The third event is the *Deeksha Kalyanak* or when the Tirthankar’s soul gives up all their worldly possessions and they start doing penance under the Deeksha-Vriksha. The fourth significant event is the *Kaivalya Kalyanak* when Tirthankar’s soul attains Kaivalya. Angels and gods set up a *Samavasaran* or a divine preaching hall for the Tirthankars and they deliver their first spiritual sermon. This is a very important event as the Tirthankar teaches the path of purification and liberation. The fifth event is the *Nirvana Kalyanak* when a Tirthankar’s soul is liberated from this worldly physical existence forever and becomes a Siddha. On this day, the Tirthankar’s soul attains a state of Eternal bliss.

There are also other significant events in the last incarnation of these Tirthankars, for example, the set of fourteen auspicious dreams during the pregnancy of the mother of a Tirthankar. When Rishabha Dev’s mother was pregnant with him, she had these fourteen hallmark dreams that included a white elephant with four tusks, a beautiful white bull entering her mouth, a strong lion, a garland of flowers, goddess Lakshmi seated on a lotus, the resplendent sun, the full moon shining bright in the sky, an ocean of milk, an urn made of gold, a fluttering flag, a god’s vehicle in the astral world, a pond full of lotus flowers, gemstones and a blazing smokeless fire. She informed her husband, the King, about her dreams. Being a learned scholar himself, he knew that his wife was going to give birth to a Tirthankar. King Nabhi knew that each of these dreams meant that the child would have a unique virtue. For example, the dream of a white elephant with four tusks meant a child with good character, the white bull depicted the light of knowledge, the lion symbolises strength, the moon meant that the child would give peace to others, the gemstones indicated that the child would share his wisdom and teach virtues, and so on. Each dream cumulatively indicated the spiritual greatness of the child to be born and when Rishabha Dev’s mother had these various dreams, her husband was grateful and jubilant.

Another interesting thing happened when Rishabha Dev was still in the womb of his mother. The gods tested his mother by

asking her many questions and she answered them all correctly. So, they also realised that Maru Devi was about to give birth to a Tirthankar. After the birth of her son, the cleanliness rituals for the baby were performed by the gods themselves. It is claimed that he had the sign of a bull on his thigh. When the king of the gods brought sugarcane as a gift to the one-year-old boy, he extended his hand to grab it, as he liked sugarcane. Sugarcane is also called Ikshu. So, his dynasty was named the Ikshvaku Dynasty. Rishabha Dev is also credited for having established the first civilization on this planet.

It was the 'age of twins' in Jain mythology when a boy and a girl were often born as twins. In addition to marrying his own twin Sunanda, as was the custom in those days, he also married Sumangala whose twin brother had died. He fathered one hundred sons and two daughters. Bharata, the future emperor of India, and Bahubali, a great sage, were two of his noteworthy sons. His daughters were Sundari and Brahmi. Sundari was taught mathematics and Brahmi was taught writing skills. The Brahmi script is named after one of his daughters. The great subcontinent of Bharat (India) was named after his son, Bharata.

When Rishabha Dev ascended the throne as King, the Earth was a bhoga bhumi, a world of bliss. Wish-fulfilling trees, or *Kalpa-Vrikshas*, granted wishes and no one had to work hard. Depictions

of these divine trees are found in ancient Sanskrit literature and their origins can be dated back to the event of *Samudra Manthan*, or the 'churning of the ocean.'

During Rishabha Dev's reign, the efficacy of the *Kalpa-Vrikshas* diminished and the citizens approached the king for guidance. He educated them with many skills like weaponry, agriculture, trade, arts, writing and knowledge. He taught them the use of fire for cooking grains, as earlier people ate raw fruits and vegetables. He also trained them in the systematic growth of food grains and the art of agriculture. He established the system of governance and the institution of marriage. He helped his subjects to deal with disputes by ushering in a system of law and order. All his work improved the well-being of humanity.

When the Earth became a *karma bhumi*, or the land of duty and work, he was wise and taught people to make use of every circumstance to their best advantage. He was against laziness and sloth in spiritual aspirants.

Once, in his royal court, a celestial dancer named Nilanjana fell dead while dancing. This awakened him to the reality of the impermanence of life. He realised that his life's final mission was to learn and teach humanity the way to liberation and freedom from this world. He renounced his royal life and went to the forest

and meditated. After many years of penance under a Banyan tree, he attained Kaivalya. That was when the whole world experienced a glow and peace. He became free from his karma because of his rigorous meditation and was liberated from the endless cycle of rebirth. He was then called 'Ocean of Knowledge' and 'Destroyer of Enemies'.

He wanted to teach and share all that he had learned and experienced. So he established separate orders of monks for men and women. He prescribed five major vows for monks and twelve vows for people who were not ascetics but were living a family life. The five vows are *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (not stealing), *Aparigraha* (non-acquisition) and *Brahmacharya* (chastity).

Rishabha Dev's fast lasted for one full year and then he came to the capital city to seek alms. His great-grandson brought a pitcher of fresh sugarcane juice, with great love and devotion and offered it to him. Rishabha accepted it in his cupped hands and drank. This day is celebrated as Akshaya Tritiya by Jains.

It is believed that the gods created a lecture hall for him where he preached to the kings and commoners alike and that even lions and sheep sat together without fear and listened to his sermons. One of his sons brought his mother Maru Devi to listen to him

speak, who is believed to be the first to attain enlightenment after listening to his sermons. In the Taittiriya Upanishad, it is mentioned that Rishabha Dev's disciples achieved the highest goal in human life. Other than the Rig Veda, and the Taittiriya Upanishad, Rishabha Dev is referenced in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Bhagavata Purana, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. There have been a lot of excavations unearthed in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley civilisation depicting the sacred bull, the symbol of the great first Tirthankar.

His eldest son, Bharata, later became the emperor after him. In the Skanda Purana, it is stated that Rishabha, son of Nabhi, gave birth to Bharata and the country (India) is named Bharata Varsha after him. However, Rishabha Dev's other sons did not wholeheartedly accept Bharata as emperor, although outwardly they obeyed him. This was because they also had a hidden desire to rule. Rishabha Dev sensed their desire and taught them that the real purpose of human birth is to achieve liberation from rebirth and not the gratification of desires. This spiritual awakening made them follow the spiritual path.

Although all his sons accepted Bharata as the ruler, one of his sons, Bahubali, who ruled the regions of Takshashila (or Taxila, now, in Pakistan) decided to fight Bharata. When he was about to hit his brother, suddenly it dawned on him, 'How can I hit my brother?

How can I kill my brother, just to fulfil this petty materialistic desire?’ He decided to go to his father, Rishabha Dev and learn the spiritual path; but he hesitated. His father sensed his hesitation and sent word for him to get down from the elephant. Bahubali realised that the simple advice to get down from the elephant was for him to get down from his ego. His moment of enlightenment arrived. Bahubali migrated to south India and spread the Jain principles there. His huge statue in Shravanabelagola, Karnataka, is very famous even today. The spread of the Jain way of life extended to all parts of India, and not merely the north. Three of the greatest ancient Tamil epics were composed by Jain saints.

As the life of Rishabha Dev came to an end, he attained *Mahasamadhi* or Nirvana in the Ashtapad Mountains, after giving his last discourse to all disciples. After he breathed his last, his eldest son Bharata is said to have sculpted life-sized statues of Rishabha Dev out of the hill.

Rishabha Dev’s life is the best example of an evolved and balanced human being, like a bird flying high with two well-developed mental wings, one for success in material life and the other for success in spiritual life. Beyond the idea of balancing one’s life, he gave insights into integrating the spiritual quotient into our worldly life.

Banyan tree

Family Name: **Moraceae**

Botanical Name: **Ficus benghalensis**

The Banyan tree is the Deeksha-Vriksha under which Rishabha Dev meditated and attained Keval Gyan. The Banyan tree is the national tree of India and being a sacred and special tree, many saints and *siddhas* meditated under it and received enlightenment. This tree has been revered since the time of the Indus Valley civilisation.

This tree is called the ‘Tree of Life.’ In Tamil Nadu, elders bless youngsters, saying, ‘May you live long like the Banyan tree.’ This tree is sprawling and spread out and its hanging adventitious roots give it a majestic appearance. The Banyan tree has a lifespan of 200 to 500 years.

The Banyan tree’s adventitious roots undergo modification to provide aerial support, offering mechanical reinforcement to its lateral branches. These specialised roots grow vertically downward



and act as supportive pillars, anchoring the tree's lateral branches into the soil. Furthermore, these aerial roots adapt into a sturdy trunk and integrate with the tree's trunk structure. Even during disruptions to the main trunk, these aerial roots, having reached the soil, extend into it, showcasing their exceptional ability to safeguard the central core. This process underscores a valuable lesson about the crucial role of roots in preserving the integrity of the parent stem.

Thin twigs of the Banyan tree are still used as toothbrushes in the countryside, in India. They strengthen the gums and improve oral hygiene. While brushing the teeth, many harmful bile juices come out of the mouth, along with the saliva. Sitting under the shade of this tree during the summer feels better than sitting inside an air-conditioned room and it is also healthier. The coolness is attributed by some to the abundant chlorophyll in its leaves. The leaves also have a mild wax coating, reflecting the incident heat radiation from the sun, thus maintaining a cool ambience under its canopy.



This tree propagates through both seeds and stem cutting. It grows on its own and doesn't require much attention, so we find plenty of saplings growing in unused building walls, cracks and crevices. Birds, fruit bats and other mammals have a noteworthy role in dispersing the seeds to other areas.

The Banyan is the sacred tree of many temples. The Banyan tree in the Prathyangira Devi Temple at Ayyavadi, near Kumbakonam, has the speciality of having five differently shaped leaves on the same branch. The world's largest Banyan tree is found in the botanical gardens of Kolkata.

In Chennai, known locally as the Adyar Aala maram or the Adyar Bodhi tree, there is a magnificent 450-year-old Banyan tree located at the heart of the Theosophical Society Campus. This impressive landmark not only graces the neighbourhood of Adyar but also holds significance for Chennai. It is India's second-largest Banyan tree and is believed to be one of the grandest Banyan trees on the planet. The sprawling expanse covered by the tree and its offshoots measures an impressive 40,000 square feet. Under this specific Banyan tree, eminent people like J Krishnamurti, Annie Besant and Maria Montessori gave discourses. Miraculously the Banyan tree survived and thrived despite the severe storm in 1989 that damaged its main trunk.

