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*The Day Of Forgiveness*

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The day of forgiveness (KSHAMAAVANI) is one of the most important days of the Jain calendar, which is observed by all Jains with great enthusiasm. It comes after eight or ten days of religious observances (PARYUSHAN and DASHLAKSHAN), which include worships, religious discourses and fasting. Jains believe that spiritual advancement cannot be achieved without sound physical health. They also denounce physical and mental hardships in religious practices. Then why all the fasting and other similar practices that go on during these religious days? Well, these are for regulating the system physically and mentally at the end of the rainy season (in India). Further, depending on one's ability and physical condition, one can observe total fasts or partial fasts or no fasts at all.

The ten ultimate virtues to be meditated upon and to be adopted are forgiveness (conquest of anger), modesty (conquest of pride), straightforwardness (conquest of intrigue), cleanliness of spirit (purity of thoughts and feelings, conquest of greed), truthfulness, self-restraint, conquest of desires (penance), renunciation, detachment from the living and non-living, and enjoyment of the attributes of a pure soul.

One day is devoted to each one of these virtues. The above virtues are to be adopted in proper order. For example, one cannot be straightforward unless one conquers pride, begs forgiveness from others and forgives everyone who might have hurt one's feelings. One cannot be truthful without having a clean mind and spirit. One cannot conquer one's desires without having self-restraint. These ten virtues are the ultimate goals of an individual. Jains meditate upon them during the ten days of celebration of spiritual awareness (PARYUSHAN). These days of religious practice and meditation culminate into the day of forgiveness, the day on which one begs forgiveness from everyone and forgives others. Then the new year starts with a clean slate and one tries to attain a higher level of spiritualism.

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<sup>1</sup> Slightly edited version of a presentation by Avanindra Jain at a meeting of the Jain Center of America in early seventies when he was a high school student.