

## **Tapa Pad**

**By Krishna Shah**

Few years ago one day, I noticed my mother was eating her lunch on a copper thali with barely any food - that too, the food seemed quite simple and plain. Out of curiosity and bewilderment, I asked her what she was doing, and why? I vaguely remember she responded with the words 'Ayambil' and 'Tapa'; this was the first time I had encountered someone doing tapa. Through further research, I came to the conclusion that tapa was simply just fasting and since it was a significant part of Jainism practices, naturally, I followed my mother's footsteps and went on to complete an ayambil oli. I felt extremely proud of my achievement as it took a lot of determination and self control to complete - I couldn't believe how my mother had managed to do an immense amount of tapa, prior to me learning about it! However, when asked by my school teacher 'why, as a Jain, did I fast?' I was tongue tied. Being lost for words, I wanted to reflect upon this and understand why. What is this Tapa pad and why is it so significant to Jains?

One of the first principles I had learnt about was 'The Navpad' - also known as the Siddha Chakra. This Sanskrit word can be translated to the '9 Great Entities' - which include Arihants, Siddhas, Acharyas, Upadhyays, Sadhus, Darshan, Gyan, Charitra, and Tapa.

More specifically, the Tapa pad, also known as right austerity, refers to oneself voluntarily foregoing some bodily comforts in order to discipline their minds from emotions and pleasures. There are two manners in which Tapa can be carried out - physically or spiritually. Physically, one can fast where they restrict themselves from eating during certain periods e.g. by doing upvaas or ayambil. However, during spiritual austerity, a person controls their inner desires while fasting. Doing Tapa for the sake of not eating, doesn't benefit you unless done with the right intention and mindset. The point of Tapa isn't merely to cause our bodies pain, but to eliminate our desires. Tapa has a great significance in Jainism, as it not only is part of the Navpad, but also directly correlates to Charitra (right conduct) and karma.

It is every Jain's goal to attain Moksha in order to liberate their soul from the cycle of birth and death. By following the three jewels of Jainism - known as Ratnatraya - they can achieve this goal. It includes right faith; right knowledge and right conduct. Tapa is a form of Charitra (right conduct) as it frees us from attachment to food but also allows us to control our inner desires. All of these attachments and feelings of desire keeps us from being able to reach Moksha. Moreover, since all Jain concepts originate from the fundamental concept of nonviolence (ahimsa), whether it be through thoughts or actions, Jains strive to cause the least harm to any life forms. Ahimsa is also closely related to the theory of karma - where the actions we do, reflect on the quality of our life. By fasting, we are automatically saving the lives of microorganisms - that would have been killed, had we eaten the food. As a result, practising Tapa, reduces the build up of karma on our soul. Therefore, it is evident that Tapa contributes to not only our ability of self control but also aids us in our goal to reduce our karmic build up to gain a favourable rebirth.

How does this have any relevance to the daily lives of young Jains - such as myself? Tapa isn't only relevant to attaining Moksha, it helps us to feel compassion towards any life form and ultimately lead a life full of kindness and compassion. Moreover, valuable lessons such

as not being greedy and having a sense of self control, can also be learnt. Additionally, scientists have proven that regular fasting helps our bodies remain healthy. Moreover, western trends encourage intermittent fasting for a healthier lifestyle!

I believe that understanding what Tapa is and why it's essential to Jainism, has ultimately helped me form a deeper understanding of my religion and as a result, I can now hopefully explain and inspire young Jains around me to practice Tapa.