



[Das Lakshana \(Paryusana\) celebrations, Jain Center of America](#), New York City
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**Jain Festivals of Self Purification:
Paryushan & Das-Lakshan
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Often when struggling with the daunting and discouraging environmental issues confronting humanity, I reflect on the strategy of the Jains. While this religious approach may not suit all, I believe there are some principles which could be shared more broadly to become part of the foundation of a sustainable future built on principles of respect, compassion, and discipline. This week, I consider the Jain Festivals of Paryushan and Das-Lakshan.

The Jain community, like other communities throughout the world, celebrates many social and religious functions annually. The most prominent and important Jain festival, popularly known as *Paryushan Parva*, is organized every year between August and September. Two popular components of this festival: ***Paryushan Parva*** and ***Das Lakshan Parva*** are celebrated by Jains throughout the world over an 18 day period Paryushan (8 days) and Das Lakshan (10 days). The mode of performance and aims of both the festivals are the same and might hold some important lessons for how we can better live in harmony with ourselves, all living beings, and the environment.

Origin of most of the festivals in the world are generally to celebrate:

- a) An historic event (such as July 4th U.S. Independence Day celebration or Victory Day Celebration to commemorate the end of World War II);
- b) The birthday of some important person such as October 2nd as Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, Christmas Day; or
- c) The contributions of some groups or persons such as Labor Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving Day etc.

In most of these festivals, there is pomp, show, lighting, decorations, dancing, gifts and presents, ceremonies, parades, tributes, merrymaking, drinking and eating.

In contrast, the Jain festivals of Paryushans are based on spiritual purification to attain its pure state. They aim at self-improvement. The emphasis here is on giving up things and vices, on self-discipline and controlling the wants and desires through fasting and other ascetic practices. The underlying idea of these festivals and their interpretation is that it is a celebration through which the karmic (deed) matter attached to the soul is totally burnt or vanquished (both internally and externally). Truly these are the festivals of self-purification.

Men, women, and children as well as monks and nuns participate in the celebration of Paryushan. In these celebrations, Jains contemplate on the wellbeing, peace and happiness of the common man. These celebrations harbinger social harmony and amity and preach the lofty Jain motto '**Live and help others to live**'. Paryushan is a period of sincere and deep contemplation, meditation, spiritual studies, atonement, asking forgiveness, dialog of the self with the self, fasting and taking a personal stock of the whole year: what, where and why did I as an individual resort to hurt and violence (mentally, verbally and physically) to others around me with whom I come in contact with in my life.

ASKING FORGIVENESS

On the last day, each person asks for forgiveness from those who have been so hurt and also grants forgiveness to those who might have done wrong to me as a person. This is a sincere attempt (without the support and help of anyone else) and is done unconditionally with the family members, friends, relatives, servants, enemies and co-workers. The sounds of *michchhami Dukkhadam* and *Uttam Kshama* (I seek and grant forgiveness) reverberate within the entire Jain community.

There are several great aphorisms (Sutras) to ask for forgiveness with the unity of the body, speech and mind, and the following two most common ones are:

***Khämemi Savve Jivä, Savve Jivä Khamantu Mi
Mitti Me Savva bhuesu, Veram majjham na Kenai.***

Meaning: I forgive all the living beings of the universe, and may all the living-beings forgive me

for my faults. I do not have any animosity towards anybody, and I have friendship for all living beings.

***Jam jam manen vaddham, jam jam vaayen bhaasiyam paavam,
Jam jam kaayen kadam, tas michchhaami dukkdadam***

Meaning; whenever and wherever I have thought of ill of others, spoken bad words and harmed any one physically, I sincerely ask for forgiveness from them.

The process of shedding our karmas (deeds) really begins by asking for forgiveness with true feelings, and to take some vows not to repeat mistakes. The quality of the forgiveness requires humility (*vinay*—absence of ego) and suppression of anger. Therefore, the real purpose of the Paryushan is to purify our soul by staying closer to our own soul, to look at our own faults, to ask for forgiveness for the mistakes we have committed, and to take vows to minimize our faults. We try to forget about the needs of our body (like food) and our business so that we can concentrate on our-self.

Paryushan Parva is a grand Jain festival of self-introspection, self-enlightenment and self-achievement. Its teachings and celebrations hold tremendous lessons for how we all, not just Jains, can live in better harmony with ourselves, all living beings, and the environment.



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