

August 2016

JainDigest



A Publication by the Federation of Jain Associations in North America



YJA CONVENTION 2016 – LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



JainDigest

A Publication of the
Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA)
email: jaindigestpublication@gmail.com

JAINA is an umbrella organization of local Jain Associations in U.S.A. and Canada. The purpose of the organization is to preserve, practice, and promote Jain Dharma and Jain Way of life.

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On the Cover: YJA Convention 2016 Attendees

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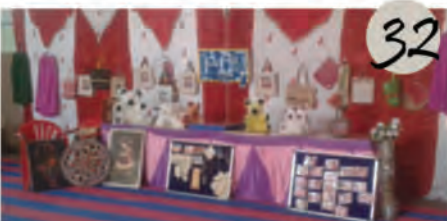
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Om Shri Veetragey Namah

Jai Jinendra,
Congratulations to all organizers and participants of the YJA Convention! It was awesome!! This issue of Jain Digest is dedicated to you, the Agents of Change!

After an overwhelming positive response to our April issue on the theme of "Compassion", all of us in the Jain Digest Committee were very excited to decide on a theme for the August issue. Considering that the YJA Convention was happening in July, we decided on the theme – "Young Jains". We came up with a few topics for the theme such as "Growing up as a Jain in North America", "Learning about Jainism" and "Practicing Jain Principles" and requested all Jain Centers to publish the request for articles in their newsletters. The response has been amazing. We received many articles on these topics; 14 are being published in this issue! In addition, we have 8 more articles related to Young Jains.

We thank all the writers for their heartfelt contribution. I feel privileged to have an opportunity to review the articles by these young writers – some as young as 14 years. Their understanding of Jainism, trials and triumphs in holding on to their heritage and belief system, their commitment to applying the principles of Jainism, their gratefulness to their parents, teachers and Jain Centers, shines through each article. So much so that it was hard for me to hold back tears of joy as I read their stories and I am sure all of you will feel the same way.

We also have two articles by young students who are not Jain by birth, but have benefitted by studying and following the Jain teachings. One of them, Allison Bergson, has joined our editorial team. Welcome, Allison.

Thanks to our editorial team members for their careful reviews of the articles and sending in their edits in a timely manner. And as usual, all these articles would not come to life without the hard work and creativity of our Art and Design team. Thanks.

One request, please e-mail your comments to us at jaindigestpublication@gmail.com. We would love to hear from you. We will also like to encourage our young writers. If you have any specific comments about their article, please write to us and we will pass along the message.

In Seva,
Dilip Parekh

Jai Jinendra,

This Jain Digest issue is dedicated to the Young Jains of America. They adorn the cover page at the recent YJA Convention in Los Angeles which had 650 youth participating from July 1st to July 4th. This was an amazing convention and truly exemplary

in every respect. Our salute goes to the YJA Board members who worked so hard with planning the successful event.

I would like to thank all those who have sent their donations making it possible for Jain Digest to lower the publication cost of printing and mailing to 15,000 members free of charge.

I would also like to thank the members who sent emails complimenting the April publication of Jain Digest. The credit goes to the authors as well as to the Jain Digest editorial and graphic teams that contributed their valuable time and effort.

Jain Digest Committee wishes you all a spiritually uplifting Paryushan Parva. While celebrating this pious parva, let us internalize and look at our own faults. Let us focus on the purification of our soul, ask for forgiveness for the mistakes we have made and take vows to minimize our faults in the future.

If mind is wounded, Forgiveness has the power to heal.
If anger is a disease, Forgiveness is the medicine.
If resentment is darkness, Forgiveness is the light.

On behalf of Jain Digest Committee, I ask for forgiveness for any misrepresentation or omission of the material while presenting it to you to the best of our knowledge, skills and ability.

Your input and suggestions on what you would like to read in the publication will help us in creating themes of interest. You may email us your articles and any information that can be shared with the JAINA community members.

We are always looking for volunteers that are interested in contributing their time and talent in designing and content development. You may email us at: Jaindigestpublication@gmail.com

Thank you with warm regards,
Mahesh Wadher





JAINA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Jai Jinendra!
On behalf of JAINA Executive Committee (EC) and JAINA Board of Directors (BOD), I wish and pray for your and family's sukh-shata during upcoming Paryushan Parv.

It is my honor and privilege to share with you a number of accomplishments JAINA and our Community have achieved over last 3 months. Today, JAINA is a very well-known and highly respected organization not only in North America but also around the globe.

Here are some recent highlights:

YJA Convention: Over 700 Youths attended an amazing YJA Convention from July 1-4, 2016 in Los Angeles. It was a special Convention as YJA celebrated its Silver Jubilee! Young Jains of America (YJA) was formed in 1991 at JAINA Convention held at Stanford University, CA. Theme of YJA Convention was "Young Jains: Agents of Change".

Houston Craft gave an outstanding Keynote address. His message of unconditional love and connection to Ahimsa resonated well with all the attendees. The combination of thought provoking day time sessions, better-than-Bollywood evening programs, sumptuous Jain food and Jainism in practice by the attendees brought YJA Convention to a new level.

Youth Exchange Program: 12 youths from across India participated in a youth exchange program in a collaboration effort between JAINA and Jain International Trade Organization (JITO). JITO is the largest Jain organization in India. 12 college students were selected from over 400 applicants. They visited New York, Washington D.C., San Francisco and attended YJA Convention. Youths had an opportunity to meet Jain Leaders, business leaders, and visit leading enterprises. JAINA would like to send a delegation of Youths from North America to India in near future. Please encourage your youths to participate.

Pope meets Jain Leaders: Pope Francis thanked Jain Community for its commitment to protect and care for the Earth in a meeting held in Vatican, Rome in June 2016.

Pratishtha Mahotsav – Vancouver: Jain Center of British Columbia celebrated Pratishtha Mahotsav over July 4th weekend. Derasar has murtis of all 24 Tirthankars.

New JAINA Member – Austin: Warm welcome to our newest JAINA member–Jain Sangh of Greater Austin (JSGA). JSGA celebrated Shilanyas for a new temple in June 2016.

99 Yatra: JAINA has organized an auspicious 99 Yatra to Shatrunjay Mahatirth, Palitana. Yatra will commence in India on November 14, 2016 and end on January



Jain

13, 2017. It is a unique opportunity for Jains across North America to participate in this historic once-in-lifetime event. Please visit jaina.org for Registration information.

JAINA Convention 2017: JAINA warmly invites you to attend our next JAINA Convention which will be held in Edison, NJ from Friday, June 30, 2017 to Tuesday, July 4, 2017. For the first time in JAINA's history, JAINA Convention will be held for **5 days** to fulfill many requests we received at last three memorable JAINA Conventions. If you have never attended, please consider joining us for an amazing experience. Registration will start on August 15, 2016 at www.jaina.org.

Jain Studies Professorship – Dallas: A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) was signed with University of North Texas (UNT) located in Dallas to establish a Professorship in Jain studies at UNT. Signing ceremony was attended by over 100 Dallas Jain community members.

JAINA Website: We have recently revamped JAINA website completely. It is now dynamic, interactive, and informative. JAINA team is constantly working to bring you new content and updates in more effective manner. At www.jaina.org, you can now read religious articles, watch religious videos with search capability, search Dharmashalas in India and take Mobile Tour Guide of Tirth. Activities of JAINA Committees are regularly updated as well.

Social Media: Now JAINA has a stronger presence on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. You can stay in touch with us on social media for news, activities and updates on Jainism.

JAINA TV Show: JAINA Media Production Committee produces Mangalam – the only Jain TV show in North America. The goal is to present Jain religion through television medium in a non-biased and non-sectarian way with special focus on our next generation. Mangalam show is broadcast on a weekly basis for past 9 years. It has given Jains of North America an important presence in the media world. It is on Sahara One every Saturday at 11 am EST and 8 am PST.

Jain Centers Events Schedule: JAINA has rolled out an integrated schedule of major events at several Jain Centers across USA and Canada. It will facilitate your travel plans to a city you are visiting in case you are interested in visiting a temple and/or attend events. This Master Schedule provides event date and timing, Jain Center's address, website etc. on home page at www.jaina.org for rest of 2016.

JAINA BOD Meeting: Bi-annual JAINA BOD meeting was held in Dallas on May 14, 2016 in collaboration with Jain Society of North Texas. Over 50 JAINA Directors actively

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participated. 20 JAINA Committee Chairpersons provided updates and discussed their plans over next year in detail. Next JAINA BOD meeting will be held at Siddhachalam on October 1, 2016.

Looking ahead, JAINA EC's primary goal is to build on the momentum of this past year. We all need to strive to spread the message of Ahimsa, tolerance, compassion, and charity to end the current unfortunate cycle of violence across the world. Together, we can hopefully initiate the dialogue across the globe to help change hate into compassion for each other.

Thank you for everything you do and your service. It is my honor and privilege to represent you as your President.

Warm Regards,
Ashok Domadia



**Let's participate in Shree Shatrunjay Mahatirth
99 Yatra project in 2016 / 17
Shree Girnar Tirth & 12 Gau Charipalit Yatra
"A Golden opportunity of life time & Second time in North America"**

Shree Adinathay Namah:
Shree Sangh Invitation
FEDERATION OF JAIN ASSOCIATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA
has organized

Shree Shatrunjay Mahatirth - 99 Yatra in 2016 / 17
Jai Jinendra !

The ninety-nine yatra will be performed under the guidance of
PUJYA PRAVACHAN PRABHAVAK ACHARYA
SHREE VIJAY MAHAPADAM SURISWARJI MAHARAJ SAHEB
and
**Shri Punch Parmeshati Ratna
Narendrabhai Nandu
& his team**

USA 99 Yatra COMMITTEE
Arvind R. Shah Chairman, JAINA 99 YATRA
(248)-828-1736

Arvind V. Shah (248) 681-5233, Sharad R. Shah (248) 879-6981,
Praful L. Shah (248) 910-6158 (C), Kayvan Nandu 011-91-9819979968
Starting Point Dharmashala- Shree Mewad Bhavan, Palitana, India
Western Style (2 Person Occupancy)
Yatra Duration Date :
November 14th 2016 through January 13th 2017

99 Yatra Starts on Monday, 14th November 2016 Kartiki Punam	Malaropan & 99 Yatra Celebration on Sat. 24th & Sun. 25th December 2016	12 Gau Charipalit Yatra 27th Dec - 30th Dec 2016	Shree Girnar Tirth By Bus 3rd Jan - 4th Jan 2017	99 Yatra Purnahuti 13th January 2017
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Estimated Cost : \$1200 per yatri (Food & Lodging Only)

Please Register with : Arvind R. Shah Chairman, JAINA 99 Yatra 2016 Project (248)-828-1736 (H)
(248)-835-7395 (C) E-mail : ashah_1941@yahoo.com

Link for more information: <http://www.jaina.org/?page=ShatrunjayMahatirth>

Learning about Jainism

By Chintav Shah, Sohail Daulat, Sonia Ghelani,
Rishi Zaveri, and Diana Weisz



Jain



Chintav is a New Jersey native and a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania where he studied Marketing, Operations, and Systems Engineering. He enjoys learning about the deeper aspects of spirituality within Jainism and their connection to other religions around the world. He was YJA's Director of Education this year and was on the Daytime Programming Team for the 2016 LA Convention.

I went to Pathshala in New Jersey from when I was 5 until I graduated high school at 17. As I grew older, many of those my own age began dropping off, until maybe three or four students remained. Why did I stay through until the end – until college? Years later, I can comfortably admit that what pushed me wasn't my own drive or my own faith; instead, it was my parents and teachers. They told me to keep going even when I didn't see immense value in memorizing line after line of a Sutra I didn't understand – they pushed me to continue to memorize all 24 Tirthankars, their emblems, and Nirvana places even when I did not fully believe in doing so.

Little did I know that this would have a much larger impact later on in life. 2 years later, when I was 19, I began to understand the Arihant's value and power as a framework and mindset for our day to day actions, thoughts, and decisions. I realized the value of the Gunasthanaks (the soul's spiritual ladder) and Dhyans (various meditative states of a purified mind); I connected the teachings of detachment and enlightenment to the principles in Greek philosophy; I even realized how truth lies in each and every religion of the world, but through centuries of politics and adaptation, what remains is a fragment of the initial truth preached by Buddha, Christ, and even Mahavir.

This past winter, I visited India for a wedding and extended my stay to attend the first ever International Conference on Science and Jain Philosophy, a 3 day event in Bombay similar to JAINA conventions. They brought speakers from all around the world who had not only a background in the sciences or philosophy but also enough knowledge about Jainism to present an argument or thesis on the forefront of our current beliefs as a collective Jain sangh on this planet. It was there that I met Dr. Jeoraj Jain, a scientist who has written and published multiple books on how the particles of water themselves are living, rather than what most Jains currently believe which is that water is living on account of the millions of bacteria and microorganisms we cannot see. The implications of this astounded me. The professor urged all of us to focus not just on boiling water to practice nonviolence, but redirect our attention to personal water conservation to realign our perspective and practices.

To bring this full circle, I believe the education of Jain youth needs two aspects: stronger faith – even if it is temporarily blind – imparted on young Jains, and second, clear and relevant applications of Jain principles that enable young Jains to become Agents of Change.

First, if every parent or teacher explicitly said “Trust in this knowledge that you learn in Pathshala, trust in these Sutras, and one day the dots will connect in a way you never thought possible,” every Jain adolescent would grow up at least keeping what they learn about Jainism in the backdrop of their lives. Once these young Jains learn to think critically and once they have more time to read into other religious beliefs, spiritual practices, and philosophical ideals in their late teens and early twenties, a sense of spirituality, compassion, nonviolence, and unity will flow through every action, thought, and decision they make in their lives. My parents' strong will pushed me to continue spending many hours each week learning about Jain concepts between Pathshala, the Jain

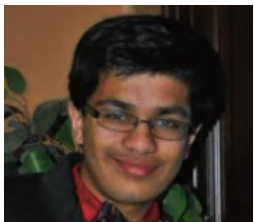


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Academic Bowl, and becoming more involved with YJA. In the same way, parents and educational leaders can do the most by instilling the importance of faith in the minds of young Jains when they need it most.



And second, we need to begin to apply the teachings of Mahavir Swami into our communities and our projects. The YJA Convention this year has done exactly that with its theme – Agents of Change. We hope this idea can grow like a virus and extend its reach as these 700 young Jains start applying these ideas to their lives, their communities, their projects, and their passions. Some may wake up tomorrow and see the truth in Dr. Jeoraj Jain's mission to bring a massive cultural shift to not only boil water, but also to redirect our focus on the conservation, preservation, and appreciation of this vital substance that keeps humanity afloat. And who knows, perhaps that very young Jain may solve this crisis we face as our entire freshwater supply on Earth dwindles and may very well disappear by 2040.



*Sohail Daulat, Age 14
Jain Center of Greater Phoenix*

More than being a religion, Jainism is a philosophy, which guides people towards happiness and liberation. In pathshala, my teachers have instructed me on how to connect Jain principles to my day-to-day life to become a happier individual. I have learned that happiness derives from gratitude and awareness of surroundings rather than greed and

individualism, which seem beneficial, however, in the long term, they corrupt the path towards purity. My pathshala teachers have helped me understand the path towards happiness and have provided me with 5 positive actions that will help eradicate my negative emotions.

- 1) A positive action to become happier is to recall all your belongings with gratitude in your mind and be thankful for everything you have, such as a nice family, job, friends, etc. Gratitude does not cost anything, but when embraced, it is invaluable. Many people take their belongings for granted and forget that they are blessed to have so much to look forward to. Instead, they should make gratitude the new attitude, and be happy with what they have.
- 2) Another action to decrease the negativity harnessed in your mind is to make a list of goals in life that are not selfish, job-related, etc. and be more content with what you have and see the people around you happy. As related to being grateful, making a list helps the person follow a certain pathway or checklist to accomplish all of the goals.
- 3) Also, being empathetic and being aware of your surroundings helps you understand and feel the emotions of the people surrounding you. Empathy helps with spiritual growth, as well as, team building.
- 4) Giving a donation is another action that increases positive emotion. However, you should donate something that is very valuable to you because that shows the decrease in attachment, greed, and reliance.
- 5) Lastly, eliminating minor addictions, such as decreasing the amount of chocolate or ice cream is eaten for dessert, because addiction usually leads to more addictions, and dependence on anything leads to sorrow in the long run.



These five actions can help everyone reach a new level of happiness, decrease in individualism and greed while increasing gratitude and empathy within everyone. After following the teachings, I am more aware of how lucky I am because I live in a nice house, have great friends, and being born in a Jain family. I also have become more empathetic, in that I can recognize when a person feels disturbed or is sad, and try to help them feel better. By realizing how lucky I am, as well as, being able to help my surroundings, while not being dependent on it, makes me a happier individual.





Sonia Ghelani is currently a marketing manager at Texas Instruments. She is an active member of the Jain Society of North Texas, Dallas. She is also a member of JAINA's Long-Range Planning Committee and volunteers her time as a Pathshala co-teacher.

When I was first asked to come speak about how the Jain Society of North Texas Jain Temple has helped me, the obvious came to mind. I can say my Navkar Mantra, believe in Ahimsa, Aparigraha and Anekantvaad, and try to follow the five pillars of Jainism as best as I can.

But as I began to think more about how this Jain Community has shaped who I am, I realized that the life lessons learned growing up as a part of this Samaj extend way beyond the obvious. These life skills allowed me to excel in school, at work and in my social life, and many of these skills can be directly traced back to having emanated from within the walls of temple. Though the list is long, I've narrowed it down to following top three.

Respect for others: Let's face it. Growing up in this community has taught me that my parents are not just Jitubhai and Dakshaben. The list is long, and includes aunts and uncles who have held my best interest at heart. "Please help put up these chairs", or "can you help serve the water, beta?" is really code for "we want you to learn to do your part too". Raising children in this society is a responsibility that is gladly shared across all, challenging us to be more respectful, courteous, thoughtful and agreeable.

Having respect for others steers us away from being the big, bad bully on the school playground, or from keeping our employees at work too late every day. Bullying is something that has taken the spotlight in the news lately, and I wonder how things would be different if everyone could learn to respect the way we did, while growing up.

Humility: Sure, I think I'm a pretty good Jain. I've memorized the Navkar Mantra and a few stotras, try to attend swadhyay or pratikraman if I'm in town, and keep a picture of Mahavir Bhagwan at my apartment. I could sit back and pat myself on the back for a job well done and tell myself to keep up the good work, but instead I take encouragement from those I see here trying to be even better Jains by taking these steps further. "Being Jain" isn't a state of being or a moment of achievement -- it's an evolutionary process,

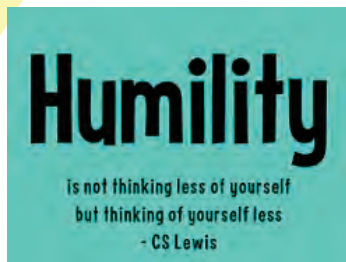
and seeing those that are on that path provides the rest of us with the inspiration to move along that path.

Humility allows us to have an appreciation for others and inspires us to be better. In school, this kept me from being upset, when having not done well in a test. In dance, humility made me practice harder and appreciate criticism. At work, it's helped me to continue to refine my leadership skills.

Leadership: My first remembrances of being a club officer actually began here, in the ladies restroom of the old temple building. There, my friends and I started GWA (Girls With Attitude) and CGC (the Craft Girls Club), and a few other clubs with relatively the same members. Later, our leadership abilities evolved as we stepped into high school and Jadavji uncle's Pathshala class, when we promised to uphold the existing Jain Youth Group Constitution. A few of us even continued to broaden our leadership abilities by becoming involved with YJA, the Young Jains of America an umbrella organization under JAINA. It was here we learned that leadership was not just merely having a title, but by building a followership grounded on leading by example, delegating and connecting with others.

Growing up here in the Jain Center has helped me gain some of the key skills and qualities. Now I look for some these qualities such as leading by example, having the drive to do the best, and ability to influence others; in those who come looking for a job at Texas Instruments, where I work.

As you can see, our Jain Society provides us more than just a place to worship. The list doesn't just end with respect, humility, and leadership, but also extends to courage (just take the example of all the kids here who perform for us on the stage year after year), friendship (with a Pathshala of 300 kids strong, it's hard to not make friends for life), discipline (I mean, why else would we be out of bed early every Sunday for Pathshala week after week), and perspective (you seriously can't ignore key principles like Anekantvaad and not apply it in daily life). It's a sacred place where the next generation can grow into high-functioning, positive adults with a drive to leave a positive mark on society. These four walls didn't just teach me about Jainism -- they taught me life skills. I am grateful to all those who have played a part in shaping my life.



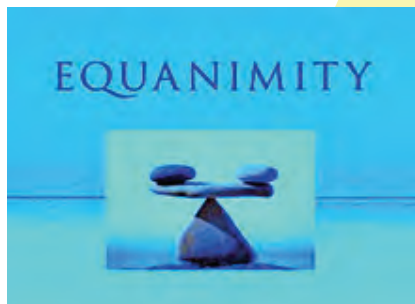
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Rishi Zaveri just completed his Masters in Computer Science from University of Michigan. He is very active youth of Jain society of Greater Detroit. He has also helped found the 'Jain Students Association' at U of M.

Now that I have graduated college, I find it very easy to take for granted what Jainism and its philosophy has lent me the past four years. Like many of my peers, in high school I found it very hard to take my religion seriously. I heard stories of fantastic mythical places such as Ashtapad and humans with superpowers. I learned about the Jain time cycle and what the universe looks like, according to the scriptures. I was told that there existed miniscule, undetectable lifeforms in rocks, fire, and the air. I was told that Jainism was a religion based on science, however, whatever I had learned in school clashed with all of these ideas. Because of this I became disillusioned with all the other tenets of Jainism. It was not until college that I redeveloped my curiosity and love for Jain philosophy. When I reflect back, there are two things that I learned that believe helped change my view so drastically.

First, I learned that Jainism is not defined by its stories of super humans and magical places. I realized that Jainism is defined by how it influences one to conduct their everyday life. Jainism is inherently a religion to be followed internally. Its principals are applicable to every situation we face, from school-induced stress and conflicts with other people. Jainism stresses the importance of equanimity and the understanding that the entire universe is in flux. Nothing is constant. Accepting this leads one to accept any situation that comes their way without feeling any extreme emotions. It tells us that if we put in our 100 percent, then the outcome is no longer in our control. This concept of Purush-aarth (effort) helped me keep a cool mind during extremely trying semesters and I was able to stay calm during conflicts with friends and family. Many elders preached to me the importance of going to the temple and doing samayik/pratikraman, but what I was never taught was that all these rituals are useless unless we are able to stay calm and controlled mentally.



The second thing that I realized was why the “science” that Jainism taught was important, even though it conflicted with the science I was used to. The concept of time existing infinitely in both directions, and the universe having a definite shape and structure and being inhabited with 84 lakh types of lifeforms – this all seems unbelievable when taken at face value. What I missed, however, was the affect this knowledge should have on a person. The knowledge that

countless humans have lived before us, and countless will live after us, puts the length of our life in perspective. Our average 80 years on this earth is nothing compared to the existence of humans. It tells us that the fame and fortune that we amass in our life will soon be forgotten in just a few generations. If even kings who ruled entire continents are no longer remembered and respected, then who are we, who only own a few acres of land? When we learn that there are other planets just like ours, where people live just like us, we realize that we are also not special. There is nothing unique in our existence. Thus the point of learning these things is to humble us. It is to remove our ego with respect to our body, our wealth and our status. It guided me when deciding my path after graduation – that I should not blindly pursue a career or job that guarantees the best pay or social status, rather that which still allows me to follow my religion wholeheartedly.

My perspective of Jainism has shifted immensely since high school. Although there are many Jain concepts that I am skeptical of, I realize that it is not the actual concept that is important, rather the self-realization it induces. I no longer call myself Jain because I do puja at the temple once a week or do Samvatsari Pratikraman once a year, but because I am learning to be peaceful and compassionate at all times.



Diana Noel Weisz

Diana is a Senior at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, majoring in Finance and Economics.

My last engaged learning was the most difficult and the most influential. After my interview with Sushama Parekh at her home, I learned the importance of asteya - non-stealing. Sushama taught me that one should not physically steal objects from other people but should also not steal emotions that aren't “theirs”. In this context, the emotions belong to one's mind and not the soul. Hence when we look at ourselves as a peaceful, eternal soul, getting influenced by the emotions is like “stealing” since those emotions do not belong to the soul.

My recent diagnosis of diabetes has placed me in many situations where I allow myself to be controlled by my emotions. From frustration with having constant high blood sugar, to anxious and hazardous thoughts that are induced from low blood sugar, there have been many times that I have asked “why me?”. Sushama's lesson was unexpectedly very profound and has stuck with me ever since the interview. For my fifth engaged learning I have practiced asteya by not allowing myself to be controlled by not only my emotions, but also by the scenarios that are occurring around me.

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Growing Up as a Jain in North America

By Urmi Mota, Satej Shah, Parthvi Harde,
Uttami Godha, Zeel Kothari



Jain



Urmi Mota, Age 17
Jain Center of Greater Phoenix

When I first arrived in Phoenix at the age of three, how was I supposed to know I would soon join a community that would change my life? Moving away from Texas was an event that I barely remember since I was basically a baby. Leaving your old home with the best hiding spots for hide-and-seek and your first friends whom you've known for less than a year or two is one of the biggest struggles of a wise, experienced, practical toddler. That same year we moved was the year that my parents decided to join the Jain community that used to meet every Sunday morning in a high school in Phoenix. From a community that grew from a few families to over 150 families that now make up JCGP, I can say with confidence now, as a teen about to approach adulthood, that I witnessed a staggering change in a community that altered my perspective in life. Looking back on that day, there were two things that I recall clearly: the fact that there were less than fifty people sitting in the middle of the creepily quiet school library and the scene of my dad introducing himself along with my mother and me to the new group that would become some of our closest friends in the future.



From that day on, Pathshala classes became as much of a norm and necessity in my life as watching the Disney Channel. More than just a class, Pathshala was also a diverse environment in which we got to listen to amazing stories, engage in arts and crafts, and develop our drama skills through the lives of Bhagwan Mahavir Swami or Shraavan Kumar. Growing up as a Jain in a country where the religion isn't well known has both its benefits and its downsides. While you get to be a part of a unique community and people can be very curious and interested about Jainism, claiming "it's really cool how different" we are,

it also means that I had to answer a lot of questions, some that an elementary school kid cannot answer concisely. "Is reincarnation the same thing as Karma? Wait, so is Jainism like a cousin of Hinduism? You can eat fish, its vegetarian, right? Would you eat meat for a million dollars? How can you not love McDonalds, it's delicious!? Why are you drinking boiled water on a warm day in August?" While it is very simple for us to answer these questions in Pathshala since we are surrounded by other children and by our gurus who teach and guide us, how was I supposed to explain the meaning of Paryushan and Tap to a friend born and raised in Arizona with barely any knowledge about other religions or Indian culture? Targeted to these questions countless times, I often approached the point where I would regretfully resort to sometimes replying, "Umm, its kind a hard to explain, maybe I'll tell you later."

For most of my childhood, I would avoid talking about Jainism and tried to follow the principles and ideas that my Pathshala teachers would implement in us without openly discussing it. It wasn't until my parents and I joined monthly Satsangs as a part of Raj Parivar in which I truly started to talk and discuss the thoughts of my mind. As an only child, it was common that I kept my thoughts secret and rarely talked about them out loud, yet these monthly gatherings for merely a few hours were so impactful that they had truly an effect on me and my family. They taught me how to live the best life that I could using Jain principles and the thoughts from Gurudev Rakeshbhai Jhaveri, devotee of Shrimad Rajchandra. These Satsangs not only made me realize how amazingly rare our lives are and how grateful we should be, but they inspired me to strive for goals that before I thought, "nah, I couldn't do that".



Most of the last five years of Paryushan, my mother has always cleverly hinted to me that she wanted me to attempt Athai, and every year I would refuse. My first thought would always be, "nope, that's impossible, I can't last a whole day without food, how would I last eight?" Being the food lover I was, even doing Upvaas was a dramatic experience, so there was absolutely no way that I imagined even attempting athai in my life. Well, that is, until last year. Gurudev's words and my past Pathshala learnings inspired me to do the one thing that I never imagined I'd do. In a three-day convention in New Jersey last July, Gurudev said something that changed my entire perspective: a simple joke. "Knock Knock. Who's there? Opportunity. Not true, because opportunity never knocks twice." Eye awakening to me personally, that joke remained in my mind on that plane ride back to Arizona, inspiring me to decide to do Athai, because who knows when I would get this opportunity again?

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As an ABCD, an American Born Confused Desi, I admit that most of my life I was confused whether to be proud or embarrassed about my faith. The questions I would receive or looks that I would get while wearing traditional clothes or the grimaces on the faces of my classmates who smelled my occasional Indian lunches made me doubt both Jainism and myself. While I now regret that these doubts even came to my mind, I realize that I was just learning how to adjust in a place where diversity is both appreciated yet judged, and that I should do that what makes me happy and helps me to succeed in the path of Jainism, because I know that life is merely the gift of the one opportunity that may not knock on the same door again.



*Satej Shah (Grade 11), Schaumburg, IL
James B. Conant High School*

“What’s that red string on your right wrist? What’s the red scroll-looking thing attached to it? Why are you wearing it?” When asked such questions, I turned into an automated voice messaging system: “It’s because of my religion.” Being an innocent five year old Jain, I only knew how to do ‘Chaityavandan’ and my daily prayers. I had no idea what a

‘Raksha Potli’ meant, so I had the same understanding as to why I was wearing that “red string” on my right wrist as my kindergarten friends. Over the course of the years, the number one question asked is, “why are you fasting and only allowed to drink boiled water?” Again, at the age of five, I had no idea why, but among my high school peers, I can give a detailed explanation for most religious questions asked. I know that I’m not the only Young Jain who has been asked these questions, because people notice your actions and the more ways you are different from them. The only way I am able to answer these questions is through my experience and knowledge as a Jain.



Growing up in North America, especially in Chicago, IL, as a Jain is a privilege. I have been shaped into the person I am today because of my family’s strong religious beliefs and spiritual Jain practices from the day I was born. My ears listened to the Navkar Mantra as soon as I was born. Every day, for the past 11 years before going to school and starting my day, I do Darshan and ‘Vaskshap Pooja’ on Parshvanath and Shantinath Bhagwan at our home Derasar. Twice a month, I attend the finest Patshala in North America at the Chicago Jain Society.



We observe eating Jain food at home and at restaurants. When I share this fact with my friends, their main curiosity is how restaurants can serve Jain food. Whether it be an Indian restaurant or a well-known franchise restaurant, their menu items can be easily customized with Jain ingredients by simply asking. This is one of the many simple Jain practices I follow. I find a religious aspect to almost everything I do which helps me understand and practice Jainism on a different level. In 2013, my dad completed a ‘Maskhaman’, which is a thirty day fast consisting of consuming cooled-down boiled

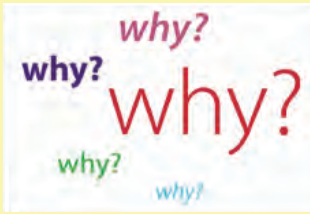
water between sunrise and sunset. In 2015, my dad and my uncle completed a 400 day journey of fasting and becoming closer with their soul, a ‘Varsitap’. With the intense fasting in my family, my Jain beliefs have gotten stronger and I have been able connect with Jainism in ways that have made me a better person. My family’s effort towards a more religious life has not only helped me spiritually, but also professionally.

At the age of 12, I attended a 3-day ‘Sangh’ in India. A ‘Sangh’ is a pilgrimage Jains take from city to city and camp out near Derasar locations. We were fortunate to shadow Maharajsahebs and witnessed their journey to attain ‘Moksha’ by getting closer to their soul. We experienced their lifestyle without electricity and other any modern amenities, as well. This experience was an eye opener for me as I realized how humans, especially Jains can devote their precious life towards their soul. When I reflect upon my life as a Jain, I’ve realized how spoiled I am living with tens of thousands of apps on my phone to help connect with people, rather than focusing on Jain values that can help me connect with my soul. Through the ‘Sangh’ experience, I was able to put different lives into perspective through a humanitarian lens.

As I’ve grown, I’ve become more curious and interested in learning the specific details about our religion. ‘Why this way?’ or ‘Why is it this way and not that way?’ types of questions come up in almost every discussion I have about Jainism. The



more I learn about Jainism, the more I want to know why. For a period of time, I was on a streak of asking why on every Jain discussion topic, but with the simple teachings from visiting dignitaries and Pathshala, I soon realized that being a Jain shouldn't revolve around knowing the whys of everything. As a Jain, our first approach should be to accept Jineshwar Bhagwan's sermons instead of searching for the answers to the whys. Practicing Jainism begins with the right faith and following the core Jain principles (Ahimsa, Satya, Achurya, Brahamacharya, and Aparigraha) in our daily lives. Learning the in-depth details and following Jain Principles will help find answers, enlighten spiritual beliefs, and guide you on the path of attaining 'Moksha'.



I am a fortunate and blessed Jain in Chicago. Being in North America, I have endless resources and opportunities which other Young Jains may not have in other parts of the world. My ability to connect my actions and knowledge with Jainism has defined how I've grown up. Jainism is not something I follow, it is my way of life. I am a proud Jain.



*Parthvi Harde, Age 17
Jain Center of Greater Phoenix*

Growing up with any sort of religious path isn't the easiest thing to do, especially if that religion isn't widely practiced in the area you live in. For me, growing up as a Jain meant I had a certain moral path already picked out for me. As years went on and I became more mature, I realized that even if I had the choice to pick a different religion I would still choose Jainism every single time. Being a Jain never meant we had strict guidelines as to what we could or couldn't do but

rather it was about becoming a person who is the ideal Jain and that meant looking within ourselves. No doubt, sometimes the constant idea of becoming a perfect Jain was overwhelming, especially with all the foreign influences in school and in our social circles; but in the end it made me a stronger believer in what Jains stand for. The characteristics that people use to describe me have all come about because I am a Jain and being a Jain means I am a person with moral value. Compassionate, peaceful, loving, humble - all these words are just a set of colloquial terms for our Jain beliefs.

These days I am much more aware of who I am and what responsibilities come with being a Jain. When I was younger I didn't feel any heavy obligations to my religion, except for this one time in fourth grade. My best friend back then wasn't a vegetarian, but we both were extreme animal lovers. So one day I popped the question out there, why do you eat the animals that you love so much? My memory of this is a little faded, but I do remember that my friend didn't change overnight. I had enough maturity to know that I shouldn't force my beliefs onto someone else. However, I did try to convince her as persuasively as possible so she could see where I was coming from. People who eat meat don't want to constantly hear how violently animals are killed. Hence rather than focusing on that, I told her how animals have feelings too. Connecting our shared love for dogs and horses I linked that back to how chicken are no different than dogs and she would never be okay with hurting a dog. With the little reminders that chicken have families and feelings, she soon became a vegetarian and she felt proud of her decision.



Since then all my friends have started to discover themselves more and now we engage in discussions rather than convincing each other to see each other's viewpoints. Even though I grew up in Arizona most of my life and was surrounded by people who may or may not understand who I am as a person, I am proud to be a Jain. I think that the most important thing in order to fully believe and practice one's religion is that one must never be ashamed of it. Being best friends with a Vaishnav, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh I know that I have never thought twice about identifying myself as a Jain to them.

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Uttami Godha, Age 15
Coppell High School, Irving, Texas

Growing up, most people assumed I was Indian, spoke “Indian,” and got “Indian” grades. Some of the smarter individuals I came across in my academic career claimed I was “Hindi.” With such oh-so-clever mindsets I was exposed to while growing up in the United States, I realized that adhering to the principles and values of Jainism, my small, esoteric religion, would be difficult in a country where Christian churches and Christmas carols were the heart and soul of popular culture.



For example, the pedagogy used by American schools used to baffle me. Growing up in a Jain family, I learned the principles of Jainism at a tender age, and strived to apply those values in my daily life. One of these values included the practice of aparigraha, or non-attachment. Yet, as I sat in my third grade classroom, in an elementary school that was part of a well-to-do school district, all I could see around me were kids playing games on their iPads and texting on their iPhones, completely addicted to technology, fully immersed in a virtual reality.

And, if we weren't playing games or texting, we were utilizing technology for schoolwork: to take online test, to create something using Google Presentations, or to take notes on Google Docs.



By the fifth grade, it had come to the point where the majority of the class didn't even know how to read analog clocks anymore, because we had been so reliant on the digital benefits our cell phones and iPads provided for us.

Now, I don't consider myself apart from the general masses- I was just as enthralled by the appeal and ease of using online resources as opposed to heavy, physical copies of textbooks. However, having grown up with Jainism instilled in every crevice of my mind and body, for some fleeting moments of my childhood, I recalled the values of aparigraha, and even lobh, or greed. And I wondered how I went from being a devout Jain to becoming so heavily reliant on technology, ignoring even the most basic principles of Jainism, such as non-attachment, especially to a pudgal, in this case.



Even now, as a high school student, at times I fail to adhere to the principles I grew up with- the main reason being that there are just so many distractions. And I'm sure this applies not just to teenagers and children in general, but to adults, as well. After all, adults have to go to work, feed and support their families, and have a million things on their minds. And, with the added circumstance of not being in their home country, it can be quite difficult to remember one's upbringing.

But, over the years, even in the midst of Jewish menorahs, final exams, and Christmas trees, I've realized something. Whether it's using the karma theory

to make sense of how things occur, drawing on meditation techniques to calm my thoughts, or taking care to not step on an ant or swat away a fly I may be bothered by, Jainism has subconsciously impacted so many of my decisions. Being a Jain makes me unique. It makes me different from my Hindu, Muslim, and Christian friends. It has shaped me into the person I am today, and brought me closer to my culture, even if I do live in the United States. If being Jain means receiving blank stares at its mention, being the only one writing about it on Religion Day, and being asked if I'm “actually vegan,” bring it on.

I could not be more grateful.



Zeel Kothari, Age 18
Loyola University, Chicago

I was born in India and came to North America at age one with no knowledge of the person I was and the religion I belong to which is obviously expected at that age. The fact is that now everyone will forever consider me as someone who was born and brought up in North America, a place with different cultural values, a place that is also a melting pot due to the variety of ethnicities here.

In my childhood, I grew up in a smaller city with very few Jains compared to other larger cities, but the Jain society where I lived was closely knit and was also dedicated in educating the youngsters about Jainism. It was here where I learned the fundamentals of Jainism and other sutras. It was here where I also learned the importance of vegetarianism in our religion and why we do not consume certain foods. Understanding the concept is one thing but applying it to your day to day life is another thing. So growing up in a Jain family, we strictly followed vegetarianism and made sure we restricted ourselves as much as we could on important occasions, especially during paryushan. But sometimes you realize that not everyone is on the same page as you because they might be taught different things as they are growing up which brings up a small incident that happened in my early childhood.

My cousins had just recently moved to North America from India and came over to visit us. At that time I was still little, and did not have much knowledge about the fact that there are many Jains that do not consume root vegetables at all times. My cousin's family was one of those families. So I remember offering my cousin a potato chip to eat and she denied it. I asked her why and her response to me was, "I do not eat potatoes because I am Jain". Well even though I was little, I still knew I was Jain too and at the same time I was eating a potato chip. So I ran to my mom and told her what my cousin said and asked her, "Mom, does that mean I am not Jain?" Then she explained to me that the food we consume is not everything that defines us as Jains, and that there is more to it. Saying the Navkar Mantra, bowing down, folding hands and not eating certain foods is one of the first things that a young Jain is taught, but certainly not everything that is taught.

Growing up as a Jain in North America, you usually are living in a place where you are constantly surrounded by people with diverse beliefs of different religions. That is when you are expected to represent your religion, but also understand different perspectives or in other words, practicing Anekantvad. When people around me want to know more about my religion, I learn with them. Often times the questions they raise, make me curious and along the process I end up learning with them. It makes me want to know the reason behind it and not just what I need to know. For example, when I was little I always knew that we are not supposed to eat root vegetables but never knew why up until later on when one of my friends asked me why, and I did not know what to say. So I asked, learned why and educated my friends about it. So the exposure of different religions all around me made me curious about the different beliefs. This gives me an opportunity to educate myself and try to answer my own questions.

Even though I may not always be able to walk to the temple, meet Maharaj Sahebs and attend their lectures all the time, or able to visit holy temples, there is so much I can do and educate myself from where I am living. Technology here allow us to virtually listen to a lecture, watch a diksha happening in India, and just stay in touch with all the Jain related events constantly happening around us. Being a pathshala student, I have many opportunities to learn and then educate others around me about Jainism. Besides going to the temple every other Sunday, I can get involved in different activities such as the Jain Academic Bowl, going to Jain conventions, and taking part in Mahavir Jayanti programs. In pathshala here, emphasis is more on the fundamentals and the science behind the religion rather than just learning the sutras. Growing up, I learned the basic sutras and the meanings, but it later I understood the meaning of Jainism and why we believe in what we believe in. That is something that has helped me out a lot because it gave me a reason for doing what I do every day. As a high schooler, I was given an opportunity to participate in a Jain Academic Bowl. That was a great opportunity for me to grow as a Jain because I learned so much about Jainism through that at the convention. It really helped me dig deeper into the fundamentals of Jainism. Additionally, going to conventions and

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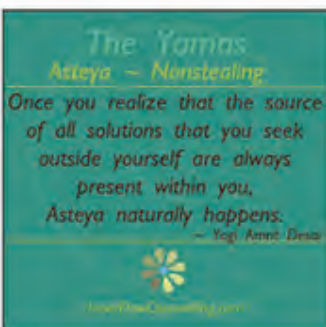
attending various sessions of my interest contributed to my growth as a Jain because I learned a lot of new information from people that felt the same way I did or had the same interest.

Staying within a tight Jain community has given me chances to grow with everyone else and reach out to other people. Growing up as a Jain in North America really is not as different as it may seem. Same opportunities available here, that are offered elsewhere, except sometimes I just have to take extra step to reach out for them. Often times I do run into complicated situations when it comes to not falling under peer pressure or trying to make sure your beliefs are not being influenced by the variety of beliefs surrounding me. For example, all the different types of foods available here can actually pose a challenge. The way they are made, or what they are made of is something I have to be cautious about. It is not as easy as it would be if I was living in India staring at a menu where there is a whole section full of entrees with “Jain” written directly in front of it. Going to pathshala and being an active member of the Jain society here has made me realize that food may be known as Jain but behind the scenes is what really matters. Some restaurants use the same oil to fry things which includes vegetarian and non- vegetarian. So even though you may be told that the food is Jain, it really may not be. So being aware of those hidden issues is something I learned to be very careful about when I order

or buy something. Overall, handling these situations with what I have learned throughout the years has worked out well.

Jainism is becoming more widely known across North America. I see many non-Jains coming to visit the Jain temple. I remember once sitting in my Pathshala class with six other Caucasian high schoolers, because they wanted to educate themselves more about this religion. This way we were able to discuss the different and similar religious beliefs which certainly resulted in an interesting conversation. I learned so much more, and it also helped me practice anekantvad even more by trying to understand their take on certain religious issues. I am truly grateful to be exposed to everything because I know for a fact that it has helped me grow and learn more about myself. From all the experiences I went through which included taking part in Jain events, being questioned by my peers, or just attending conventions, I feel much more knowledgeable and confident to be able to explain the fundamentals of my religion to anyone who may ask. All these experiences have really shaped me the person I am today and I am grateful for it. Just like any other place, North America provides Jains with many opportunities, which I try to take advantage of. The closely knit Jain community here is truly committed to helping every Jain learn and grow which I am glad to be part of.

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*“Continued from page 11”*



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Unlike the other engaged learnings, this one is particularly special because I have recognized the importance of it and plan to follow it throughout my life. Implementing asteya in my life has taught me to not be consumed the external factors that are occurring around me but to simply experience the moment without stealing the beauty or pain from it. This has been especially hard to do in difficult situations. For example, I have been applying for internships this entire semester and did not receive a job offer. Since this was my main priority this semester, it was very frustrating to know the countless hours spent on job applications were a waste of my time.

Luckily, in the middle of this denial process I began to practice asteya and did not allow myself to steal the emotion of frustration nor allow myself to feel that I deserved some type of reward for the hours I spent looking for a job.. At first, it was hard to not allow myself to be frustrated. I had to physically sit myself down and take deep breaths to remind myself that the emotion of frustration was not mine to take. Although I did not get a job offer, instead of wasting my energy on frustration I used my energy to reflect and ask myself; are the fruits of karma simply trying to tell me, I had to do something else?. The answer came to me one day, and I am now moving to China this summer to study Mandarin. In all, if I was not practicing asteya, during my job search process, I would have probably allowed myself to continue to waste my energy on frustration, would not have achieved the clarity, acceptance, and right mindset that made me realize; what I really wanted to do this summer.

Practicing Jain Principles

By Prakhar Bhandari, Vritika Patni, Vritika Parikh,
and Dhara Shah



Jain



Prakhar Bhandari is a student at the University of Pennsylvania pursuing a BSE and MSE in Computer Science with minors in Mathematics and Engineering Entrepreneurship. Prakhar enjoys playing tennis, cooking, taking pictures, and reading science fiction. Prakhar is a president of HJA (Hindu Jain Association), that is affiliated with YJA - Young Jains of America.

As a college student in the US, one has to deal with a variety of unique situations that most of us have not experienced before. One meets people from different religions, people from different countries, people who study and are passionate about vastly different things than oneself – hence the amount of information to take in during college can be overwhelming. There is always some activity or event that is going on and there is no shortage of things to do, or people to meet. It can be overwhelming to try to process all of the new information and learning that one can pick up.



With this in mind, I have found applying the Jain principle of Anekantvad to be particularly useful throughout my college experience. First, let me give some context about Anekantvad. It means “many-sidedness”, and represents the multiplicity of viewpoints. The classic Jain parable of the blind men and the elephant aptly illustrates this. In this story, an elephant had arrived at town and six blind men went to go see what an elephant looked like, by feeling different parts of the elephant’s body. The blind man who felt the tail said that the elephant was like a rope, the man who felt the leg said the elephant was like a pillar, the man who felt the trunk said the elephant was like a tree branch, and so on. The moral of the story is that even though they were all saying different things, they were all correct. All of them had some part of the truth, yet no one had absolute truth, since they all had some limitations in



their perspective. The key lesson here is that even though none of them had absolute truth and were saying different things, there is still something that can be learned from each of them.

I have tried to apply this perspective during my years at college. At an institution of higher learning, everyone brings their own viewpoint and has their own unique perspective on ideas about the world. Even among my Jain friends, we would frequently have debate and discussion on topics. The most interesting thing about this was that for the



first time, I realized that there was no one right answer and that there was no one absolute solution that anyone had. I was forced to think about what I really believed in, but more importantly, why I believed in it. I was a college student and my purpose in life right now was to learn.

I had discussions with my Jain friends about their world views, philosophy, life, the future, and other things. This introduced me to many different schools of thought and ideas within Jainism. I remember one time I was discussing the topic of fate versus free will with my Jain friends and the argument was that in Jainism, we believed in the concept of omniscience. People with omniscience, or kevalis, have absolute knowledge of everything – past, present and future. So, if someone can know everything I will ever do in the future, do I have any choice in deciding what I want to do? If someone knows that I will reach for a pencil in three minutes or that I will go for a walk at 6:07PM in the evening, does that mean I have any choice or free will in doing that? After lengthy discussion, we all came to different



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conclusions – some of us believed that we did not have free will, some believed we did, some believed in a limited level of free will.

How was this possible? We had all been raised in America and grew up learning Jain principles at Pathshala. Wasn't it



concerning that even with a similar background and using the same Jain texts to research and read about the topic, we had all come to different conclusions? I don't think so. In fact, I thought the experience was particularly enriching. Jainism itself teaches us that sometimes we cannot find the absolute truth.

Sometimes all we can have are parts of the truth. But why should that be any less significant? Each of us was making valid points and even though we were saying different things, we all had elements of the truth.

It is also very important to keep an open mind and make a variety of friends. Don't just spend time with the people who look like you or who think just like you. Actively go out and seek friends from different communities, from different religions, from different majors – people who challenge you, inspire you, and intrigue you. Take classes outside of the major – subjects that you know nothing about, that you find challenging or intimidating. Take advantage of the diversity and variety of opinions at your college. Some of the most meaningful insights I have had about Jainism have come from discussions with people who had never heard of it. I've learned and gained insights about computer science from taking a law class. Knowledge is everywhere as long as you keep an open mind.



*Vritika Patni, Age: 15
Jain Center of Greater Phoenix*

I have been attending pathshala classes from a very young age, and Jain values have been instilled in me for as long as I can remember. However, it was not until this year—my freshman year

in high-school—that I was really able to apply what I had learned in pathshala, to my everyday life.

One of the principles Jainism has taught me is to try to let go of worldly attachments and material possessions, and instead place emphasis on being part of a community.

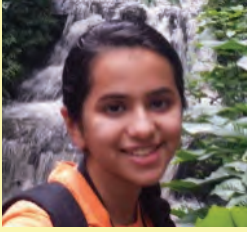
Specifically, I learned to try to let go of minor addictions, in hopes of being more in control of my senses and impulses.



One of my minor addictions, for a really long time, included social media. I was constantly on social media, and this ultimately distracted me from school work, and hindered me from developing close relations with others. In a way, an excess of social media actually disconnected me from my surroundings, instead of connecting me with others. Before I entered high school, I came to the realization that it was important to eliminate distractions, so I would be able to focus more. Additionally, I realized the importance of actually talking and bonding with other people, as these were the connections and memories that would stick with me in the future. I was able to recall Jain principles in regards to community and minor addictions; this led me to delete some of my social media accounts, in hopes of fixing this issue.

I still am working on becoming less attached to my phone, but since then, I have definitely noticed a change for the better in my lifestyle. I feel that I am now able to connect with people, and am able to completely indulge in the present moment—without having to worry about the trivial details of everyday life. I feel as if I am in better control of my senses and impulses altogether.

In pathshala class, I would learn about the importance of community, and I would see this sense of togetherness with everyone who attended. I think surrounding myself with a supportive community and learning about Jain principles has helped me grow tremendously. It has been somewhat challenging to try to balance everyday circumstances with Jain principles. Yet, at the same time, it has been rewarding to be able to apply what I have learned to a situation like this, and allow it to have such a positive, lasting impact on my life.



*Vritika Parikh, Age 14
Oak Valley Middle School, San Diego, California*

Creak. I slowly opened the door, clutching my bag. A wave of middle school students sat before me, their gaze fixedly upon the

teacher in the front. I spotted an empty chair next to my friend, Aayushi, and boldly made my way to it. While the lesson was being taught, I sat and yawned.

This was my schedule. Every Friday, I would wake up, study ahead in Anatomy, arrive at school, go to dance class, and then come an hour late to Anatomy. For the whole year, my Friday had been like this. At the beginning of Science Olympiad, my family had requested for a time change. But, nothing had been working out in relation to the other events' timings. So here I was. I had learned to study independently, and had made a vow to get at least an A on every quiz. So far, I had succeeded. Now I bounced up and down. The announcements for the partner choices were starting.

“Well, the moment you all have been waiting for... partners!” The atmosphere changed in the classroom. Everyone jolted upright, their hands folded neatly on their laps and their faces full of smiles. I clapped my hands and waited, eager but tense. She started muttering lists of names. Aryan was with Deepa, Amethyst was with Emil, Sangam was with blah, blah, blah... Where was my name? Seconds, minutes, hours passed.

Finally she came to my name. “Ah, Vritika is with Nick!” She looked at me, her smile stretching from ear to ear. My expression froze into distain. Nick?! Nick, of all people?! I turned around and looked at Nick. Everyone followed my gaze. There he was in the back, books under his feet as usual. He had curled his textbook into a small cylinder and was pretending to smoke from it.

“Sup?” he questioned when he saw me. I gave him a weak smile and shuddered. All of my independent studying, attendance at each class, excelling amongst all; did this mean nothing to the eyes of my teacher? To give me a partner as such? Furious as I was, I endured the last thirty minutes of Anatomy.

Afterwards, I stormed my way over to my teacher. “Why?” I cried, “Why did you put me with a partner... like him?!?” I gestured to Nick who was busy brushing the bangs of

hair off his face.

“Sometimes the things you are most afraid of are the things that make you happiest.” She replied calmly.

“But I am not afraid of him! Please just give me a different partner! I beg you!”

“You will know when the time comes. Now, if you so please, there’s your mother.” Hurt and frustrated, I told my mom the whole story on the way home. She advised me to set up my first practice with Nick and see how it went. After much thought, I accepted the fact he was going to be my partner.

Everyone is different and have various ways of learning. I thought to myself. I will have to find out his.

I was dropped off the next day at his house, determined to be successful. In my arms, I carried notecards, play-dough, and a laptop. I rang the doorbell, was let in by his mom, and approached the dining table. He was doing his calculus homework and appeared to be moving his head to a beat. When he saw me, he stopped and pointed to an empty chair.

“Sup?” he asked.

“Anatomy. Let’s begin, shall we?” He nodded. “Okay, these here are notecards. I have written multiple terms for all three systems that we need to memorize. Want to give them a try?” I handed the cards to him. Nick showed me his open palm. I dropped the notecards into it, but, at the last second, he flipped his hand sideways.

“Ha ha! Tricked ya! I don’t do anything on paper little dude. It’s all up here.” He indicated to his forehead and stomped on the notecards.

“Alright, alright, Nick. Please do not step on the paper, especially if it has something written all over it. The bad karma of kicking or nudging anything that gives us knowledge results in bad fruit; we do not gain knowledge. Our education will suffer and we won’t win at the final competition.”

“Oh I am really sorry!” He knelt down in a bowing motion.

Digest

“Please forgive me oh holy paper.” I laughed.

“I think it’s all good now, Nick. Now how do you usually learn, if not with paper? Perhaps with modeling the systems, or taking short quizzes online...?”

“I don’t know little dude. I usually go with the beat.”

“The beat?” I asked quizzically. “Is this some eighth grade thing I don’t know about?”

“No, it’s how I learn. To the beat. I develop a rhythm to the subject I am learning about, and memorize the words to the tune. It may be complicated, but is efficient for me at any given time of the day.” I was ecstatic. Nick was not the boy who I had imagined to be. He was someone else inside. A diamond in the rough, they called it.

“Why haven’t you been doing well in the quizzes this year in class then?”

“I have had trouble making a beat for the integumentary, immune, and cardiovascular systems.”

“Is that it? Well, that’s what I am here for!”

From there, Nick and I met weekly to practice for the Science Olympiad Anatomy Final Competition. By the time it came around, we were ready. Even though the competition looked tough, his musical talent and my resourceful memorization would be up to the task. The exam allowed 1 minute per question. We flew past most of them until the final minute remained. The examiner shouted “Go!” for the hundred and first time.

“Write a short paragraph on how smoking affects the heart.” I read. “Um, okay, um... Nick!” I snapped my fingers in front of his face. “I know this.” He whispered, almost guiltily. “I researched about it after you gave me the dirty look in class.”

“Sorry. But it was for your good. Now you know, don’t you? Well, write, no time to look that pale!” I handed him the pencil. “Smoking harms the covering of your supply routes, prompting a development of greasy material which contracts the course. This can bring about a heart assault or a stroke. The carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke diminishes the measure of oxygen in your blood. This implies your heart needs to pump harder to supply the body with the oxygen it needs. The nicotine in cigarettes

fortifies your body to deliver adrenaline, which makes your heart beat quicker and raises your pulse, making your heart work harder. Your blood will probably clump, which expands your danger of suffering a heart attack or stroke.” Nick composed. “I am really glad I researched it. I didn’t want to disrupt my health or let it affect my parents’ relationship with me.

“I do too. I am glad I let you write the answer, even though I knew it. I was just testing you to see if you learned your lesson.” The timer started beeping. All the teams lined up and handed in the tests.

“Well, you have reformed me in many ways. Good luck, partner.”

“Good luck to you, too, as I have learned the same amount from you.” I gave him a thumbs up and went out the door.

At the awards ceremony, Nick and I ended up winning not third, not second, but first in our entire school and third place in the Anatomy division amongst every school competing. My experience may have taught me all the Anatomy lessons in the world, but what I learned in the social aspect was much more significant. It made me realize how practical the Jain teachings are.

One idea was to always accept others the way they are and focus on their virtues, not their looks. And the second notion: sometimes the things you are most afraid of, are the things that make you happiest and we need to practice the Jain philosophy of Glad Acceptance. These two concepts go hand in hand with each other and can be applied directly to one’s daily life to become a good person. As the famous saying goes, “Never judge a book by its cover.” One should not form an opinion about someone based purely on what is seen on the surface, because after taking a deeper look, the person may be very different than what was expected. Nicholas was a good, intelligent boy who seemed a little scary and ignorant at first. But after getting to know him, I learned he had a different way of learning, and just needed a little nudge in the right direction. I had been afraid that with him as a partner, I was doomed to fail at the competition. I had been afraid that we would simply not win. However, the situation reversed and I learned that the only thing that had blinded me was his appearance.

This incident truly opened my eyes. Now, I promise to never shut them again.



*Dhara Shah, Lincoln, Rhode Island
Senior Management Consultant at PwC*

Bhagwan Mahavir's great message to the world was that birth and caste was insignificant, and that karma was of utmost importance since future happiness depends on the destruction of karma. We are all born with different lives. Some are rich, some are poor, some are overweight, some are slim, some are dark, and some are light. However, it is not who we are, but what we do that determines our fate.

As a child, it was fairly simple to practice Jainism in my daily life. I grew up attending functions at the Derasar, learning Jain history and scriptures through Pathshala, and being involved in the local and national Jain community events. After school, I would come home to a Jain family, pray before dinner, and then eat the vegetarian food my parents had prepared. On weekends, my social activities were always preapproved and supervised by parents. The ease of applying Jain principles in my adolescent life stemmed from the knowledge I had gained through my exposure to Jain teachings and the minimal distractions which challenged the core values of Jainism.

Admittedly, going through college and eventually moving onto my professional career, the application of Jain principles was not as simple. The knowledge was still in my mind, but so were the conflicting perspectives which challenged what I thought I knew. In fact, leading a Jain way of life was much more challenging when there was no one telling me what to think, what to say, and what to do. I had practiced Jainism all my life because I was raised to, but to stay true to the core values in absence of my parents, took courage, determination, and self-control.

There were (and still are) decisions I had to make on my own which were a test to my core beliefs. A few inspirational

teachings helped me to navigate this path on my own. One was a saying I heard at a YJA session I attended while in high school: "Morality is doing what is right, regardless of what you are told; religion is doing what you are told, regardless of what is right." As long as I was keeping with the Three Jewels of Jainism: Right Faith, Right Knowledge, Right Conduct, I knew that both morality and religion were one and the same. This gave me great pride in being a Jain and even greater motivation to lead a Jain way of life.

I moved out of my house and into my first college dorm in the fall of 2008, during the exact time that Paryushan was taking place. I still remember being in freshman orientation and the program coordinators being confused as I declined to eat any root vegetables, among other vegetarian options which had been selected for me. There were many puzzled looks and probing questions from my peers on why I was fasting and not drinking water after sunset. It was humbling to be able to explain to them the principles behind Paryushan and self-control.

During that first week, I vividly remember meeting one of my now very dear friends and learning that he was also a Svetamber Jain. My newfound friend expressed to me that he had decided not to follow the strict Paryushan diet that first year of college because adjusting to the new environment in the states and also having to limit his food choices would be very difficult. While I respected his decision, at the same time, I felt a sense of pride that I was able to overcome this challenge for myself. That is what it was, a great challenge for the next five years when I followed Paryushan during the start of each undergraduate and graduate school year. At times, it was tempting to break the rules in order to "fit in" and "have fun" with my friends, especially during the late night movie and snack binges, as well as the unlimited welcome week party foods. However, I channeled the self-control I had established when I completed my Atthai years prior and applied it to each of the eight days.

Aside from Paryushan, holding a vegetarian diet alone in college was not always an easy task. I remember having to get creative with my food choices, modifying meals to ensure I was getting the same amount of nutrients that I was used to at home, and at the same time ensuring no violence was involved to put food on my plate. I joined the Student Senate and as an elected officer for my class, headed the Food Services Committee. I met with the Department



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Head of Dining and improved several of the university policies to make it easier for fellow Jains to carry out their practices. For instance, I had the staff mark new serving utensils for vegetarians at each food station to avoid cross contamination when serving meat and vegetarian food to the students.

I remember getting frustrated, going out to eat at restaurants and having such limited options on the menu. Asking if the Pad Thai was made with fish oil or if the dough in the dinner rolls were baked with eggs was sometimes an inconvenience for others at the table, as well as a further limitation on what I could consume. However, each time I overcame and persevered through the difficult choices I had to make, I felt a great deal of willpower and deeper respect for myself. I learned that those who respected and admired me for being true to my principles turned out to be the friends I wanted to keep close.

If you attend a university in the U.S, you are bound to attend a party where there is alcohol and other substances. Drinking alcohol is a social norm, everywhere, and it is very difficult to steer away from the peer pressure while following the principles of Jainism. It is hard to say “no” when everyone else around you is saying “yes”. In a hard time facing social pressures, such as this one, it is important to remember that how people treat you is their karma,

how you react, is yours. A student from Rutgers University shared their story with me on this exact issue. “You are seen as the ‘weird person’ because you do not consume alcohol, and it may even be a reason why you are not invited to social gatherings in the future. I faced this when I was a freshman; while my friends encouraged me to drink, and as I continued to decline, I saw my group of friends get smaller and smaller. Even though I lost some friends, I kept the ones that matter. It’s a decision I do not regret” she said to me. Social pressures like trying buffalo chicken wings or a beer are challenges which invite individual decisions and self-discipline. In the same token, meeting people who have different backgrounds, principles, and values of their own can help in understanding and practicing anekantawada. Another important lesson is to keep a healthy level of tolerance and acceptance for those who do not agree with your opinions, which will help you avoid bad karma.

I have always had a natural desire to avoid violence, not only in terms of my diet, but also by practicing non-

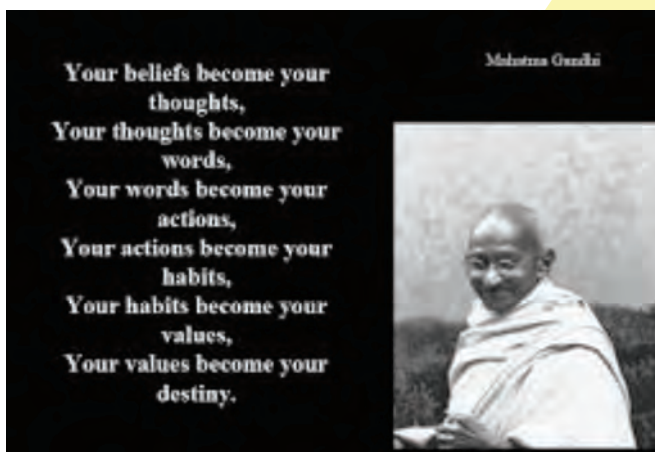
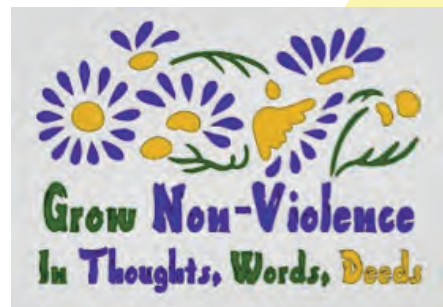
violence in words and actions. This boded well for me while in college, but additional challenges arose while in the workplace, where there is a clear sense of hierarchy. I was speaking to my father recently and he told me a story

about a cockroach in his office: “I remember one day a few years ago when I was at work, there was a cockroach on the floor in my office. My boss kept yelling at me to ‘step on it, step on it!’ Even though I reported to her, I felt the need to challenge her on this. I rationalized with her: ‘if I step on the cockroach, then it will die.’ ‘That’s exactly my point,’ she had replied, ‘kill it!’ I explained to her that I could not

and would not kill the bug, because I did not willingly kill any living beings. At first, she was shocked at this response, as it was a different experience for her to hear that someone did not want to squish an ugly, potentially harmful insect. The following week, I brought this incident up in a diversity training session with the staff. To my pleasure, my colleagues were very appreciative for the new point of view and impressed by the compassion that

Jainism has for all living things.” I think it is so imperative to remember when leading our daily lives, at home, in school, or in the workplace that the most important principle of the environment: is that you are not the only element.

Mahatma Gandhi, a strong leader who was heavily influenced by Jainism once said “Keep your thoughts positive, because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive, because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive, because your behavior becomes your habit. Keep your habits positive, because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive, because your values become your destiny.” My father’s story and the words of the father of India have stayed with me every time I encounter a similar situation in my life.



Young Jains of America

By Sunny Dharod



Jain



Sunny Dharod is from Lenexa, Kansas and is affiliated with the Kansas City Jain Sangh. He has been active with the YJA community for three years, serving as the 2013-2014 Director of Fundraising and 2015-2016 Executive Board Co-Chair.

Purpose

Young Jains of America (YJA) is an entity of the Federation of the Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), a non-profit religious organization. YJA puts emphasis on projects related to Jain youth from the ages of 14-29. The main objectives include the following:

- To raise awareness about Jain ideals and principles in North America and the world;
- To create a forum for sharing Jain religion;
- To instill a sense of pride among youth about Jain heritage;
- To address the problems, difficulties, and concerns facing Jain youth;



YOUNG JAINS OF AMERICA

- To assist and promote charitable community activities;
- To prepare youth, who ascribe to Jain values, to become successful leaders of tomorrow;
- To develop friendships among the youth, who ascribe to Jain values; and
- To foster and strengthen local youth groups.

The YJA Executive Board comprises of 16 Jain youth from across North America: two Co-Chairs, eight Directors, and six Regional Coordinators (RCs). Furthermore, Local Representatives (LRs) assist the RCs and members of the Executive Board with activities in their local temples or around the region.



Midwest Retreat - Chicago



Game Night - Raleigh



Navkar Jaap - Austin



Volunteering - Los Angeles

History

Since the launch of this organization in July of 1991, YJA has proudly been serving the Jain community for 25 years. Key milestones include the following:

- 1993 - First YJA Executive Board elected
- 1993 - First *Young Minds* magazine published
- 1994 - First convention hosted in Chicago
- 1995 - YJA unveils its website, <http://www.yja.org>.
- 2002 - YJA partners with Veerayatan, sending youth volunteers to needy places
- 2009 - YJA joins Facebook and Twitter
- 2009 - First YJA "National Dinner"
- 2010 - First YJA "National Service Day"
- 2014 - YJA supports first ever JAINA "World Compassion Day" at Jain Centers



1993 - 1994 Executive Board



2016 YJA Convention Committee

Digest

Current State

In order to grow the network of young Jains living in North America, YJA had organized several events and projects in the past year, some of which include the following:

Local Events

YJA's Regional Coordinators and Local Representatives have collaborated with Jain youth to organize religious, community service, and social events. Some of these include "National Dinner" weekend, Navkar Jaaps, temple clean-ups, and outdoor activities.



Young Minds

Our quarterly e-magazine is meant to connect the Jain youth community. It includes articles in which individuals reflect on their experiences of applying Jainism in modern society, pictures and summaries about events, Jain recipes, and promotional material about major YJA projects.



Future Vision

While YJA has excelled over the years, its leaders are looking to branch out and promote Jain values outside of its own community by taking the following steps:

Globalize

YJA hopes to globalize its network and collaborate with Jain groups in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, South Africa, Kenya, Singapore, etc. Many of their youth communities are very active, and YJA believes its own members can broaden their perspectives by learning about the presence of Jainism in other modern societies.

Regional Retreats

YJA's Regional Coordinators held retreats throughout the winter and spring. These all lasted for an entire weekend, and they were filled with educational sessions on Jainism, outdoor recreation, and social bonding activities. The 2016 retreats were located at Three Rivers, CA (West), Texas Hill Country (South), Magnolia Springs State Park, GA (Southeast), Chicago, IL (Midwest), Poconos, PA (Mid-Atlantic).



YJA Forums

YJA Forums allows young Jains to share insight with each other through blogging. Some of the many topics in which people can converse about include Science and Religion, Jain Theories and Scriptures, Vegetarian/Vegan Diets, and Holidays and Festivals.



Educational Webinars

Our Director of Education organizes educational webinars, which serve as an opportunity for youth across the nation to listen to knowledgeable speakers and join in on discussions on topics related to Jainism. Recent webinars include "The Power of Travelling (to India and the World)," "Jainism 101: Understanding Karma is a Cinch," and "Compassion in our Many Faiths: An Interfaith Webinar."



College Chapters Project

YJA has worked with student organizations that have joined the YJA umbrella. Participating colleges include UPenn, Michigan, Pittsburgh, UT-Austin, Illinois, and Boston University. YJA provides schools with educational handbooks, along with assistance on creating, promoting, and executing events.



Promote Interfaith Activities

YJA is looking to collaborate with other youth religious groups to find similarities in their core values. Aside from raising awareness about Jainism in North America, this will also allow young religious leaders to come together and find solutions to current issues that exist in today's world, many of which can be solved through religious coexistence.

Collaborate with JAINA

One of JAINA's main initiatives is to promote youth activities. YJA hopes to play a large role in this by working with JAINA to implement more joint events and projects. Furthermore, YJA hopes to assist with JAINA's convention planning efforts, from organizing youth activities to leading sessions.



YJA Convention 2016

By Milan Jain and Satej Shah



Milan Jain is a junior at Solon High School, based near Cleveland, Ohio. He serves as an YJA Local Representative for the mid-west region and also was a part of the Social Subcommittee for the convention.

Satej Shah is a junior at James B. Conant High School, Schaumburg, IL. He serves as an YJA Local Representative for the mid-west region.



Imagine being in one place with 650 young adults who you have absolutely nothing in common with. You are all alone; maybe you know a couple of people, but for the most part, you feel completely lost. Now imagine if you could connect with all of these people through one element. Young Jains of America (YJA) connected over 650 Young Jains across North America, showing how they all had one thing in common - their way of life, Jainism! Many Jain youth recently experienced a whimsical feeling this past 4th of July in sunny Los Angeles at the 12th biennial YJA Convention. The convention included various phenomenal activities, ranging from interactive religious sessions to memorable social events, including a traditional garba and an Indian-themed formal. All YJA attendees became the “Agents of Change” – the YJA theme this year – as they nourished their soul and made new friendships that will last them a lifetime.



If you were at the YJA convention this year, you’d understand what the word “agape” means. For those of you who could not attend, quite simply put, agape means selfless love. Who else was more appropriate to share this message than the keynote speaker Houston Kraft? Through a multitude of engaging anecdotes and act-outs, Kraft showed all YJA attendees what it truly means to have love for something. Kraft also gave reference to the essential concept of Ahimsa, a concept that is quite overstated yet underplayed in today’s modern era. Through all of his efforts, all youth gained another perspective on what it means to be a true agent of change.

YJA kicked off on Friday with a remarkable M.E.L.A. The M.E.L.A was designed for attendees to “Meet Every Last Agent”. This process consisted of entertaining ice-breaker activities and carnival-style games, along with other social activities. The M.E.L.A was where most attendees had the opportunity to set their feet and show their unique character to others. M.E.L.A brought all ages of Young Jains together and although every attendee couldn’t meet every agent of change, all Young Jains created an atmosphere to fabricate a special friendship with whosoever they met.



Bhangra! Fashionista! Dirty South! All of these words flashed through attendees’ minds as they hungrily watched the talent show take place before them. Restless energy pulsed throughout the room as the participants expertly performed. At the end of every one, deafening shrieks brought life to the room as attendees threw their hands together and applauded and cheered for their fellow

Young Jains on stage. All in all, whether it be the “Dirty South” brilliantly coordinating their dance steps to the boys from “Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Bhangra” stomping their feet to a catchy dholak beat, it was very clear that the “Decades of Bollywood” Talent Show will forever remain an illustrious aspect to this successful convention.

Digest

“A now, close your eyes and imagine you’re stranded alone on a desert,” a smooth voice articulates. You, as well as a group of 40 other young adults, reluctantly yet compliantly close your eyes. This is an accurate depiction of one of the nearly 120 sessions that took place at the YJA convention. A variety of speakers were brought in from all over the world, speakers who covered topics including what Jainism means to them, how they’ve invoked their inner spirituality, and even how they managed to abide by Jain ideals while studying in college. Through interactive activities and role playing, youth experienced a first-hand account of what it truly means to be a Jain.

We would like to acknowledge all the speakers, who did a phenomenal job sharing their experiences and their journeys of life. We’d especially like to acknowledge the blessings we received from Swamiji, which were inspi-



rationally to all attendees. His modern yoga and meditation practices combined with Jain Principles were enlightening. Swamiji has always been a motivational guru for youth across North America. Swamiji and Samnijis were precise in conveying their messages in a simple and clear way.

Jain Academic Bowl: Who is the best when it comes to knowledge of Jainism? Young Jains had the opportunity to show off their incredible knowledge in the Jain Academic Bowl. Usually JAB consists of the three basic question-answer rounds, but previous JAB competitors and future Jain leaders became Agents of Change to alter and modify the competition this year. JAB at YJA included Question-Answer, Jeopardy, identify the picture, and speed rounds. With these innovative rounds, the JAB participants were able to show how well they knew Jainism while involving the crowd. YJA also introduced Jains in Action during this convention. Young Jains were put in different groups and created a small company. All groups pitched their ideas in front of a panel of judges and the winning team, “Hungri.ly,” received a grant to set their business idea in motion.



We would also like to thank the JCSC for hosting the convention, and the leadership support from JAINA was greatly appreciated in making this convention a success. We all remember Gurudev Chitrabhanuji, who is one of the pioneers in bringing Jainism to North America. We are truly blessed to follow one of his key principles of veganism throughout the convention. Guruji’s most loving stavan “Maitri Bhavanu” inspired us to be friends with all living beings throughout the convention and in our daily lives.



YJA did an excellent job connecting with Jainism spiritually and religiously, but the board and convention committee stressed on connecting with the Indian culture through a traditional Garba and Raas event, Straight Outta Gujarat. With classic Indian decoration and a live musical group, all 650 attendees went in numerous circles releasing their unmatched energy in beats of two and three. To finish the night, long lines of Raas showed who became agents of change and added their own modern dance moves to the basic hit-hit move raas step. Yes, the dab was featured. Straight Outta Gujarat showed no matter how westernized the

young Jains become, Indian culture will always be embedded within them and every Jain will embrace it.

Lavish tapestries to the left. Elegant decorations to the right. Music blaring all around. Welcome to “Maharaja’s

Court” - this year’s YJA formal dance. Attendees had the chance to dress up elegantly, donning Indian reception attire, to celebrate the last night of such a memorable convention. The dance floor was clogged up with people of all age groups bonding over good music and a fun ambiance. Whether or not one could dance, it was very evident that all of the youth had a fantastic time bonding with their fellow agents of change at the “Maharaja’s Court.”



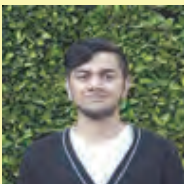
On the last night of YJA, all attendees spent their final hours at the convention with an all-nighter slumber party. Those who had enough energy and spirit stayed up the entire night and occupied the entire first floor. In groups, there were games of spoons, card magic tricks, and Ninja. Aside from the impromptu activities, the friendships built throughout the weekend were strengthened. The all-nighter is the last memory from the convention that every attendee takes away as it was perhaps the most exhilarating event.



Finally, we would like to acknowledge the YJA Executive Board and the YJA Convention Committee for their tremendous work and efforts towards planning and executing this convention. All committees did an excellent job in making sure that every attendee enjoyed the convention. As for the future, social media will keep all Young Jains connected, but as we proceed professionally and religiously, we will continue to remember that religion unifies us; it pushes us to live as the Agents of Change.

YJA Convention 2016 – Behind the Scenes

By Manan Jobalia and Simmi Nandu



Manan Jobalia is from Nashville, TN. He is a Healthcare Management major with a pre-med concentration at UAB. He is Director of Public Relations at YJA.

Simmi Nandu is from Dallas, TX. She is a junior at the University of Texas, Austin, studying Chemical Engineering. She serves as a South Regional Coordinator at YJA. She also served on the convention’s Hospitality Committee.



Seven months ago, thirty-five people from across the country joined the 2016 Convention Committee. Seven months ago, the only thing we had done was make a list of things that needed to be accomplished. Seven months ago, most of us had never met each other in person. Seven months ago, we became a family!

By the time Friday, the first day of convention, rolled around, all thirty-five of us were already at the hotel and preparing for the opening of convention since the earliest hours of the morning. Most of us had been in Los Angeles since earlier in the week, burning hours and calories to pack souvenir bags, set up the hospitality suite and lounges, unloading the U-Haul and carrying boxes. Storage rooms were filled from corner to corner and fully prepared for the coming days’ activities.

Digest

On the first day of convention, the board members were up early to get ready for everyone's arrival. We started the process by setting up for our first event, MELA (Meet Every Last Agent), and making sure all of the pieces were ready for people's arrival. As a board member looking over the growing crowd, it was honestly such a fulfilling moment to see friends who'd been separated since the last YJA convention, reuniting and embracing each other like family. Soon it was time usher the attendees into the ballroom for the Opening Ceremony, followed by Decades of Bollywood talent battle.

The show started with the Convention Hype Video. The excitement built up in the video was directly reflected by the people in the audience - you could literally feel the anticipation for the weekend to finally commence. And it finally did. With a round of applause, our four Co-chairs walked on stage and after a few words, lit the convention diyas to signal the official commencement of YJA 2016. As the opening ceremonies commenced, the convention committee was ready to start the dance battle as much as the audience was. So as soon as the last speech ended, we turned over to our lovely Emcees, Prachi and Paras. During this time the board members were either working on getting everyone to enjoy the show or preparing the amazing mixers that were planned for everyone to enjoy. After that, it was bed time for the attendees. For the board members however, the night had just begun. So began the teardown, cleanup, and preparation for the next day's events.

Our Daytime and JNF teams did an incredible job recruiting speakers for the convention's 129 sessions, which incorporated the theme, Agents of Change, along with several ties back to our Jain teachings and principles. Once daytime activities officially ended for the day, attendees were given the opportunity to relax, eat chutney sandwiches, and of course, get ready for Saturday night's main event: Straight Outta Gujarat. Everyone shuffled into the pre-function area, decked from head to toe in their very best garba attire, taking pictures with the specially made posters. In the middle of the ballroom stood the incredible centerpiece that a few of our board members actually put together by hand. On stage was the live garba band, which kept us entertained for hours. We danced till our feet could move no more, and the night ended with a fabulous bhel feast prepared by the board members ourselves - with the help of adult volunteers, of course. Finally, it was time to send the attendees off to bed so that they could be well rested for the final day.

Sunday morning comes and the board members are all gearing up for the last day. Throughout the night, we started setup for the JAB/JIA Competition and the daytime programming. The morning starts like any normal morning for us and we get a running start. Daytime programming goes through like a flash and we are waiting for JAB/JIA to start. All the board members are excited for this especially since JIA was a new program created this year. As the day goes on, the attendees go off to the rest of the sessions before the rec hour. During this time they had the opportunity to go upstairs, change, snack and relax before dinner and that night's event: Maharaja's Formal. As everyone came down for dinner people were getting excited for the formal. The doors to the formal opened and everyone, including the board members were shocked. The decorations were beautiful and the setup was amazing. The formal started off with a group YJA photo and then our DJ started the night off with some amazing music that continued on till 1am at which point the all night sleepover started. This was the time when all of us got together and got to hang out and watch all of the attendees having fun and spending time together before everyone had to leave. As everyone got ready to go to bed, the board members stayed up and cleaned up to ensure that the next morning's ceremonies go according to plan.

Monday was a very emotional day for us.

With the end of closing ceremonies, we had just finished the event that we had started planning..
Seven months ago!

Young Jains Embracing the Path of Renunciation

By Paritosh Shah, Parasdham, Mumbai



Jain

Born in the lap of luxury, life for 22-year-old Akhil Doshi was one big party till the day he decided to renounce it all and become a Jain monk. Akhilbhai is one amongst the eight youngsters who embraced the vows of Jain Diksha under the aegis of Rashtrasant Pujya Gurudev Shree Namramuni Maharaj Saheb. The Diksha ceremony that was conducted on February 14, 2016; has left a lasting impression on India's consumption capital, Mumbai.

What brought about this transition in their lives? Why did they shun a life of abundance and a prospering career to embrace the simplistic lifestyle of renunciation? How did they follow their inner calling after having dwelled in a materialistic world?

Let's read a few excerpts extracted from countrywide Talk Shows, where the 8 Navdikshits (then Diksharthi) had heart to heart conversations with youngsters like themselves about the path they had chosen for life.

Q. How can spirituality help the youngsters of today?

Our education system teaches us how to achieve Success. However, there is no one to guide us on how to deal with failure. An understanding of how to balance the mind when confronted with either success or failure is what spirituality can give the youth of today.

Q. What is Dharma according to you?

A. Dharma for me is a process of developing my INNER QUALITIES. It is not just a set of ideologies and beliefs, rites and rituals. Any act which catalyzes our endeavor to nurture our inner qualities is dharma. We've always worshipped Bhagwan Mahavir, but in reality, dharma is a step further than that. It is one's effort to become LIKE Mahavir!

Q. Being a Science Student, how did you turn towards Religion?

A. Science helps us understand the 'How' behind everything - How are we born? How does the human brain work? How does age affect the body? And so on. Religion, on the other hand, gives us answers for the 'Why' behind everything... Why are we born? Why do people have different levels of intelligence? Why does the body change with age? So I think religion is a deeper science. Therefore, being a science student, I have been able to understand the importance of religion better.

Q. What brought about the transition in your life from a career of Chartered Accountancy, to a life of Charitra Angikar (Saiyam)?

A. I was very competitive since childhood and I wanted to be the best at whatever I did, be it academics, dance, debates, skating or even my career in Chartered Accountancy. But one Shibir in Pujya Gurudev's sanidhya threw light upon the course of my whole life. On one hand were my aspirations, and on the other hand was a totally different individual, asking herself, 'What is your achievement from all your achievements?'

It was an eye opener. We keep aspiring for more and more, till we reach the end of our life and realize that our net worth is still zero. And thus, competing with the world is no longer my dream, I now wish to compete with myself every single day and enrich my inner wealth with my inner qualities.

Q. What is the importance of having a Guru in life?

A. I was born in a very religiously rooted family. And thus, practicing the traditions of dharma was a part of my daily routine. However, that made me a Jain by birth, not a Jain by character. Only after meeting Pujya Gurudev, was I able to grasp the real essence of dharma. A Guru is not someone who gives you knowledge, he is the one who awakens your own inner voice and ignites the knowledge that lies within you. Pujya Gurudev's presence in my life was just that. He made me realize that dharma is not a road to end one's difficulties; it is the road to discover the reality, the truth.

Q. What drives you towards renunciation at such a young age?

A. When one is born in a family where he asks for one thing, and he is offered 10, there's nothing more that he can possibly want. I was blessed to have such a family. But when I met Pujya Gurudev, his simple yet profound exposition of the truth hit me really hard. It made me realize that even though I had so much, in reality, I had NOTHING! The shallowness

Digest

of the most vibrant materialistic pleasures stood like stark in front of my eyes, making me realize that we are not really consuming the comforts we believe that we own. In fact, it is these very luxuries which consume our whole life and make us forget who we are. The more we have, the more we want. I felt like a slave to my own wants. And that is what fueled in me a quest to find something that would put an end to my never-ending desires.

Q. You are from a Derawasi background, and you are taking Diksha in a Sthanakwasi sect. What are your thoughts on this?

A. Not everyone can be a GUIDING LIGHT to elevate you from within. Only the one whom you share a deeper connection with, who has the ability to overpower your vices and bring about a transformation in you and take you towards purity, can become your Guru. So it does not matter which sect he belongs to; what matters is if he can help purify me from within? Can he help me transform my nature? And can he take me closer to my goal of becoming like Parmatma?

And Pujya Gurudev has always taught us to worship Parmatma, not the Panth (sect). He always says, “Was Trishala Mata Derawasi or Sthanakwasi? These sects are not to divide us, they are roads towards the same goal. So don't become 'wasi' (stale), stay fresh!”

Q: Aren't you worried about the difficulty you would face in the Sanyam life?

A: One of the biggest inspirations I gain from Bhagwan Mahavir is His determination and focus. Yes, distractions will always be there in the world, be it in sansar or in sanyam. However, once your heart and mind are connected with your goal that you want to achieve, you will not be affected by anything around you. This is similar to Arjun; none of the distractions affected him at all, because he was absolutely focused on his target.

We've been in Pujya Gurudev's constant training and sanidhya for almost 5 years now. And during this time, the innumerable Agnas that he has given to us have played a pivotal role in shaping us; making us capable of facing every difficulty.

Q. Do you think everyone should take Diksha?

A: Not everyone can join the Army, but everyone can become a good citizen. Similarly, not everyone can take diksha, but everyone can definitely become a good human being. So I believe that while diksha is not for everyone, developing their inner qualities while staying in sansar is surely for each and everyone.



*Pujya Shree Param Asmitaji Mahasatiji
Pujya Shree Param Sanmitraji Mahasatiji
Pujya Shree Param Amanyaji Mahasatiji
Pujya Shree Param Sanidhyaji Mahasatiji
Pujya Shree Param Rujutaji Mahasatiji
Pujya Shree Param Rushitaji Mahasatiji*

Where there is a realization of the truth from within, it invokes in one an ardent thirst to attain that truth. That defines the journey of these 8 Navdikshits too. Their courage, determination and resolve has indeed been an inspiration for millions of people across the world. 30,000+ people attended the diksha ceremony and 40,00,000+ viewers from more than 30 countries worldwide witnessed the 10-hour spectacle via live telecast and webcast. Fortunate are those who revere the philosophy of Lord Mahavir, but blessed are those who strive to become LIKE Mahavir! Watch the video of the entire Diksha Mahotsav on www.diksha2016.parasdham.org or on www.youtube.com/ParasdhamTV and revisit the glory of Jin Shasan with this historic event!



*Param Pujya Shree Vinamramuniji Maharaj Saheb
Param Pujya Shree Pavitramuniji Maharaj Saheb*

JAINA Committee Spotlight: JAINA Upliftment Program



Jain

Uplift a Jain child or family from poverty by education

According to recent statistics, approximately 17% Jain families are at or below the poverty level (earning Rs. 5,000 per month). For the underprivileged children and families in India, education is perceived as a high-priced luxury and they continue to live in despair and a state of hopelessness. JAINA's mission is to uplift these underprivileged ones and extend our services to help them to a sustainable livelihood. Under this program the selected individuals in India will receive quality education for their children, higher or vocational training for young adults, and skill enhancement vocational training for heads of households to increase their earning potential. The intent is that it will result in a sustainable livelihood to liberate them from poverty.

The family's designation as needy (Rs. 5,000 per month or less in rural or Rs. 8,000 per month or less in urban area) will be verified by JAINA and its partner organizations using pre-established selection criteria. The adequacy and duration of the assistance will be certified and re-certified by partner organizations. The financial assistance will be paid directly to schools or vocational training centers. The other incidental expenses related to education will be paid to the family on as-need basis as recommended by the partner organization.

Purpose of assistance:

- To meet immediate needs (tuition fees, books, stationery, transportation, etc.) to provide education for their children.
- Provide skill enhancement training to heads of household leading to higher paying jobs.
- To encourage each assisted family to become self-reliant and productive within the context of their local economy.
- Assist families in financing entrepreneurial initiatives such as small retail stores called petty shops, garment stitching, bicycle repair, teashops, appliance repair, TV & cell phone repair, etc.



Selecting the child or family: The child or family will be chosen in a participatory manner by the local organizations based on priority of need in compliance with JAINA's selection criteria. The names of the selected children and families will then be sent to the JAINA's Upliftment Committee for review and finalization. The committee reviews the entire family's resources and financial capabilities prior to approving submitted profiles. These profiles are recorded and then linked with a donor family, individual, group, etc. for further mentorship and ongoing assistance.



Accomplishment highlights (2014-2016):

- 200+ students of all ages were funded education and/or skill enhancement vocational training leading to higher paying jobs in different states in India.
- JAINA's pilot project - Jain school in Delhi with over 1,000 children from poor families receiving quality education.
- Gujarat & Rajasthan Sakhi Udhogyani project (learning to develop skills, crafts, toys, & stitching of garments).

Digest

There are many Jain children and families awaiting your assistance to secure their children's and family's future.



We are thankful for the financial support and volunteer work that many of our sponsors and partners have provided that helps make all of this happen!!!



"Together we are better" Come and join the uplift mission to make a difference via educating **one child at a time or one family at a time by donating \$50 per month.** For donations please visit <https://jaina.site-ym.com/donations/>

Example: 2016 Applicants: Mr. Dipak Bhai Jain (9th standard) from Ahmedabad, Gujarat and Ms. Sejal Pungliya (7th Standard) from Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh

Contact Information:

Dr. Sushil Jain (Virginia) (240)-277-3039
Mr. Kamlesh Mehta (California) (408)-839-8996
Mr. Bhupesh Mehta (Maryland) (240)-455-4524
Mr. Kamal Shah (Wisconsin) (414)-795-3558

www.jainauplift.org | info@jainauplift.org



JAINA Upliftment Committee Members:

- Dr. Sushil Jain (Virginia)
- Mr. Uday Jain (Houston)
- Mr. Kamal Shah (Wisconsin)
- Mr. Bhupesh Mehta (Maryland)
- Mr. Prem Jain (San Francisco)
- Mr. Kamlesh Mehta (San Francisco)
- Ms. Lata Champsee (Toronto)
- Mr. Shugan Jain – New Delhi
- Mr. Niranjan Juva – Ahmedabad
- Mr. Prafulla Parekh – Pune
- Mr. Subhash Parmar – Pune

Active Teenagers of JOY at Jain Society of Greater Detroit



The Jain Organization of Youth (JOY) was founded in 1993 as the youth wing of the Jain Society of Greater Detroit. JOY's objective is to empower the youth of our community by providing a platform to spread awareness of the Jain religion and to promote social and community service.

Major objectives are to:

- Help build the essence of Jainism socially and spiritually within the Jain Youth Community
- Produce principled leaders for the Jain Society of Greater Detroit
- Assist the Jain Society of Greater Detroit with major events
- Advocate service and give back to the community
- Foster a sense of community among Jain Youth
- Make a difference even outside the vicinity of the Jain Youth Community

JOY members are between the ages of 13 and 18 and currently there are about 36 members. Here are the activities that JOY organized since fall 2015:

In October, during Diwali, JOY arranged for members and kids to make Rangoli. Many JOY members participated and colored awesome Rangolis which were kept in temple for viewing for a week. All kids wrote messages on leaves and stuck them to a tree creating the "JOY Kalp Vruksh". It was also kept in temple for viewing. Another new activity was making Thanksgiving cards for old and sick seniors in rehab. JOY members decorated and wrote personal messages in the cards which they delivered in person to the senior citizens.



In November, JOY has its signature activity. On Thanksgiving day, JOY has a Navkaar Jaap for the Turkeys who are killed. On the morning of Thanksgiving, JOY members prepare breakfast for all the adults (of course their mom's help them a little bit) and after breakfast they have Navkaar Jaap for about an hour.

In December 2015, JOY had an event called "Lock In" at a member's house. About 20 members gathered at 8 pm and were there until 8 am the following morning. During the night, different activities were planned such as discussions and debates on current affairs and Jainism, and they played different board games, etc. The bonding experience amongst members nurtures long-lasting friendships. All this was supervised by 2 moms who volunteered to stay awake with them.

In January 2016, they began the year with a community service/volunteering event. JOY members went to the organization called "World Medical Relief." They learned about the history and establishment of the organization and sorted medical supplies based on their expiration dates. The supplies that were packaged were shipped to London to help the underprivileged. It was a great experience for all the kids and they enjoyed working there.

This year they had a shoe drive called "Soles4Souls Shoe Drive" for underprivileged kids of Detroit. They collected around 250 pairs of old shoes, sandals, and flip-flops donated by society members.



JOY kids raised a contribution to help the Nepalese Refugees affected by the earthquake. The donations and the toys collected by JOY kids were sent to refugees and children in Lansing, Michigan.

February brings the most awaited event of JOY; the Winter camp! Every winter all the members go camping. They rent a huge house and around 20-25 kids and chaperons go there for the weekend. The whole trip is planned and executed by the kids. They do a lot of activities including discussions, cooking, cleaning, playing outdoors etc. and students learn some real life skills.

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A lot of the JOY kids are good dancers and every year they perform a dance during Jain Society's "Annual Fundraising Dinner." They choreograph the dance themselves and perform in front of around 500 society members. JOY kids have been instrumental in teaching the young kids about confidence and public speaking.

JOY kids have shown respect to the teachers by celebrating the teacher's day in 2016. Every year JOY performs the snatra puja during Mahavir Janam Kalyanak celebration. Under the guidance of an adult, all the kids recite all the sutra's, gatha's and stavan's and perform the puja themselves. Here they get to practically apply all the religious sutra's that they learn in study class. Our one of the big event, "Mother's Day Garba," was held on 15th May, 2016. In summer we will have our annual 5K run.



Current committed members:

President:	<i>Riya Shah</i>	Vice President:	<i>Chintan Maheshwari</i>
Treasurer:	<i>Shilpi Shah</i>	Public Relations:	<i>Bhumika Jain</i>
Publications:	<i>Shreyans Munot</i>	Community Service Director:	<i>Kush Madhani</i>
Advisors:	<i>Mamata Maheshwari and Rahul Munot</i>		

Padmashri Dr Kumarpal Desai Awarded Ahimsa Ratna Award



Ahimsa Foundation of Indore, established specifically to spread the awareness of the concept of Ahimsa worldwide awarded Ahimsa Ratna Award to the well-known laureate and a Jain intellectual Padmashri Dr Kumarpal Desai. The award giving ceremony took place on 20th March 2016 at the Anand Mohan Mathur Auditorium, Indore. Dr Desai was presented with a cash award of Rs One Hundred Thousand, a memento and a certificate of honour.

The Chairperson for the award ceremony, Jain Ratna Shree Nemnathji Jain commented with his astonishment at the range of activities that Dr Desai had managed to get involved in within a single life time. The Registrar of the Foundation, Shree Mulchand Anchalia said that this award ceremony was an occasion for celebration in Indore as Dr Desai was the third deserving recipient being honoured with the award following in the footsteps of the well-known and respected humanitarian, Rashtra Sant Bhaiyuji Maharaj and Shri Anna Hazare.

The Director of the Foundation, Shree Abhay Lalvani elaborated on the reasons for making the award to Dr Desai. He said that the award is given for spreading the awareness of Ahimsa and undertaking humanitarian activities with compassion. He went on, Dr Desai has been active both in India and abroad. He has had been given audiences by Pope John Paul II at the Vatican and by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. He had lectured at the Chapel in the United Nations.

Shri Atul Zamad the Regional Chairman gave a brief account of the specific humanitarian work undertaken by Dr Desai. This included being an International Director of Eye Care Trust, Chairman of the Indian Red Cross (Botad Branch), Trustee of Anukampa Trust and Sulabh Health & Heart Trust. Shri Suresh Kothari and Shri Pankaj Sanghavi both congratulated him for this distinctive honour.

The Directors of the Institute of Jainology also congratulated Dr Desai who is also the Managing Trustee of the Institute in India for this honour.

Source: India News, Institute of Jainology

Finding my way to Jainism

By Allison Bergson



Jain



Allison Bergson recently completed her Masters in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University. Last summer she attended the Yoga and Jainism course at ISSJS in New Delhi and the Understanding Jainism Course at Jain Vishwa Bharti in Ladnun. Since September of 2015, Allison takes Pathshala classes at the Jain Center of Southern California and this summer, she will return to ISSJS to co-lead the Teaching for Peace Program. She currently teaches yoga at Youthbuild, a local nonprofit that helps students who have dropped out or who were kicked out of traditional high schools.

When I first learned that the masters in yoga studies course at Loyola Marymount University included travel to India, I was excited. The travel would focus on something I had never heard of called Jainism, although it is the sixth largest religion in the world. In fact, when I first heard the word Jainism itself, I immediately thought of a popular rock and roll song called “Jane Says” by the band Jane’s Addiction. The song is about a girl named Jane with little emotional control and childish coping mechanisms. She has a lot of psychological and material attachments such as her wig and television. The passion and anger she has towards a boyfriend makes her react and she take a swing at him which only leaves her angrier and sadder to the point of tears. She dreams about moving far away to Spain, to start life over in a place far removed from the pain and suffering arising from her current circumstance. If only Jane knew about the Jain religion, then maybe she would have known a thing or two about Vairagya, dispassion. The first time I had ever heard the word dispassion was at the Jain Center of Southern California. Vairagya is a necessary component of spiritual life that helps one cultivate neutrality and equanimity amidst all experiences.

This portrait, of a highly emotional and insecure female lead, sums up the qualities I had acquired as a young girl without being aware of my demeanor. While studying Anthropology at UCLA, I experienced a heightened sense of emotional distress to recent traumas in my life. I was still ‘coping’ with my parent’s recent divorce, a friend who took his own life, a father figure in and out of the ICU and an emotionally abusive relationship. In my world, coping was more akin to suppression because I seriously lacked emotional awareness and the ability to introspect. Whereas the girl named Jane turned her violent anger and sadness outward, I directed mine inward.

On the outside, I seemed perfectly healthy and in control. I had 7 piano students, a part time job, a long distance relationship, and four upper division classes. I had excellent rapport with my professors and was invited to take courses at the master’s level. To top it off, I took Muay Thai a few evenings each week. On the inside, I was sinking deeper and deeper into what I now understand as depression directed inward. I didn’t have words to describe exactly what I was feeling so I just ignored it and kept busy with all my activities.

One morning, I looked in the mirror, and I didn’t recognize myself. I was mortified to find the whole left side of my face swollen to the point that I could barely see out of my left eye. Horrified by my own reflection, I drove straight to the emergency room. After waiting a couple hours, I met with an amazingly observant doctor who really took the time to figure out my illness. She asked me questions about my daily life, my thoughts, and perspective on political issues at UCLA and the country at large. I don’t really remember all the details of the conversation but I certainly remember how she made me feel. I felt loved and I felt cared for. By the end of the conversation, the swelling went down almost entirely. She said, “There’s nothing wrong with you physically but I suggest you change, whatever you’re doing daily because you aren’t getting away with it.” She said, “Consider this a warning.” Taken aback by the bluntness of her words, I took them to heart. Although she didn’t prescribe me any medicine, she wrote on the evaluation sheet that I had something called ‘general malaise.’ I had never heard the word malaise before so I looked it up. The word Malaise comes from the Latin root malus and the French word ease. Malus means pain, suffering, sorrow and anxiety. Ease means to take comfort in something. The traumas buried within started to seep through and take on a palpable form of their own. All at once, I was confronted with parts of myself that I had desperately worked to avoid.

Taking the doctor’s advice to change things up, I skipped martial arts and brought a book called Space Time and Medicine to a park, walking distance from my apartment. My intention was to simply be with myself and introspect- whatever that meant. Within the first few pages, I learned how every person has an internal sense of time and how

Digest

it changes in relation to the breath. Perplexed, I took pauses while reading and played with slowing down and speeding up my inhales and exhales. I felt time literally slow down or speed up around me. The effects were instant and it felt like magic. Looking back, this was a turning point for me because it was the closest thing to meditation that I had experienced thus far. The author's words helped to articulate what was happening in language I could easily digest. It was the most peace I had felt in almost 8 months.

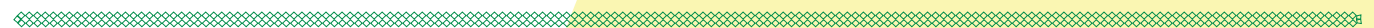
Fast Forward 3 years to my third yoga teacher training when the connection between my soul and outward behavior strengthened. Moved by ahimsā philosophy, I transitioned to a mostly vegan diet after 24 years of eating meat. 8 months later I was on a plane to New Delhi, India to study Jainism at the International Summer School for Jain Studies (ISSJS). Immediately I found Anekāntavāda (non-absolutism) - a worldview highlighting the interconnectedness of our individual experiences, extremely pertinent to global issues. Anekāntavāda acknowledges that all life forms merit respect because they have access to different forms of truth rooted in experiences unknowable from outside perspectives. In light of anekāntavāda, the practice of ahimsā goes beyond tolerance and beyond empathy. It teaches humility and humbleness in the midst of frustration, fear and anger or when confronted with the unknown.

“Jainism brings to light that what we do as individuals has profound implications in terms of our shared experience.”

Jainism brings to light that what we do as individuals has profound implications in terms of our shared experience. Participation in the global economy is the clearest example of this. However, our experiences are connected at a much deeper and more subtle emotional level. The closest form of scientific proof is the 'Butterfly Effect.' The Butterfly Effect demonstrates how subtle phenomena, such as the flapping of butterfly wings in one part of the world affects weather

and storm patterns globally. Our thoughts feelings and actions are never isolated from the thoughts, feelings and actions of other people. When we ostracize and cause harm to others, we ostracize and cause harm to ourselves.

In September of 2015, I began attending Pathshala classes at the Jain Center of Southern California to better understand karma. Whereas, anekāntavāda makes us aware that our environment is shared, karma makes us aware that we, as individuals, have a relationship with it. The cultural ethos and underlying psychological imprint reinforced at Pathshala encourages students to consider the direct as well as indirect consequences of his or her deeds. I cannot help but reflect over my own k-12 education and think that a course in ethics would have encouraged me to introspect early on and may have provided a deeper layer of meaning to my education. This summer, I am privileged to co-lead the Teaching for Peace Program at ISSJS. Jainism has added gratification to my daily experiences and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve Jainism through my professional and academic life. I am sincerely appreciative of the kindness and warmth shown to me by members of the Jain Community of Southern California.



“Second generation Jains, often distance themselves from the castes, sects, and rituals of Indian-based Jainism. Instead, they seek to adapt the principles of care for organisms, plants, animals, & all people inherent in their tradition to a public stance on vegetarianism (& increasingly veganism), environmental advocacy, meditation, civic and gender equality, interfaith alliances, and community service.

With a historic base in industries such as banking, engineering, education, and medicine, and recent involvement in technology and politics, it is reasonable to anticipate that modern Jainism will adapt itself to new challenges in global financing, scientific and technological innovation, corporate accountability, communication, and bioethics, rooted in the three core values of non-harm beyond the human, non-possession, and non-one-sided views.”

(Source: An article in www.patheos.com “Jains in America: A Socially-Engaged Second Generation” by Brianne Donaldson, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Monmouth College)

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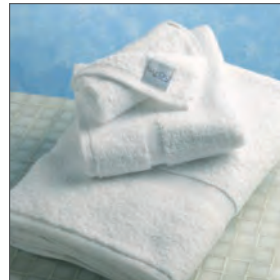
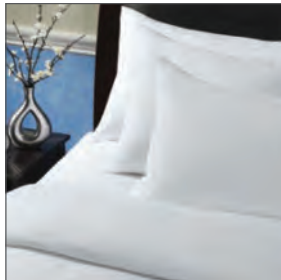
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TYING THE KNOT

Males



M0605201607:

Gujarati Jain parents invite correspondence for their US born 31 yrs, 6' tall and slim MD/PhD son. Currently doing first year residency in the ay area. He is vegetarian, world traveler, down to earth, strongly believes in simple life style and community service. Alliances are invited from US born/raised girls with similar values. Please email bio-data with photo to shahfamily85@gmail.com.

M0605201603:

Gujarati Jain parents invite correspondence for their India born, US raised and US Citizen. He is Vegetarian, Non-smoker, Non-drinker, born 1984, 5; 7", 140lb., Innocent divorced after 7 weeks. Holds degree in B.S. Electrical Engineering. Works in public company as an Engineer in California. He is seeking Vegetarian, Educated, and girl with culture form both India and US. Please send bio-data and recent photographs to bavishi_milan@yahoo.com.

M0605201601:

Proposal for matrimonial alliance invited for Gujarati Jain boy, vegetarian, non-smoker, and non-drinker, 5' 11", born May 1989 (Mumbai). Raised in Canada (1998-2014), MS (Computer Science) from state University of New York (2014-2015) and presently working as software engineer with a reputed investment company in Boston. Please respond with bio-data and photographs to kgt10@hotmail.com.

M0605201604:

Jain parents invite proposal for their son, US. Born September 1986, 5' 6". Doctorate in Pharmacy, fair, handsome, vegetarian, non-smoker, non-drinker. Seeking US raised, career oriented professional girls, preferably from NJ, NY. Please email bio-data and photo to ljain123@yahoo.com. Call: 732-347-5851/5844.

M0605201602:

Jain Parents looking for a well-educated, vegetarian, non-smoking, and non-drinking girl for our son, with great family values. He is US Born May 30th 1989 and is 6ft 3" tall and slim. Currently in medical school graduating May 2016. Please send Biodata and recent photographs to ksaj5311@gmail.com.

Jain Parents invite correspondence for their US born and raised, college educated, vegetarian son. Born November 1980. 5' 9" tall, non-smoker, well-mannered, handsome, and friendly. Working for a well-known financial corporation for several years. Fair skin, strong morals, kind-hearted, and family-oriented. Please respond with bio-data to e-mail address: shahbeejal@hotmail.com

M0605201605:

Warm and supportive, US born and raised, Ivy league educated software engineer seeking life partner who will create with him a partnership where both people grow together and share the joy of life. Jain vegetarian, non-smoker, non-drinker born in 1963, 5' 10"; Working at highly respectable company in Northwest. Never married. Enjoys hiking, photography, reading, music, travel and sports. Send biodata with phot at hsha05@yahoo.com, (253-862-2588).

Gujarati Jain parents seeking alliance for their son, US educated family oriented, vegetarian. He was born in Mumbai India May 1985, perfect blend of modern and traditional values. He owns of ten cellphone stores, one SPA franchise, investment in startup companies and real estate he is very well settled. He enjoys music, travelling, sports, contemporary and modern art, trying new cuisine, & spending time with family. He is honest, ambitious, friendly and happy! He is looking for someone who is independent, friendly, family oriented and a person who has a mix of Indian and Western values. Someone who is trustworthy but not judgmental, adventurous, vegetarian well settled girl in the US. Please respond with biodata and picture to: bxctavares@gmail.com, Call: 352-348-9493

M0605201606:

Uncle seeks alliance for his US Citizen nephew MBA, 26 years old, 5'-10", 145lb, slim, handsome, and working in St. Louis for reputed global firm. Parents have migrated to India. Alliances are invited from vegetarian, Jain/Gujarati professional. Family oriented girls. Please send biodata along with photo to mahendraarunal@gmail.com, 412-780-6051.

M28031601:

Rajasthani Jain parents invite proposal for their son; Born Apr 1983, 5' 9", never married, working IT professional in Atlanta, GA. Vegetarian, non-smoker, non-drinker, Very confident, dynamic, handsome, open minded, Outgoing and ambitious. Correspondence invited from understanding, cultured, family oriented, well-educated, vegetarian girls. Please respond with photo and bio-data. Email: padmaimpex597@gmail.com or call 707-404-4791.

Gujarati parents invite match for their US-raised son, vegetarian, 32 5'8". Works in family real estate development business; enjoys volunteering in international development, movies, plays, traveling, and reading and has strong family values. He is seeking US-raised girls with similar values and interests. Please respond with a bio and photo to: hresort@gmail.com

Please note that due to space limitations, we were not able to print all the matrimonial ads in the Jain Digest. For a complete list and to place an ad please visit <http://www.jaina.org> and select MARRIAGE option.

We update JAINA website ads about once a month. So once you place your ad, it may take up to one month for your ad to appear on the JAINA web site. Your ad will remain on JAINA website for one year only or until cancelled by you within the year.

For more information or questions please contact:
jainmilanchair@jaina.org. Purvin Vakhawala – Jain Milan Chair

TYING THE KNOT

Females



F06151601:

Gujarati Jain physician family invite proposals for their US born in December 1986, 5'7", and business graduate from a top university in US and working as a marketing director at a top New York company. She is very fair, charming, attractive, vegetarian and outgoing professional. Correspondence invited from US raised, well educated, vegetarian, nonsmoking professionals. Please respond with bio- data and recent photographs to: aasc1112@gmail.com

F06051601:

Masi-Masajee seek matrimonial alliance for their very beautiful niece (Surajmukhee), born April 1986, 5' 1", 48 Kg, MBA, superb IT and marketing experience, co-owner of a factory in Mumbai (Proficient in Hindi, Gujarati and English) with a Jain, vegetarian, educated, well established boy. Please send bio-data to shailoo.palvia@gmail.com and/or call 732-983- 7034.

F06051604:

Gujarati Jain Cultured daughter 5'-2 1/2", US Citizen born 1987 fair, beautiful, slim, B.Tech (ECS), Ueberkeley, Divorced (Brief marriage 2014). Application Engineer, NY, searching matching Kind, Caring, Cultured, Vegetarian US/Canada Citizen/Permanent Resident. Bio-data, Recent Photo to crickefandom@gmail.com.

F02051601:

Gujarati Jain, U.S.- born, outgoing, caring, non-smoker, vegetarian girl, family-oriented, 36 years old, 5' 6", fair skin, physician in Washington DC area, looking for kind, U.S.-born professional boy in East Coast or Midwest. Contact: sandys1789@gmail.com.

Gujarati Jain - Never married; raised in the USA (US citizen), 5'0" born February 1980, vegetarian; Registered Dietitian. She is family-oriented, outgoing, with a perfect blend of east and west. Please contact with details: shah.shaadi.nj@gmail.com

Gujarati Jain Parents invite proposals for their US born Daughter, Dec 1985, Height 5' 3", slim, talented, beautiful and family oriented. She finished her MD in 2011 and currently she is in 2nd year of Gastroenterology fellowship in NYC. Correspondence invited from suitable match, well-educated, cultured, vegetarian, non-smoking US born boy. Please reply with bio-data and recent photo to: Dsdb0826@gmail.com

Jain parents invite proposals for their daughter; well cultured, vegetarian, outgoing with good blend of east/west values. Born August 1984, 5' 2" US citizen, BS in Computer Science. Please respond with bio-data and picture to: meghajain_21@yahoo.com. or call 503-396-7441

F06051603:

Gujarati Jain family seeks alliance for their daughter raised in USA, born in 1989. She is vegetarian, family-oriented and blend of both traditional and modern values. She has completed her education in Accountancy and Computer Science (M.I.S.) and currently working. Looking for a life companion with similar values & progressive views, vegetarian; but non-smoker and non-drinker, preferable. Kindly contact us with your bio-data and recent photograph at geetaneal@gmail.com or contact us at (727) 743-5120.

Gujarati Jain parents invite correspondence for their US born physician (M.D) daughter; she is family oriented, cultured, great values and vegetarian. Currently doing 2nd year residency in Internal medicine in Ohio, 5' 5" born in August 1989. Correspondence invited from well-educated, cultured, vegetarian, family oriented and likeminded boys. Please Email bio-data with a photo to: hshahpe@gmail.com.

Gujarati Jain family invite proposal for their 1987 US-born daughter. She is 5'4", slim, smart, biomedical engineer, family-oriented, vegetarian. Technical Marketing manager by profession, our daughter enjoys music, sports, outdoor recreation and reading. Respond with bio-data and photo to: sjg387@gmail.com.

F06051602:

Gujarati Jain parents seek alliance for their 1988 born beautiful daughter, 5'2", fair, vegetarian, nonsmoker, and nondrinker. Family Oriented. Currently finishing up MD/MBA. Living in NJ. Seeking educated professionals in USA with similar values. Email biodata and recent photographs to: mshah625@gmail.com

Gujarati Jain parents, seek alliance for their daughter, born in June 1991 and raised in Bombay, 5'4", fair, vegetarian, non-smoker also family oriented holding a green card. Worked as a teacher in India. Seeking educated professionals in USA, with similar values living in USA. Email: jjhaveri57@gmail.com Cell number: 917-445-4709

Gujarati Jain Parents seeking alliance for their daughter, US educated family oriented, vegetarian. She was born in Mumbai India May 1989, perfect blend of modern and traditional values. She manages accounts and business development of ten cell phone stores, well-traveled she enjoys outdoor activities, likes to read, hangout with my family and friends, watch TV and movies, learning about new places. She is looking for a smart, educated, honest, family oriented, adventurous, vegetarian, well settled boy in US. Please respond with biodata and picture to: bcxtavares@gmail.com, Call: 352-348-9493

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For more information or questions please contact: jainmilanchair@jaina.org. Purvin Vakharwala – Jain Milan Chair



Being an Agent of Change

By Sunny Jain



Sunny Jain is a Write-Off Analyst working in the Energy Sector in Houston, TX, and a lifetime member of the Jain Society of Houston. Described by his peers as diligent, compassionate, and a team-player, Sunny attests his spiritual growth and development through practice of Jainism.

As we dive deeper into the 5th ara of the cosmic wheel, a world where qualities such as compassion, trust, and faith are overpowered by the four passions of anger, greed, ego, and deceit, the importance of unified and tightly knit Jain communities around the world is more apparent than ever. As a Jain born in the Manushya Gati, we have been bestowed with the knowledge and human capability to facilitate meaningful change and help others around us. Just as Newton's third law states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, even the smallest act of kindness can significantly impact someone's life, and in turn even create more agents of change.

My story follows the footsteps of an archetypal American born Jain, who halfheartedly participated in Jain youth events and community functions before completely disconnecting from the community upon entering college life. Of course, this was not something I was particularly proud of. Every week would be a reiteration of the previous week, in which I would resolve to get more involved at Derasar, only for it to backfire, whether it be an upcoming exam or the sudden need for more sleep on a Sunday. Visiting Derasar once a week would evolve into once a month, until it conceded to "showing face" on Mahavir Jayanti and randomly selected Sundays where I would "get my Darshan in" before making my swift escape. Sadly, I wasn't the only one.

What makes so many of this generation disconnect from the Jain community like I had done their age? Is it the absence of English-oriented lectures and events, creating a major communication barrier for American born and English speaking Jains? Is it the lack of Jain Fellowship and Youth Group activities in their community? In the pursuit of catering to the needs of the general Derasar population, is there a lack of focus on this often forgotten demographic of Jains between the ages 18 to 30? It may very well be all of the above reasons and more; however one thing is certain, there is a missing sense of community.

Building a sense of community is the string that unites Jains of different ages, interests, and backgrounds towards a common goal, our Derasar. Without a sense of community, people are less motivated to get involved, cliques begin to form among different age groups, and more troublingly, people feel lost and are not able to find their place in the group. Their Derasar does not feel like "home", as it should.

even someone like myself could be an agent of change, through something as little as supporting our local Young Jain Association (YJA) and Jain Fellowship events and encouraging others to get involved, whether it be Ultimate Frisbee and the YJA Regional Retreat, or religious oriented events such as Chaitya Pariparti. By setting an example for the next generation, I disregard the norm that life after high school necessitates disengaging from the community like I had done at that age.

No matter what one's age or background be, every Jain has a role to play in building this sense of community, just as I have done through something as little as getting more involved and encouraging others to do the same. As agents of change, we are the ones who can facilitate real change and build a foundation for our youth, those who represent the future of our Derasar, community, and religion.

The next time you see a new face at Derasar, whether adult or child, actively go out the way to make the new person feel welcome, feel valued; even if it requires breaking out of your own comfort zone. Build a genuine relationship with this person, and perhaps exchange contact information, so that they will return and one day do the same for someone else. As an introvert, I know all too well how difficult it can be to meet new people and assimilate into a group of people you do not know, especially if they are not your age.

As Jains living in an era shaped by forward thinking and progressive ideals, we must collectively rethink the way our communities are socially structured and how we can create an environment that is more welcoming and inclusive for Jains of all ages especially the youth. I call on all my fellow agents of change to lead by example, to break this pattern that is disconnecting our generation, and to encourage others to do the same. The appropriate role of concerned adults will be to serve as a resource and facilitate a process over which youth themselves will have ultimate control. The strength and stability of the youths' relationship to parents, other involved adults, and peers motivates them to participate in religious events. This helps them begin or strengthen their devotion to God and higher powers to which they are introduced to in such events. Such relationships and devotion then become their main motivation to stay connected and continue to receive its benefits across major life transitions, such as going to college. Together, we are the future of Jainism.

Digest

JAINA CONVENTION 2017



The JAINA Executive Committee, JAINA Convention 2017 Convener, Guntant Shah and its Board Members are excited to take this opportunity to invite you, your immediate and extended family members, friends and the Jain community around the world to join highly anticipated JAINA Convention 2017. It will **be held at the NJ Convention & Exposition Center in Edison, NJ from Friday June 30, 2017 to Tuesday July 4, 2017.**

For the first time in JAINA history, the convention will be held for 5 days to help you get the most out of this exciting event. **Please register early** as we expect a record setting number of attendees and the space is limited. Registration will start on **August 15, 2016.**

We are planning to invite many learned scholars and high profile speakers from both within and outside of our community. Please share this invitation with anyone that would enjoy a wide variety of religious, cultural and social programs. This will be a unique opportunity -- we hope to see you there!

A convention board consisting of the following members is already in place and plans are being developed for a memorable event:

Guntant Shah Convener NJ	Ashok Domadia JAINA President San Francisco, CA	Atul Shah Youth Programs Chicago, IL
Devang Shah Registration NJ	Dilip Punatar Facility and Day time Sessions Planning Dayton, OH	Dilip Shah Fundraising and Evening Programs Philadelphia, PA
Harshad Shah Food NJ	Jayesh Sanghvi Marketing & PR Houston, TX	Kalpna Gandhi-Sanghavi Souvenir and Cultural Program Long Island, NY
Purvin Vakharwala YJP & Jain Milan Atlanta, GA	Snehal Shah Finance NJ	Vijay Kothary Booths & Exhibition Atlanta, GA

Please mark your calendar.

Please stay tuned for further communications from us.

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Tel: 213-484-0510
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