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Speak Up

IS RAKSHABANDHAN A JAIN FESTIVAL?

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Celebrating a festival often has a strong social component, bringing people together to share joy, traditions, and cultural practices. It's a time for communities to bond, families to reunite, and friends to celebrate together.

In the context of Jainism, there are some eternal festivals celebrated forever without any particular occasion, like *dasalakṣaṇa*, *aṣṭāhnikā*, etc., and some immediate festivals due to some incident, like Diwali for the liberation of Lord Mahāvīra. Rakshabandhan is one of those festivals that is remembered for an incident.

The story goes that a group of 700 Jain monks led by Acharya Akampana arrived in Ujjaini, where Acharya Akampana instructed them to observe a vow of silence (*maunavrata*) due to a premonition of impending danger. The local king, a devout Jain, visited the monks but received no response due to their vow. This led to criticism from the king's ministers, who were opposed to Jainism. Śrutasāgara, one of the monks, returning from taking the meal and unaware of the vow, engaged in a doctrinal debate with the ministers and defeated them. He went and told the whole story to Acharya Akampana who instructed monk Śrutasāgara to wait and meditate at the same place where the debate had taken place to avoid any unwanted incident to the group. This incident led to further tensions, and the ministers plotted to harm the monks.

The ministers' plan to attack a meditating monk was thwarted by a forest deity. The next morning, the citizens saw the ministers' failed attempts and criticized them, leading to their expulsion from



the city. Seeking refuge in Hastinapur, the ministers plotted further revenge. When the monks visited Hastinapur, the ministers borrowed control of the state from the king and set fire around the meditating monks. A householder informed Monk Viṣṇukumāra that he could save the group using his Vikriyā Ṛddhi (the power to transform his body into different shapes). Viṣṇukumāra renounced his monkhood, shrank to the size of a dwarf, and approached the king. Impressed by his abilities, the king granted him a reward of three feet of land as he demanded.

Viṣṇukumāra then grew to his fullest size, covering the entire land in two steps, and asked the ministers if he should place his third step on their heads. Realizing their mistakes, the ministers repented and extinguished the fire. Viṣṇukumāra got re-initiated into Jain monkhood, and the people celebrated by distributing sweets. This story highlights the values of protection, unity, and the importance of community bonds in Jainism.

The Jains remember the story and praise Acharya Akampana, Monk Śrutasāgara, and Monk Viṣṇukumāra for their forbearance and saving the religion.

Moreover, the Jain community also celebrates the cordial relationship between brothers and sisters staying together in affable ties. Earlier when the kingdoms were attacked by the enemies and the kings were killed across the country, the queens used to send an auspicious thread to their well-wisher kings who would then come and save their kingdoms and lives. Being a day of happy vibes and togetherness, girls send (or tie) a thread to their brothers asking them to keep them safe and guide them in life following the historic tradition.
