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Tribute to Param Puja 108  
Acharyashri Vidyasagarji Maharaj

## JAIN DIGEST

A Publication of the

Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA)

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

In 2023 the Jain community lost three prominent Jain personalities: Dr. Hukum Chand ji Bharill and Dr. Sanjeev ji Godha, and Shri Premacharya ji. This year on February 18<sup>th</sup> again the Jain community suffered the loss of one of the most revered Jain munis - Acharya Param Puja 108 Acharyashri Vidyasagarji Maharaj.

His passing has left an irreplaceable and significant void for his devotees worldwide. However, because Acharyashriji has done so much for the betterment of humanity through his discourses, books, poems, and many social initiatives, we feel solace in knowing that his legacy will continue to guide and inspire people to make progress in their spiritual quest.

In this June 2024 issue of Jain Digest we pay tribute to Acharyashri Vidyasagarji via two articles in the Devotion section. One written by Dr. Arihant Kumar Jain from Mumbai provides details of Acharyashriji's life and his significant contributions to Jain literature and his various social initiatives. Another article is a collection of cherished memories of a few followers of Acharyashriji from USA who had one or more opportunities to be in his divine aura personally and receive his blessings. We hope you will find these articles elevating.

In the Devotion section we also have an article by Savita Jain about the story of Bhaktamar Stotra and how she was inspired to create a playlist of YouTube videos that teaches how to properly pronounce the *shlokas* and their meaning.

In the Compassion section learn about a few animal sanctuaries which are more than animal shelters. Jayana Shah shows us that in these places compassion reigns supreme and animals of all sizes are treated with kindness, respect, and empathy.

In this issue of Jain Digest, we continue with the series of articles in three areas. In the "Jain Sculptures and Art Collections" series, Dhruti Rath covers Jina and Kalpasutra Folio at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. In the Education section we continue the series on Jain *sutras* by Dr. Ramjan Hasaniya. In this issue, he explains the meaning of each word in the *Jayviyay Sutra* – one of the very important Sutras which highlights the reverence one feels towards Bhagwan. Due to space limitation, we had to split this into 2 parts. The second part will be included in the

October 2024 issue. In the series of articles by Pathshala students, we bring you essays written by three talented pathshala students at the Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington.

In the Education section we have two more articles – one by Rajkumar Jain from Indore on some important learnings about *Karma* from the story of Maynasundari and in the other article, Anop Vora gives us various details about Samayik such as its benefits, prerequisites and the process.

In the Inspiration section Reena Shah covers the various facets of Oprah Winfrey's illustrious life and highlights her virtues such as compassion, truthfulness, non-attachment, humility, etc.

We covered the story of two USA born *diksharthis*, Tanya and Karan, in the February issue. Inspired by that, Payal Seth, in an article in the Transformation section, explores how such selfless decisions impact a wider community, inspiring us to advance on our spiritual path. In the "Why Meditate?" article, Ramesh Khandhar describes various meditation techniques that can be helpful in resolving physiological and psychological problems.

In the Information section we bring you an eyewitness report of the incredible Sahasravadhan program by Muni Shri Dr. Ajitchandra Sagarji, provided to us by Dilip V. Shah. We also have a report of the Jain Leadership Forum held in Chicago in April 2024 that was organized to discuss how Jainism in North America can be advanced from success to significance. And in the article about Young Jain of America (YJA) you can learn how they are creating a vibrant community of young Jains through various social and spiritual activities.

In the Conversation section we are pleased to bring you a very thought-provoking interview with Mr. Philip Wollen from Melbourne, Australia who is probably one of most passionate proponents of Ahimsa. Get inspired by reading his very articulate and eloquent answers to why he calls himself Ahimsan, his views on Veganism, his various kindness projects, etc.

My sincere thanks to all the writers for their contribution. Thanks to everyone in our editorial team for their dedication and hard work.

If you would like to write an article for our next issue to be published in October 2024, please write to us at: [jaindigestpublication@gmail.com](mailto:jaindigestpublication@gmail.com)  
Or call or send a message at 310-721-5947.

In Seva,  
Dilip Parekh



# JAINA

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Members of the Jain Community,

It is with great pleasure that we highlight the vibrant activities of JAINA. It is crucial to reiterate the purpose of our organization and the significance it holds within our community.

For over four decades, JAINA has been at the forefront of serving the spiritual, educational, and cultural needs of the North American Jain community. Led by dedicated leaders, both current and past members of the Executive Committee, our organization has curated a diverse array of programs and initiatives to cater to these needs.

<https://www.jaina.org/page/Execcommittee>

JAINA represents over 200,000 Jains across North America, with 72+ Jain Centers under its umbrella. Our initiatives span across various domains, including education, environment, youth services, and humanitarian services, showcasing our commitment to a holistic approach to community service – [https://www.jaina.org/page/jaina\\_committees](https://www.jaina.org/page/jaina_committees)

Here's a brief **overview** of the dynamic and multifaceted activities that define JAINA:

### Spiritual Guidance and Growth

We provide a plethora of resources, including literature, online sessions, pilgrimage opportunities, and workshops, to deepen our understanding and practice of Jain Dharma. These initiatives form a solid foundation for spiritual growth and introspection, rooted in the values of **Ahimsa**, **Anekantvad**, and **Aparigraha**.

### Community Engagement and Service (Seva)

Our commitment to community service is unwavering. Through various committees, events, and platforms, we offer ample volunteer opportunities to contribute to Jain causes and engage in projects that make a significant difference. We foster a sense of belonging and collective action within our community.

### Educational Empowerment

Education is a cornerstone of JAINA. We provide access to educational materials for **Jain Pathshala** on the topics of philosophy, history, and culture, empowering both - pathshala teachers and our younger generation. Furthermore, we **support our youth** through mentoring and leadership opportunities, particularly in Jain studies or related fields, expanding Jainism's reach in the **academia**.

### Networking and Mentorship

Networking is essential for professional and personal development. JAINA facilitates networking opportunities with professionals and leaders within the Jain community, offering mentorship, philanthropic endeavors, and career advancement opportunities. These support systems are invaluable at every stage of life.

### Celebrating Our Heritage

We take pride in celebrating our rich Jain heritage through cultural events, festivals, and celebrations. These gatherings serve not only to preserve traditions but also to pass on the torch to future generations, ensuring the vibrancy and relevance of our heritage.

### Health and Wellness

Promoting a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle and ethical practices is integral to our commitment to Ahimsa. We offer resources and guidance on incorporating mindfulness in daily life, enhancing the well-being of our community members.

### Recent Accomplishments and Endeavors

#### Transition and Governance

We've successfully navigated the initial transition, establishing a stable foundation for our future endeavors. Our governance model emphasizes empowerment, transparency, accountability, and effective governance at all levels, ensuring that **every action** we take **aligns with our mission**. Almost 44

**committees** were reviewed, and **leadership** was selected by EC.

**Jaina Expense Approval** tool is being launched to streamline request, validation, approval & accounting processes.

## Technology and Communication

We've modernized our technology landscape, leveraging modern tools like **Microsoft Teams**, **conference facility**, **Role based emails**, **fortnightly newsletters** to connect, engage, and disseminate information, ensuring that our community stays informed and connected.

In addition, by strengthening **engagements with local centers**, **sustaining philanthropy efforts**, and **impactful initiatives** across various domains, we are reminded of the profound impact of collective action within our community.

## Recent Activities Highlights

- The **Bidada Survoday Annual Camp** in India - January 2024
- The **Dialogue with JAINA events** in Mumbai, India, arranged by **Jaina India Foundation**, facilitating meaningful discussions with community organizations.
- **Spiritual visits** to esteemed Gurus and Sadhu-Sadhvis for their blessings.



- The **JAINA India Conference** in Ahmedabad on 'Jainism & Environment'.



- **Official visits** to various projects undertaken by JAINA in India, such as Vihar dhams, Kanya Shala, Animal Panjarapoles, and potential project opportunities.



*Girivihar - Vaiyavacch Dham – Palitana*

- The recognition of individuals through the **JAINA India Awards** for their **philanthropy**, **social work**, and **Seva** to the Jain community.
- The **Jain Leadership Forum** in Chicago in April, bringing together professionals and leaders to apply Jain principles in various fields.

As we continue this journey, I invite each one of you to step up, engage, and make a lasting impact. Together, let's ignite positive change, uphold our heritage, and propel JAINA toward a brighter future.

Sincerely,  
Bindesh Shah



## MODERN SANCTUARIES: NEW FRONTIER IN ANIMAL CARE

### JAYANA SHAH



*Jayana Shah, a volunteer, and Graphics Designer by profession, dedicates herself to various organizations such as JCSC, JAINA, and NGOs like VOICE of Specially Abled People and TCCOP. Her commitment to service led her to become the editor for Compassion Section at Jain Digest, showcasing her passion for spreading awareness and supporting causes close to her heart.*

When I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade I spent few days of summer vacation at my Nani's home in a small town of Gujarat. One morning among the gentle chants and fragrant incense of her Jain household, I learned a lesson in compassion -one that would shape my worldview and guide me on a journey of empathy towards all living beings. It was a lesson taught not through words, but through actions. It was my Mama's simple yet profound act of rescuing a distressed kitten from the rooftop of the home while flying a kite which resulted in him losing the battle of kite fight.

As I watched my Mama tenderly rescue the kitten, nurse the trembling creature back to health, I was surprised by his sympathy. His actions taught me that compassion knows no bounds – it extends not only to our fellow humans but to every creature that shares this planet with us. This early lesson in compassion was further reinforced as I grew up. Over the years I have been blessed to have several community service opportunities which have enriched my life.

In recent years I have encountered stories of sanctuaries like Luvn Arms Animal Sanctuary in Colorado, USA, and three in India; Shrimad Rajchandra Jivamaitridham in Dharampur (Gujarat), the newly opened Vantana in Jamnagar, (Gujarat) and Ahimsa Tirth in Jalgaon (Maharashtra). These sanctuaries, located worlds apart yet united in their dedication to animal welfare, serve as beacons of hope and compassion in a world too often marred by cruelty and indifference.

Let me begin with **Luvn Arms Animal Sanctuary** located in Erie, Colorado. (<https://luvinarms.org/>) Opened in August 2015, it serves as a refuge for abused and neglected farmed animals. Founded by Shaleen and Shilpi Shah and cared for by a dedicated staff, Luvn Arms is a testament to the transformative power of compassion. What began with a single horse named Jale has blossomed into a sanctuary that provides solace, healing, and love to a diverse family of residents such as cows, pigs, turkeys, chickens,

horses, goats, donkeys, sheep, and ducks. Each animal is always referred to by their name. Through the dedication of passionate volunteers, Luvn Arms continues to thrive, rewriting the narrative for farmed animals and proving that love and kindness can indeed change the world.



The sanctuary also has educational programs such as field trips, LEAP program (Leaders for Ethics, Animals, and the Planet) and Camps. In summer Jain Retreats are held where individuals are invited to embrace a journey of self-discovery, foster a deep connection with all living beings, and find solace in the sanctuary's compassionate ethos.



Nestled in the serene landscapes of Dharampur, **Shrimad Rajchandra Jivamaitridham**, embodies



the principles of Ahimsa, central to Jain philosophy. (<https://bit.ly/4aGKaT8>)

Here, animals are not merely residents but cherished friends, their well-being and security paramount. From providing a comfortable living space to practicing Ahimsa milking methods, every aspect of care is infused with love and compassion. The sanctuary also includes an Animal Nursing home. More than 340,000 animals have been treated under the Animal Care program.

Since the Nursing Home is running at full capacity, a critical need for in-patient services and post-operative care for complex cases was noted. It was identified that a facility providing end-to-end treatment for all kinds of animals under one roof would significantly improve the well-being of thousands of animals as well as increase the quality of life of the local community.



Envisaged by Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshji's compassion, the plan for **Shrimad Rajchandra Animal Hospital** was unveiled in 2021. This 150-bed multi-specialty animal hospital is spread across 47,000 sq. ft., and is all set to break all barriers and become the pioneer institute in India for animal healthcare. It will be amongst the few hospitals in India to offer services such as 24×7 OPD and IPD, dialysis for animals, a blood bank, laser therapy treatment, animal prosthesis, cancer treatments, laparoscopy, and endoscopies – all under one roof. All species of animals, right from dogs to cows; snakes to horses; and parrots to tortoises, will find solace in this abode of care. (<https://bit.ly/3Q8XkzY>)

Another incredible sanctuary, **Vantara**, opened its doors on February 26, 2024. It is the brainchild of Anant Ambani. Anant has a heart of gold, especially when it comes to animals. Anant's vision for Vantara

is amazing. He has poured his heart and soul into creating a place where animals are treated like royalty. And he hasn't held back one bit. Just like how you'd spare no expense to take care of your own family members, Anant has gone above and beyond to make sure every creature at Vantara feels loved and cared for.

Vantara is like a paradise for animals, an amazing facility designed just for them. They have everything from cozy accommodations for elephants to high-tech medical equipment for their health needs. One of the coolest things about Vantara is its special facilities for elephants. They have a huge jacuzzi just for elephants! It's not for fun, though—it's actually for treating arthritis. Imagine how happy those elephants must feel getting a relaxing soak in their own personal spa !



But that's not all—Vantara also has top-of-the-line medical facilities, including MRI and X-ray machines, an ICU, and even a dental clinic for the animals. They even have a special Elephant Hospital with hyperbaric oxygen chambers and laser machines. And get this—they offer massages to the elephants! Who wouldn't want a spa day like that?

When it comes to food, Vantara has expert chefs who prepare specially curated diets for each animal, making sure they get all the nutrients they need to stay healthy and happy.

But Vantara isn't just about pampering animals—it's also about saving them. They've rescued over 2,000 animals from all sorts of bad situations and given them a safe place to call home. With a team of 2,100 dedicated staff members, Vantara continues to provide refuge to animals in need every single day.

And here's the best part: Vantara isn't just focused on helping animals; they're also working to save endangered species and restore their habitats for the future. Inspired by the philosophy of 'Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva' (to serve Jiva as Shiva(Lord)' by Swami Vivekananda, Vantara is partnering with organizations like the World Wildlife Fund and the Zoo Authority of India to make a real difference in wildlife conservation.

These stories remind us that compassion is not merely a virtue to be admired from afar but a guiding principle to be lived and embodied in our daily lives. Whether through simple acts of kindness towards a distressed kitten or through the creation of sanctuaries that provide refuge to animals in need, each of us has the power to make a difference, to sow seeds of compassion that can ripple outwards and create a more compassionate world for all beings.

**Ahimsa Tirth** in Jalgaon (Maharashtra State) created by Late Ratanlal C Bafna is considered to be one of the best Goshalas in India. His love, compassion, and passion for promoting Ahimsa have been the driving force behind this Tirth. He believes that whoever has love and compassion for cows and takes care of cows, God will take care of them.



The sanctuary has 2500 cows and other animals saved from slaughterhouses such as bullocks, goats, camels, etc. Cows are cared for like family members. Along with grass, they are fed with ayurvedic supplements such as Shatawari and Ashwagandha. The cows are milked in the morning while devotional songs are played which creates a very serene and pious atmosphere. The cow dung is used to create gas which is used to provide fuel and electricity needed for the Goshala facilities. It is also used to

create fertilizers. Various Ayurvedic medicines are also manufactured here and sold at low cost under the Kalyani brand. There is a special structure for pigeons which stays cool even during summer time.



It is not just a Goshala but a place where visitors can learn about Ahimsa and Vegetarian diet by visiting a museum named "You Turn" where through hundreds of posters, sculptures, and films, visitors are made aware of the importance of Ahimsa and vegetarian diet. The hope is that after visiting this museum people will take a U-turn and stop eating non-vegetarian food. To get a video tour of this wonderful place, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HXDtQV9dxl>

As I reflect on these stories, I am reminded of the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." May we, inspired by the examples of Luvn Arms, Shrimad Rajchandra Jivamaitridham, Vantara, Ahimsa Tirth, and countless others, strive to create a world where compassion reigns supreme and all beings are treated with kindness, respect, and empathy.

You know what would be super fun? Visiting these sanctuaries! Instead of big birthday parties or fancy anniversary dinners, how about celebrating at the sanctuary? You could bring treats to share with the animals and create special memories together. Plus, if you're really feeling the love, you might even consider adopting one or two animal buddies. Don't worry, they'll still be taken care of by the sanctuary, but you'll get to be a part of their lives too. It's a win-win situation - you're helping the animals and teaching your family the importance of kindness and empathy. So what are you waiting for? Let's go spread some love and make some furry (or feathery) friends!



# SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION OF ĀCĀRYA ŚRĪ VIDYĀSĀGAR JI MUNIMAHĀRĀJ

## DR. ARIHANT KUMAR JAIN



*Dr. Arihant Kumar Jain is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Studies in Jainism, K. J. Somaiya Institute of Dharma Studies, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai. He has five books to his credit so far, out of which he is the author of three and editor of two. He is the founding Editor of 'The Prakrit Times International eNewsletter' for the promotion and propagation of the oldest Prakrit language and literature globally, as well as he is also an Associate Editor of Jain Avenue published by JAINA. He has directed a documentary film depicting the historical and archaeological importance of Sravanabelagola (Karnataka), which has been screened in a couple of National and International film festivals.*

Saṅt Śīromaṇi Digambarācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Jī Munimahārāj, a revered spiritual leader, a great ascetic, a philosopher, a great poet, an epitome of scholarship and spiritual insight, has left an indelible mark on the spiritual landscape through his profound teachings and exemplary life.



He is also known as the Saint of Sadalaga because he was born in the village Chikkodi in Belgaum (Sadalga) district of Karnataka on *Aśvina Śukla Pūrṇimā* (*Śārada Pūrṇimā*), 10 October 1946, Vikram Samvat 2003. He had the privilege of getting the discipleship of Ācārya Śreṣṭha Mahākavi Jñānsāgarji Mahārāj. His journey from Vidyādhār, his childhood name, to Vidyāsāgar was one of deep commitment towards acquiring and imparting

knowledge. He, who was detached from worldly ostentation, has dedicated his life to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge. Born into a world yearning for enlightenment, he emerged as a guiding light who led the country on the path of intellectual awakening.

### Epitome of Jain Wisdom

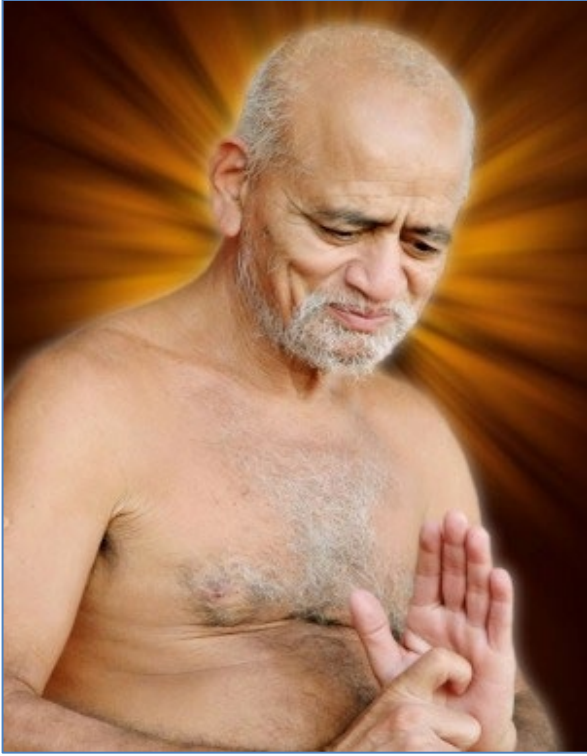
One of Ācārya Vidyāsāgar Jī's most notable contributions is his relentless effort to revive and propagate the ancient Jain wisdom. In a rapidly changing world, he emphasized the timeless relevance of Jain teachings, guiding his followers on a path of self-realization and spiritual enlightenment. Through discourses, writings, and educational initiatives, he sought to preserve and transmit the profound knowledge embedded in the *Āgamas* (Canonical Texts).

I consider myself extremely fortunate that along with my father and mother, I had the privilege of visiting him at many places like *Damoh, Kundalpur, Garhakota, and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh (Bharat)*, and got the great fortune of giving him *Āhāra Vidhi* at some places. Ācārya Śrī had a special blessing for my father Prof. Phoolchand Jain Premi, Varanasi. My father had done research work "Critical study of *Mūlācāra*" on '*Mūlācāra*' – Prakrit Canonical Text of Ācārya Vattakera, which is considered an ideal research work on *Śramanācāra* (code of conduct of Ascetics) in the field of research. Ācārya Śrī's whole life was based on *Mūlācāra*. With the blessings of Ācārya Śrī, later on, my father and mother Dr. Munni Jain, by working on the rare ancient manuscripts found, also brought to light a scripture called *Mūlācāra Bhāṣhā Vacanikā*. Ācārya?



Śrī also did sermons of this scripture in his huge *Muni Sangha*. With his inspiration, after years of research and hard work, my father wrote a well-researched work named '*Śramaṇa Saṁskṛti aur Vaidika Vrātya*', which was published by Bharatiya Jnanpith, and inaugurated by Acharya Śrī.

At the heart of Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj's legacy lies his profound understanding and promotion of the Prakrit language. In an era where the world is rapidly evolving, he staunchly held onto the roots of our linguistic heritage, emphasizing the importance of preserving and promoting the rich tapestry of Prakrit literature. His tireless efforts in reviving interest in Prakrit have not only safeguarded our linguistic diversity but have also ignited a renewed passion for the beauty and depth inherent in our ancient texts.



### An ideal embodiment of penance and renunciation

Saint Ācārya Muni Vidyasagar used to follow strict rules. He never consumed things like sugar, salt, green vegetables, fruits, dry fruits, oil, allopathic medicines, milk and curd in his ascetic life. These things were completely prohibited in his diet. Saint Ācārya Muni Vidyāsāgar used to take *Āhār* (pure and faultless food) once a day by making fingers of

his hands (Karpatra) and also used to take a limited diet i.e. less than the number of Grāsa (mouthful intake of food) decided by him. Never ate much. He used to drink water only once a day, that too 5 anjuli before and 5 anjuli after meals. He had fixed rules not only for eating but also for sleeping. He used to sleep on one side only on a wooden bed. Neither mattress, sheet, nor mat was spread on it. Ācārya Muni Vidyasagar never took money from anyone. Nor was any trust ever formed. He was strictly against taking money. Ācārya Muni Vidyasagar was Aniyat Vihari. He never made a travel schedule. Whenever he used to travel, no one knew in which direction he would go. Even when the devotees asked, he never gave this information.

### Literary Contributions

The Ācārya's literary oeuvre is a testament to his brilliance. His writings, characterized by their intellectual depth and spiritual resonance, have touched the hearts and minds of readers worldwide. His ability to distill complex philosophical concepts into accessible and meaningful prose has made his work a beacon for seekers of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. His spiritual and literary genius has given to society and mankind at large rare books of Scholarly wisdom, couched in a language that even the lay and common reader can understand with ease. He is a linguist, versatile in Hindi, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Marathi, Bengali, English and other Indian languages. Some of his notable publications are as follows:

1. *Narmadā kā Narama Kaṅkara* (The Soft pebble of Narmada)
2. *Dubo Mat, Lagāo Dubakī* (Don't be drowned but Dip-dive)
3. *Totā kyon Rotā* (Why does a parrot cry?)
4. *Cetanā ke Gaharāva Mein* (In the depths of consciousness)
5. *Mukmati (Mute Clay) is the crowning glory* – his philosophical epic.

His *Mahākāvya* (The Great Epic) 'MŪKMĀTI' grouped under the various heads of marvelous topics taking into consideration the utility of the soil and its reflection on the life of mankind to mold and

divert to achieve the blissful journey of life. It consists of ślokaś, chhaṇḍ, and talented sayings and proverbs curved into lyric and poetry by the Ācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji. With the vivid topics more connected with life, Philosophy, Spirituality, ethics, and the National awakening of human beings, it added another link of golden chains to the great scriptures of Indian heritage and philosophy. 'Mook Maati' has been and is being translated into Marathi, English, Bengali, Kannada, Gujarati, Urdu, Sanskrit Languages, and Brahmi script etc. Ācārya Śri has evaluated the epic on the basis of five grounds, namely:- 1) Establishing the human values of life (2) Setting the ideals of life of the age, (3) Cooperation in cultural upliftment, (4) Advanced philosophical thoughts, and (5) Capability to produce life-giving energy. About 283 Hindi scholars have written reviews on 'Mook Maati' Mimamsa (Part 1, 2, 3), which have been published by Bharatiya Jnanpith. On this, 4 D.Litt, 50 Ph.D., 8 M.Phil., 2 M.Ed., and 6 M.A., etc. have been done. We have amply seen that the Ācārya Śri has done justice to test this compendium of monasticism which provides a direction to the other philosophies of the world through Jain philosophy to which Ācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji Mahārāj is devoted and dedicated heart and soul.

With the vivid topics more connected with life, Philosophy, Spiritual, ethical, and National awakening of human beings, it added another link of golden chains to the great scriptures of Indian heritage and philosophy. He additionally contributed *hīndī śataka*, *ācārya stuti saroja*, More than 500 haiku poems, Verse translation of 22 texts of Jainācāryas, 10 spiritual hymns, 9 devotional Geet, Written compositions in languages like English, Bengali, Kannada, Prakrit etc. He has created many texts in the Sanskrit language, among which the following are prominent:

*Śaradā Stuti*, *Paṃcāstikāya kā Saṃskṛta Pratiṛūpaka*, *Dhīrodaya Campūkāvya*, *Saṃskṛta Śataka*, *Sunītiśatakam*, (*Śramaṇaśatakam*, *Niraṇjanaśatakam*, *Bhāvanāśatakam*, etc.). Ācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji's contributions extend beyond the realms of literature.

## ‘Bade Bābā’ of Kundalpur and Visionary Ācārya Śri

Ācārya Śri was the main source of inspiration for the construction of the new main temple for the ancient idol of the first Jain Tirthankara Adinath Rishabhdeva, popularly also known as 'Bade Bābā'. According to an inscription of Vikram Samvat 1757, the former temple situated on the hill was the oldest temple of Kundalpur (District Damoh, Madhya Pradesh), in which 'Bade Baba' was seated. With the inspiration of Ācārya Śri, this ancient idol has been shifted to a new grand huge temple today. In 2022 the historical *Pañcakalyanaka* of this temple was witnessed by 1.5 million devotees. This beautiful temple is in Nagara architectural style and is one of the tallest Jain temples in the world. It was completed under the guidance of Ācārya Śri, who is often referred to as "*Chhote Bābā*" in relation to the image of 'Bade Bābā'.

## Social Welfare Initiatives

A true embodiment of selfless service, Ācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj actively engaged in various social welfare initiatives and humanitarian activities. He championed causes related to poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, environmental preservation, and community development. His teachings inspired countless followers to actively contribute to the well-being of society, emphasizing the importance of compassion and service to humanity.

Due to his inspiration, artificial limbs, hearing aids, crutches, and three-wheel cycles have been distributed in many handicapped camps organized by Jain Samaj. Free eye operations, medicines, and spectacles have been distributed through the camps. A free handicapped assistance centre is running in 'Sarvodaya Tīrtha' Amarkantak. In the spirit of kindness to animals, *Dayodaya Gaushālās* have been established in various states of the country, where thousands of animals going to slaughter are being brought and given protection. Ācārya Śri feels that the public awareness campaign

to stop animal meat export should not be limited to any party, religion, or society, but there should be collective participation of all political parties, society, religious leaders, and individuals in it.

His social and humanitarian endeavors have left an indelible impact on society. Through educational initiatives, he has empowered countless individuals, providing them with the tools to navigate the challenges of the modern world while staying rooted in our cultural ethos. Likewise, he saw a paramount role for agriculture in our economy, also stressing making agriculture modern as well as sustainable. His work towards reforming jail inmates was also noteworthy.

Ācārya Śrī always used to say that “it is the duty of all of us to support the weaker sections of the society and make them like you. One can never be self-made by providing money, but one can be taught good deeds by giving one the means to earn money. For this, this non-violent work of handloom can be considered the best work”. Some key initiatives by him are as follows:

- **Promotion of Universal Values through Education**

Education was an area very close to his heart. It was his firm belief that education is the cornerstone of a just and enlightened society. He championed the cause of knowledge as a means to empower individuals, enabling them to lead lives of purpose and contribution. Ācārya Vidyasagar wanted our youngsters to get an education that is rooted in our cultural ethos. He also believed that a holistic education is one that focuses on skilling and innovating. He took immense pride in India's linguistic diversity and encouraged youngsters to learn Indian languages.

Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj advocated for universal values that transcend cultural and religious boundaries. His teachings emphasized the core principles of love, compassion, tolerance, and selflessness. He always used to say – ‘*caraṇa nahīṇ, ācaraṇa chuo*’ (Touch the conduct, not the feet). By promoting these values, he aimed to foster harmony and understanding among people of

diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of global unity and interconnectedness.

- **Who raised the voice of calling 'Bhārat' as 'Bhārat'**

Ācārya Śrī's slogan was '*India nahin, Bhārat bolo*'. He had been saying in his sermons that Bhārat should be called Bhārat. He had even been running a nationwide campaign since 2017. He said that since ancient times, our country has been known as *Vishwaguru* by the name of Bhāratvarsha. But after independence from 200 years of British slavery, the name of the country was changed to India in English. The ancient history of the country should not be forgotten, hence the original authentic name of the country, Bhārat, should be recognized.

- **Educational Reforms and Promoting Girl Education**

Recognizing the pivotal role of education in shaping individuals and societies, Ācārya Vidyāsāgar Ji spearheaded educational reforms rooted in spiritual principles. He believed in an education system that not only imparts academic knowledge but also nurtures moral and ethical values. His efforts led to the establishment of educational institutions that aimed at holistic development, fostering a harmonious blend of academic excellence and character-building.

Pratibha Sthali is a unique girls' residential educational institution across India, which has blossomed and flourished due to the immense grace and vision of Maharaj Ji. On 18 February 2004, the foundation stone of Pratibhasthali was laid in the presence of Ācārya Śrī 108 Vidyāsāgar ji Maharaj Chaturvidh Sangh at Tilwara Ghat on the holy banks of the holy river Narmada in Jabalpur. Today, along with Jabalpur, branches of Pratibha Sthali in Dongargarh (Chhattisgarh), Ramtek (Maharashtra), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), and Lalitpur (Uttar Pradesh) are also smoothly engaged in propagating Vidya. Here education is not a means of earning money but is a sacred process of imparting knowledge. Here, Bal Brahmacharini Vidushi and trained teachers are providing their selfless services to build a bright future for the girls. This C.B.S.E.



recognized institute is reviving the memory of ancient Gurukuls in today's modern environment. "The aim of education here is not to sustain life but to build it."

- **Building a *Svāvalambī* (self-reliant) *Bhārata* through *Hathkarghā***

He believed that since ancient times, India has been the world's largest textile production center due to its textile manufacturing art, but in this era of mechanization, we have hurt handicrafts a lot. As a result, rural areas, which are called the soul of India, are today facing serious problems like unemployment, poverty, and migration. To solve many such problems, with the blessings of His Holiness Ācārya Guruvar Śrī 108 Vidyasagarji Maharaj, many handloom training and production centres are being operated across India. Under the blessings of Ācārya Pravar, 'Chal Charkha Women Training and Employment Centres' are being operated at 9 places in different states of India like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. Tihar Jail signed an MoU with Chal Charkha, Pratibhamandal Trust. This organization will provide skill training in the field of handloom and handicrafts to the women prisoners in jails and will also provide employment to these women prisoners after their release.

### Golden Memories

I remember in March 2020, I reached Pratibha Sthali, Jabalpur early in the morning with my wife Smt. Neha Jain to have his darshan. He was doing *Swādhyāya*, I went near him, touched his feet, and introduced myself to him. He was very happy to know that I am the son of 'Premiji' and am working in the field of Jain philosophy to continue the legacy. With his familiar smile, he also asked about my father Prof. Phoolchand Jain Premi, mother Dr. Munni Jain, elder brother Dr. Anekant, and elder sister Dr. Indu. It was surprising to know that he was speaking everyone's name. He also asked me about my research topic 'Contribution of Ācārya Kundkund in the development of philosophical and spiritual thinking' and also happily blessed me. I wanted to capture that moment in my eyes. Even today, when

I close my eyes and remember him, this golden scene comes to my mind.

### Heartfelt Tribute

Ācārya Śrī was a great ascetic who observed 36 'Basic Gunas' in his philosophy of life. During today's Pañcam Kāla (Fifth Ara), his Routine duties were like that of the Caturtha Kāla (fourth Ara). Enduring health-related parishaha's (hardships) with equanimity, Ācārya Śrī gave up the title of Ācāryatva and accepted full Sallekhanā (Voluntary Ritualized death). He had completely given up the Caturvidha Āhār (fourfold diet) three days earlier and then on 18th February 2024, at the age of 77, he attained Samadhi-Marana at Chandragiri Tirtha in Dongargarh (Chhattisgarh, Bharat) and merged into the Panchatatva. If we analyze his 'Municharya' carefully, it becomes clear that his 'Sallekhanā' had been going on for many years.

As we pay tribute to Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj, let us reflect on the profound influence he has had on our nation and the literary world. His legacy is not confined to the pages of history but lives on in the hearts of those who have been touched by his wisdom and benevolence. He embodies the Jain ideal of universal welfare (lokasaṅgraha) by his humanitarian outreach to all beings. His life and teachings continue to inspire and guide millions on their spiritual journey. His contributions to reviving Jain wisdom, promoting universal values, initiating educational reforms, engaging in social welfare, and fostering interfaith dialogue have left an indelible impact on society. As we reflect on the legacy of this revered Ācārya, may we draw inspiration from his teachings to create a more harmonious and compassionate world.

Ācārya Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj, a true luminary, has lit the way for generations to come. May his teachings continue to guide us, and may his spirit inspire the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and compassion in the years to come.

# DIVINE EXPERIENCES WITH PARAM PUJYA 108 ACHARYASHRI VIDYASAGARJI MAHARAJ

(Editor's Note: After Acharyashri Vidyasagarji Maharaj attained Samadhi on February 18, 2024, Times of India published an article written by Prime Minister Narendra Modi about Acharyashriji. The article starts with:



*"Acharya Vidhyasagar Maharaj attained Samadhi and left all of us saddened. His life is a spiritually rich epoch graced with profound wisdom, boundless compassion, and an unwavering commitment to uplift humanity. I have had the honour of receiving his blessings on numerous occasions. Thus I feel a deep sense of loss, akin to losing a guiding light that has illuminated the path for countless souls, including myself"*

After reading this, our editorial team came up with an idea to collect experiences of those who have met Acharyashriji personally. I contacted Noopur Jain who had written an article about **"Mook Mati"**, the epic poem written by Acharyashriji that was published in the February 2021 issue of Jain Digest. I shared the idea with her and she enthusiastically agreed to contact several people she knew who had met Acharyashriji. Within a few days she collected several responses which are included in this article, along with her own experience of being in Acharyashriji's aura. Many thanks to Noopur ji and all the writers who have shared their cherished memories.)

Acharyashri or **"Chhote Baba"** (as Acharyashri Vidyasagarji Maharaj is popularly known to the entire world) has been a constant source of inspiration, was the most reverend, and the most influential Muniraj within the Digamber Community. Our Acharyashri attained samadhi on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at Chandragiri Teerth in Chhattisgarh's Dongargarh.

Today, Acharyashri is not with us, but he has made a lasting impression on his followers - the most revered acharya among both *Shravakas* and *Munis*. Even though we devoutly miss Acharyashri's presence and *Aashirwaad* today, but we understand that history will never forget him. His words, writings, books, and *Updesh* is and will always be with us forever. He was a living Tirthankar, as many would call him due to his unparalleled strict Digamber lifestyle. We would like to pay our tribute to our one and only *Gurudev* by sharing a few of our own experiences while meeting him and doing *Gurudev's Darshan*.

## Noopur Jain, Cerritos. CA

In the summer of 2022, my family made plans to visit Acharyashri during our India visit. It was once in a lifetime (and apparently the last) opportunity to see him up close at a small village in Maharashtra named Shirpur.

Every moment of those blessed 3.5 days went by in a blur. We were absorbed into Acharyashri's *Bhakti Bhaav*. Despite heavy ongoing rains and a long and

ardous journey to get to Shirpur, unusual village environment (specifically for my American born kids), walking in rainwater laden muddy roads, and all other adversities a small Indian village has to offer, all we could see and feel was the smiling face of Acharyashri and the vibrations created from his holy presence there. It was magical!

Each morning, I eagerly rose early to catch a glimpse of him as he embarked on his nihaar. After a refreshing shower, we hastily prepared ourselves to join the procession for his padgahan. Although I didn't have the opportunity to offer him aahaar, the padgahan itself was immensely gratifying. Acharyashri would gracefully traverse a long aisle of devoted shravakas, each fervently hoping that he would grace their chauka for aahaar that day. As he passed by, my family and I received his radiant smile and blessings, conveyed through a raised hand in aashirwaad mudra. His gestures and eyes spoke volumes; no words were necessary. In that moment, we felt truly blessed!

After the morning aahaar, we eagerly attended his pravachan. The mere sight of Gurudev was deeply gratifying. Our family also had the privilege of paying homage by presenting Shrifal at his lotus feet, providing yet another opportunity to experience his divine presence up close. Though he spoke little, the seeker could sense the immense power of his presence. He didn't flaunt his riddhi (though

undoubtedly, he possessed many), yet one could feel the radiance and the culmination of his fifty years of Sadhana reflected in his countenance.

For me, experiencing Guruji's darshan at Shirpur felt like a lifetime achievement. I'm immensely grateful that we made deliberate plans to visit, knowing that such an opportunity might never arise again. My heart overflows with gratitude! Jai Jai Gurudev!

### **Ramesh Khandhar, Brea, CA**

On October 27, 2018, I was doing my spiritual sadhna in Koba ashram in Gujarat. My cousin uncle Anilalbhai Khandhar was performing 'Sanlekhna tapa' in presence of and under the guidance of PP Acharya Shri Vidyasagarji Maharaj residing at Khajuraaho. Under Acharyashri's guidance and approval, my uncle had started the 'sanlekhna tap' nearly 10 years ago. He had lost over 45 pounds and became so weak that it was anticipated he may attain 'samadhi maran' in just a few days. I immediately booked my train ticket and went to Khajuraaho. I stayed there for three days and on the second day his soul peacefully departed. Under the personal guidance of Acharyashri, I was fortunate enough to recite arihant and siddha mantras to my uncle. He was intently listening and was aware that I was chanting the mantra. On the same night, early morning my nephew called and informed his dad's departure from this world. The next morning we did all the cremation procedures right in the backyard of the place Acharyashri was residing.

In the afternoon, PP Acharyashri granted us a personal meeting with him. We silently sat. He gave his blessing to us, describing the sincere efforts of my uncle to attain 'samadhi maran'. Acharyashri said that he had completed seven 'pratimas' and declared that he was one of the best shravaks who attained 'samadhi maran' under his supervision. In the past, over 50 shravaks had attained 'samadhi maran' under his guidance.

In the past, I have visited Acharyashri three times and got his blessing and personal meetings. I was so blessed to have such a casual conversation with him on such an auspicious occasion. I felt his divine touch. It was one of the most memorable events in my life. I was able to attend his discourse every morning and witness 'aahar daan' around 10:30 am.

### **Shelley Jain, West Windsor, NJ**

One of my most cherished memories is meeting Acharya Shri in February 2019. Amidst hundreds of eager devotees, the chance to offer him aahar felt like a triumphant victory, marking a turning point in my life. Despite my son's illness, we brought him along, trusting in the blessings of Acharya Shri to heal. Surprisingly, after encountering numerous muni maharaj that day, my son miraculously recovered, and our worries vanished. Returning home, I felt a profound shift within me, discovering newfound solutions to life's challenges.

Acharya Shri's aura and presence left an enduring impression, ingrained in my mind forever. Our family remains forever indebted to him, and I am grateful to my aunt for facilitating this profound experience. He epitomized wisdom and compassion, and though he may no longer be with us physically, his teachings continue to resonate, guiding us through life's journey. While expressing the loss of his physical presence is difficult, I find solace in his enduring contributions and legacy, which will remain etched in our hearts forever.

### **Charu Jain, Fremont, CA**

I visited Acharya Shri for the first time in my life on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at Ramtek. Until then, I had never seen a Digambar sadhu so closely. According to the Indian calendar, it was his birthday (Sharad Purnima), and he was observing silence. When I approached him and paid my respects (bow down with Namostu), he was busy reading a book. I stood there and suddenly he looked at me from head to toe with his large eyes. For a moment, I thought I had made some mistake and that he was looking at me in anger, for I had never seen such large eyes before. Later, I learned that his gaze is said to bring well-being to anyone it falls upon. And indeed, it did.

Since that day, my inclination towards spirituality has only grown, even after 16 years. I felt a connection with him and made it a routine to visit him on my every trip to India. He always offered me his blessings and guidance. Getting one on one with him is very rare but I was fortunate enough to get that every time I visited. I had the good fortune to give him *Ahaar* thrice (one time including *padgahan*, the whole process), accompany him in his *Vihaar* twice, perform the ritual of washing his feet, and present him with sacred texts. We also received his Chaturmas kalash three times,



and his auspicious blessings were always with us. Each visit filled me with energy that lasted until my next trip, after which I yearned for his darshan again. In 2019 at Nemawar, I asked him for guidance in life, and he instantly said, "You must be doing daily *dev darshan*," to which I agreed because I was. Then he advised, "Try to engage in *pooja*." Later, I wondered how Acharya Shri knew that there was a temple near where we lived and that I would be visiting daily. Many consider him to possess divine powers, and I have experienced this myself.

I would like to share some guiding words he spoke to me because one never knows what might transform someone's life. In 2012, he said, "Study the theory of karma well; life is all about karma." In 2016, he told me, "Knowing yourself is not sufficient. If we repeatedly bring to mind whom we recognize, we can bring it into practice. Bring it into practice." In 2017, he advised, "Practice equanimity; equanimity is samadhi." In 2019, he gave me a *niyam* of 36 fasts as penance for sins in household life. In 2023, when I asked if I should continue teaching spiritual studies, he replied, "Yes, people will learn." That was my last darshan. My heart was overjoyed. Now that he is no longer with us, I feel an even deeper connection and have resolved to incorporate his guidance into my life. He was my guru and will always be. My endless salutations to Acharya Shri! I feel from within that he will become a Tirthankara in the future, and I hope to be part of his divine assembly (samavsharan).

### **Mrs. Sudha Shah, Kansas State, USA.**

Seven years ago, amidst heavy rain, I journeyed to Dungar Gadh for a special darshan of Shri Vidyasagarji Guruji. Despite the downpour, I was blessed to receive his darshan, where he accepted only water offerings. In 2021, determined to see him again, my flight faced a lengthy delay. During the journey, I immersed myself in his naam smaran. Arriving in Bhitoni near Shahpura, Jabalpur, I was granted the golden opportunity to present Shastra Daan to him.

In November 2023, despite our family doctor's advice against travel due to my husband's health, we ventured to India, guided by Guruji's remembrance. With his divine grace, we secured reserved spots and received a private darshan in his room, where Guruji blessed us both. The next day, we offered Jalpan (Amrit) instead of food. His mere presence dissolved

all our troubles and instilled tranquility. Indeed, he resembled a Tirthankar in every way!

### **Kamsala Baskaradoss, Charlotte, NC**

I had been longing to go for Acharya Shree's darshan since 2019. However, due to Covid, my plans were repeatedly postponed. Finally, in 2022, I managed to take a brief 10-day break from work and flew directly from the USA to Delhi with my daughter to seek Acharya Shree's darshan. At that time, Acharya Shree was in Raheli. I felt a mix of excitement and anxiety, wondering if I would indeed get the opportunity for darshan. Given Acharyashree's health condition, there were several restrictions in place for in-person darshan. Thankfully, with the help of some kind-hearted friends, Kapil baiya and Savan baiya, I was able to secure Acharya Shree's darshan during the morning guru bhakti session.

Sitting in the hallway with my daughter, I sensed a subtle vibration within me even before Acharyashree emerged from his room. As Acharya Shree approached the guru bhakti hall, my eyes welled up with tears, and I found myself trembling inexplicably. The overwhelming emotions washed over me, but at the same time felt an intense peace inside.

During the guru bhakti session, we had the opportunity to move closer to Acharya Shree and receive his blessings. In that moment, it felt as though I was receiving a divine blessing from Lord Mahavira himself.

Since that unforgettable day, not a single day has passed without me experiencing a deep sense of reverence and devotion towards my Guru. Whether Acharya Shree is physically present with us or not, his teachings continue to serve as my guiding light, shaping my life's path with profound wisdom and clarity.

### **Rajkumar Jain, Piscataway, NJ**

My wife, Neerja, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have received his blessings last year, experiencing the profound moment of darshan and touching his sacred feet. Being in his presence, breathing the same air, and following his footsteps during Vihar three times was an extraordinary and heavenly experience that defies description.

## My JOURNEY WITH BHAKTAMAR STOTRA

### SAVITA JAIN



Savita is JAINA's Director of Public Relations since 2019. She is an active member of Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington. She was a Emcee for JAINA Conventions in 2019, 2021 and 2023. Currently volunteering for teaching Jain Sutras since last 5 years. She is the Co-Chair of Akshay Patra foundation for DC MD VA chapter along with her husband Rahul Jain. She is an anchor dancer, choreographer, a motivational speaker, and a 7 time gold medalist in BSC and Visharad in Hindi. [Savita.jain@jaina.org](mailto:Savita.jain@jaina.org)

One of my fondest childhood memories is the time spent in the grand hall of Sthanak Mahavir Bhawan. On those auspicious mornings, we would enter the hall and reverently worship Guru Bhagwant, who was seated on the *Sthanak Paat*, reciting the *Tikhutta*. Following this, we would all chant the Bhaktamar Stotra together. As we reached the conclusion of the sutra, the first rays of the sun would pierce through the hall windows—Paheli Kiran, a symbolic moment marking the beginning of something divine. This scene has stayed with me, deeply etched in my heart! Now, whenever I recite the Bhaktamar Stotra, I am instantly transported back to that hall, feeling the same sacred vibrations resonate within me.



#### The Story Of Bhaktamar Stotra

Bhaktamar Stotra, composed in the *Vasanttilaka Chhand* by Acharya Shri Mantung ji, is a priceless gift given to Jainism. During the reign of Raja Bhoj, a time when *Tantra*, *Mantra*, and miracles captivated the

masses, Raja Bhoj himself harbored doubts about Jainism. His skepticism stemmed from Jainism's rejection of miracles, which made it less appealing to people accustomed to more sensational displays of divine power. During this period, Acharya Mantung ji, a wandering monk, caught the king's attention.

Summoned to court on Raja Bhoj's orders, Acharya Mantung ji was challenged to demonstrate the significance of Jainism. "Jainism may not subscribe to miracles, but it firmly believes in the divine assistance that protects its devotees," he asserted confidently. "Bind me in chains and see for yourself; my faith alone will liberate me."

With Acharya Shri's consent, Raja Bhoj had him shackled in heavy chains and confined within a chamber secured by 48 doors. This act set the stage for a profound demonstration of faith over spectacle. Shri Manatungji, the Jain saint and priest of Samata, became deeply immersed in the devotion of Lord Rishabhdev. As he composed each verse aloud, the shackles began to break by themselves. By the time he reached the final verse, all the chains had shattered, and the locks on the doors had burst open, setting the doors agape. At this climax of absolute faith, the sacred Bhaktamar Stotra was brought into existence! This moment marked not only a spiritual triumph but also the miraculous power of devout recitation.

Every letter of every saga of Bhaktamar Stotra is a mantra ! It needs to be read with faith and devotion. And if there is purity and clarity in pronunciation along with devotion, then we get even closer to achieving our goal.

#### The Science Behind Bhaktamar Stotra

This hymn, crafted in the ancient and sacred language of Sanskrit, serves as a profound source of mental and spiritual tranquility. The correct pronunciation of its

verses—engaging the tongue with the upper palate, finely controlling the breath to vary between gentle and deep intakes, allowing the lips to meet, and guiding the breath to flow from and to the navel—triggers therapeutic vibrations within the brain. These vibrations not only soothe the mind but also enhance spiritual connection and awareness.

The meticulous process of articulating each sound and syllable is akin to performing Pranayama, a yogic breathing practice known for its health benefits. This precise vocalization promotes the free flow of energy along the body's chakras and meridians, thereby aiding in the prevention and cure of various ailments. Regular and mindful recitation can help regulate blood pressure, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and fortify the body's defense against physical and mental health issues. Engaging in this practice can bring about a joyful calmness, keeping the mind serene and focused, and creating a buffer against the stresses and strains of life.

In essence, the disciplined and conscious chanting of this hymn is not just a spiritual exercise but also a holistic health practice, harmonizing the body, mind, and spirit. This underscores the timeless wisdom embedded in ancient scripts, revealing their relevance and potential in promoting overall well-being in contemporary times.

## Exploring the Profound Wisdom of Bhaktamar Stotra

Precise pronunciation ensures that the essence of the words is fully captured, maintaining the integrity of their meaning. Each verse of the Bhaktamar Stotra is a complete teaching in itself, yet there are specific verses that resonate deeply with me and greatly enrich my recitation experience.

Gatha #5 - Despite being a scholar of immense wisdom, Shri Manatugacharya described himself as ignorant and unintelligent when it came to extolling the virtues of the Lord. This humility highlights the simplicity, gentleness, and grace of Acharya Shri.

Gatha #22 - Here, Acharya Shri ji compares Adinathji's mother to the eastern direction, where although the stars shine in all directions, the radiant sun only rises in the east. This metaphor beautifully highlights her unique and pivotal role.

Gatha #28-35 - These verses offer a vivid portrayal of the eight Pratiharyas associated with a Tirthankara. The term 'Pratiharya' is used here to denote the awe-inspiring and divine aspects of their presence, emphasizing their dignity and sanctity.

Gatha #36 - Meditating on the meaning of this verse allows one to feel as if they are physically extending their hands towards the divine on the ground, a gesture of devotion and surrender.

These examples illustrate the rich and significant insights each verse holds. Every verse not only tells a story but also conveys deep spiritual truths and lessons.

## Embracing Opportunity: Teaching Bhaktamar Stotra Amidst COVID

My mother always emphasized the importance of thorough learning, which included the correct pronunciation of the Bhaktamar Stotra. Living in the U.S., during recitations at the Sthanak or Temple, I could sense the uncertainty in people's pronunciation. The COVID pandemic, while bringing challenges, also provided us with time that could be creatively utilized. Seizing this opportunity, I initiated online classes to teach the correct pronunciation of the Bhaktamar Stotra. Participants, both children and adults, joined from across the U.S. and even from other countries. This engagement has not only continued but grown, reflecting a sustained interest in learning, and preserving this sacred recitation. Inspired by my students, I was encouraged to record the Stotra, making it accessible to an even broader audience. This journey has been a fulfilling testament to how periods of difficulty can be transformed into opportunities for growth and community building.

## Flexible Learning with Bhaktamar Stotra

Inspired by numerous revered Guru Maharaj Sahibs, I have recorded the Bhaktamar Stotra and uploaded it to YouTube. <https://bit.ly/3JoCYii>

This effort is a humble attempt to share this sacred hymn more widely, allowing individuals to learn and recite at their own pace. It is my hope that this resource will enrich and benefit listeners by making it accessible anytime and anywhere.



## LEARNINGS ABOUT KARMA FROM THE STORY OF MAYNASUNDARI

### RAJKUMAR JAIN. INDORE, INDIA



*Rajkumar Jain is an independent thinker and a well-known writer based in Indore, India. After earning his graduate degree in Engineering and a post-graduate degree in Computer Applications, he has been in the business of IT System Integration for the past 34 years. His main interest is in meeting new people and learning from their life stories..*

The captivating tale of Maynasundari from the renowned Jain literary work "Shripal Charitra" serves as a quintessential Jain rendition emphasizing the significance of one's Karma in life. The tale chronicles the odyssey of Shripal, the youthful heir to the throne of Champanagar, whose father, passed away untimely. Seeking to usurp the kingdom, Singrath's brother, Ajitsen, plotted to eliminate Shripal. In a bid to protect her son, Shripal's mother fled with him and sought refuge among a colony of lepers.

The people of the leper colony became very fond of Shripāl and took great care of him. Ultimately, Shripāl contracted leprosy. When he became a youth the people made him their leader and named him Umar Rana. Under his leadership, the group traveled from place to place and one day arrived at the city of Ujjayini where King Prajapal ruled.

King Prajapal had two daughters – Sursundari and Maynasundari. The king loved both of them and made adequate arrangements for their training. Sursundari was trained in the arts and crafts whereas Maynasundari learned about Jain Philosophy.

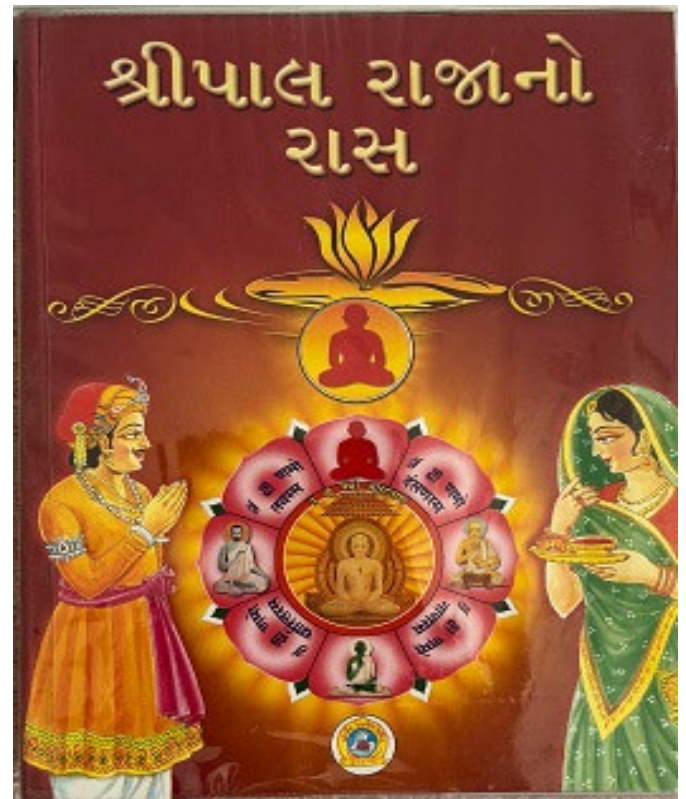
One day, the king decided to test their knowledge and called them in the assembly hall. He asked a number of questions to Sursundari who gave satisfactory replies to all of them. In the end, the king asked her by whose favor she got all her skills and also the amenities and luxuries that she enjoyed. The girl humbly replied that she gained all that by the king's favor. Pleased with her replies, the king decided to reward her appropriately.

Then, he asked several questions to Maynasundari. She too gave satisfactory replies to all his questions. In the end, the king asked her the same question that he had asked Sursundari. He had expected Maynā to give an identical reply and thus please him. However, Mayna had total faith in the religious philosophy she had studied at length. She firmly believed that everything that she had received had been the result of her karma. She must have earned good karma in the past that resulted in the happy situations that she was undergoing. If she did not

have that karma to her credit, no one could bestow happiness on her. She therefore replied:

"O father! The great king! With due respect to you, all the comfort that you provide me are only because of my Punya karma. Everyone gets whatever is written in his/her destiny due to his/her own karma. Anyone else cannot give or take away anything."

The king was exasperated to hear the unexpected reply. He could not believe that the girl could have received anything without his favor and did not agree that everything happens according to one's own karma. He therefore wanted to teach her a lesson. He decided to marry Mayna off to Umar Rana as a punishment, forcing her to face the consequences of her karma.



Mahopadhyay Shri Vinayvijayji Maharaj in his book "Shripal Rajano Raas" says that when Mayna heard about this from her father, there was no change in

her facial expressions. She neither felt any sadness in her heart nor did she blame her father. She was steadfast in her belief in Bhagwan's teachings and was willing to face the consequences of her insistence on speaking the truth.

Mayna accepted Shripāl in the guise of Umar Rana as her husband and took care of him. She went to temples and heard the sermons of monks along with him. One day, Mayna and her husband went to see Ācharya Munichandra and talked to him about their problems and his leprosy disease. Acharyashri advised them to go through the penance of Ayambil Oli, known as Navapad (nine pious entities) penance, which can cure all types of diseases. Mayna and Shripāl devoutly observed the Navapad worship and penance with all its vitality. The result was miraculous. Shripāl's skin disease started fading, and in due course, he was totally cured of leprosy and regained the skin that he had prior to contracting the disease.

### What do we learn from this story?

This story describes Maynasundari's faith in the philosophy of karma and her devotion to Navapad. It stresses the importance of her effort and determination to change her fate. Mayna and Shripāl accepted that their accrued karma of past life had put them into their current condition. But they did not blame anyone or get discouraged. They knew that they could change their future if they only put effort into acquiring good karmas and destroying bad karmas. They exerted their own self-efforts into the penance and worship of Navpad to improve Shripāl's condition and were ultimately successful. Full faith in the theory of karma is essential to be content, happy and practice equanimity.

The history of Jainism is full of such characters whose lives corroborated this philosophy. For example, Chandanbala was born as a princess and then sold as a slave. She overcame these dire circumstances with full faith and devotion, became the first Jain Sadhvi, and attained Moksha. Even Bhagwan Mahavir faced the consequences of his past karma; but continued his quest for achieving Moksha and succeeded.

Colin Powell once said "Success is the result of perfection, hard work, and learning from failure". It is not an overnight achievement but is a result of persistent efforts and dedication to achieving something. Steve Jobs, who created Apple, left college and joined Atari, where he saved money to start his journey. Despite facing challenges and

setbacks, Jobs remained a driving force behind the company's success, shaping it into one of the most influential and valuable tech companies in the world. We are connected to the Universe both internally and externally, with the concept of karma based on the belief that every action you do will inevitably return to you, like a boomerang. The nature of karma, whether it be a solitary occurrence or a collection of intertwined events, remains a mystery. Karma goes beyond just actions to include thoughts and words as well. Every day, we witness numerous instances of both good and bad karma. Whether accumulated through cycles of reincarnation or created in present life all the positive "Punya" and negative "Paap" karma and their consequences manifest in one's *Janma* and *PunarJanma*. If there is something wrong in one's life, there is something wrong within them.

At times, individuals must face the consequences of their actions, which can be quite severe. Because the circle of Karma completes itself encompassing origins along with its roots. Reinhold Niebuhr, in his Prayer, wisely expressed, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." With this wisdom, one must accept the adversities or the most difficult times in life as a result of past life's negative karmas.

In our daily lives, we often hear the saying "As you sow, so shall you reap," where the act of sowing is invisible, and we only experience the outcomes we reap. Consequently, we find ourselves questioning why we are in certain situations and what wrong we have done while cursing and questioning God. It is crucial to be cautious of our malicious and wicked actions, as they can ultimately lead to our downfall, often in ways we never anticipated.

Let us embark on this journey of life by reviewing our actions regularly and striving to walk on the right path, thereby earning good karma for ourselves and inviting brighter outcomes. Sooner or later, these outcomes will manifest. The more sincerely and honestly we perform our duties, the better the results will be.



## SAMAYIK - GATEWAY TO LIBERATION

### ANOP VORA



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Our seers composed the Samayik ritual with the aim of developing equanimity towards the ongoing vicissitudes of life. Most of us go through life reacting unconsciously to things, people, and situations. This ritual is structured to put a stop on the resulting incessant dysfunctional sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions and bring us back close to the Essence, Source, divinity or Atma for at least 48 minutes.

Samayik is not an ordinary ritual. Its long term impact from its continual practice is just immense. That is the reason our scriptures have regarded it as the First Essential task (*Avashyak*) that we need to do every day. The emanating calmness from it must continue throughout the day as we interact with the world.

#### Benefits of Samayik

The pious ritual of Samayik has several benefits:

1. Samayik cultivates equanimity and tranquility under all circumstances - good or bad.
2. It is a great tool to develop full awareness.
3. It leads to right mindset and behavior.
4. It helps us develop the feelings of friendship, compassion, and brotherhood towards all souls.
5. It gives us a wonderful way to win over the feelings of attachment and aversion and stop the resulting constant stream of unproductive thoughts.
6. It is a process that is designed to take us closer to our real nature and its inherent virtues of Samyag Gyan, Darshan and Charitra.
7. It is a great way to practice of non-injury and non-violence.
8. It's regular practice advances us in our spiritual path and takes us closed to liberation.

#### Prerequisites

Most Jains usually become aware of the Samayik ritual at an early age but practice it mechanically without understanding its deeper meaning; therefore its benefits do not show up in their lives. To optimize the outcome, our scriptures have recommended some prerequisites to prepare ourselves prior to doing it.

1. Due to the deep conditioning, most of us run around chasing the material things, power, status, and recognition, non-stop-leading to a mental turmoil. In this state of mind, the effect of Samayik is just transient. There is no lasting change. To get away from this rat race and calm down the mind, the first requisite is to imbibe the concepts of impermanence and detachment to the worldly life preferably under the guidance of a *Sadguru* and develop a spiritual attitude. This will help us put a break on our daily activities and prepare us well.
2. Second requisite requires us to cut down the sinful activities as well as the related toxic emotions to develop a right frame of mind. This means living an ethical and a simple life to prepare us well for a long term impact of the ritual on our psyche.
3. Physical environment: Seating down in a separate room in a quiet, disturbance-free surrounding in front of the statue of a Tirthankar (or in the presence of a monk or imagined monk in the form of *Sthapanaji*) is strongly recommended.
4. Time duration: Our seers are recommending that Samayik be done for 48 minutes to quiet down the mind and deepen the connection with the divinity.

The above prerequisites indicate that our life style must reflect the spirit of Samayik throughout the day. If we engage into immoral and violent activities, have no control over attachment and aversion, no control over emotions of anger, arrogance, deception, and greed all day and then



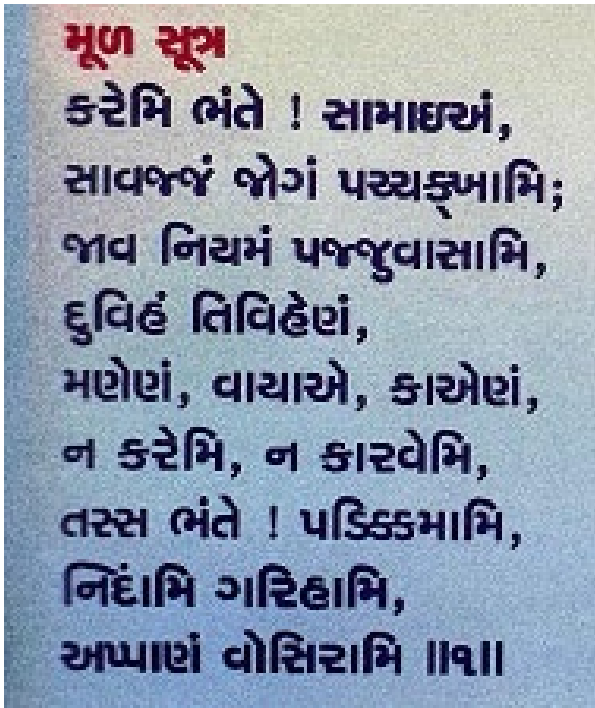
we sit down to perform Samayik, the benefits are minimal. There is no room for hypocrisy in the Jain religion.

What I have stated above in the first two prerequisites is the ideal way of doing Samayik to maximize the benefit. If we study the way we live our lives, we may find that we are no way close to that ideal state. This does not mean that we should abandon the ritual altogether. There is nothing wrong in taking the first step with whatever our spiritual level is. If we understand the process clearly and our goal is clear, then mini steps are just as important. As we keep marching on, eventually we will grow and reach our destination someday.

## Process

The right procedure requires for the aspirant to wear clean clothing and sit down on a piece of woolen cloth and recite several sutras expressing non-violent disposition to all living beings, remembering all 24 Tirthankaras, and their virtues and taking a pledge to perform the ritual.

The pledge requires us to recite a sutra called *Karemi Bhante*.



Volumes have been composed to explain the deeper meaning of each and every word of it. Its title conveys deep humility and respect towards the monk. When we recite this sutra, we are taking a pledge not to engage in *Savadya Yoga* - meaning making a commitment for not engaging in the sinful activities of body, speech and mind or getting them done by others - for at least 48 minutes. This time duration is for worldly folks like us; but for monks, it is a Life Time obligation.

This pledge is very powerful and is the core of Jain Philosophy. If we have prepared ourselves properly, this pledge helps us make a U turn from the daily life easily at least for a short time. It signifies the beginning of an end of the cycles of birth and death. It is an important step that moves us closer to the path of liberation.

The process ends after 48 minutes expressing apology for the mistakes that occurred while performing the ritual and deciding not to repeat them again.

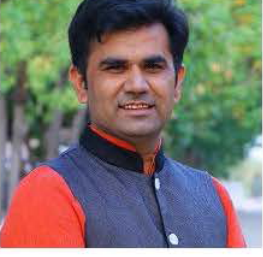
Samayik is similar to meditation except the recitation of the sutras before and after. The end goal of both -Samayik and Meditation is getting close to Atma. Both are complimentary to each other. However, Samayik offers a simple but well-crafted formal process that includes showing respect to a Guru, salutation to all Tirthankars, a pledge to stay away from meaningless thoughts, words and acts. In meditation these steps are not clearly outlined but implied. In either case, both aim at taking the aspirant towards to equanimity and tranquility-critical steps prior to achieving a higher spiritual stage.

## Conclusion

Samayik is indeed a wonderful ritual designed by our sages for the benefit of mankind. If properly done, the ramifications are humongous. Even Lord Mahavir, whose goal was to achieve the ultimate liberation, started with Samayik at the time of initiation. Most of the monks and nuns also start their spiritual journey with the same step and practice it throughout their lives. We are indeed truly blessed to have a powerful and yet a simple tool available to take us towards a peaceful and calm life. I hope this article will inspire the readers to start practicing it more often.

## સાધકનું સંકલ્પસૂત્ર : જયવીયરાય સૂત્ર

By Ramjan Hasaniya



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જૈન ધર્મ કર્મસત્તાને પ્રાધાન્ય આપતો ધર્મ છે. અહીં ઈશ્વર કર્તા નથી. એક જૈન સાધક જેને ભજે છે તે તો વીતરાગ પરમાત્મા છે, જેઓ રાગ-દ્વેષથી પર હોઈ કોઈના પર પ્રસન્ન થઈ કશું આપી દેતા નથી કે અપ્રસન્ન થઈ કશું છીનવી લેતા નથી. તેમ છતાં જૈન ધર્મમાં પુષ્કળ પ્રાર્થના સાહિત્ય સર્જાયું છે. સૂત્ર, સ્તોત્ર, સ્તવન, સજ્જાયા આદિના રૂપમાં પ્રાર્થનાકાવ્યો રચી અનેક ભક્તકવિઓએ પોતાના ઈષ્ટદેવ પ્રત્યેનો અહોભાવ વ્યક્ત કર્યો છે. આ પ્રાર્થનાકાવ્યો અન્ય ધર્મના પ્રાર્થનાકાવ્યો કરતાં વિશિષ્ટ બની રહે છે, કેમકે અહીં કૃપા દ્વારા કલ્યાણની યાચના નથી, પણ કલ્યાણમાર્ગ મેળવ્યાનો રાજીપો, તે માર્ગ દેખાડનાર પ્રત્યેનો અહોભાવ અને તે માર્ગ પર ચાલી આત્મકલ્યાણ કરી શકવાની શક્તિ માગવામાં આવી છે. આ પ્રકારના પ્રાર્થનાસાહિત્યમાં સૂત્ર-સ્તોત્ર આદિ પ્રાચીન સ્વરૂપો છે. જય-વીયરાય સૂત્ર આવું જ એક પ્રાચીન અને ઉત્તમ પ્રાર્થનાસૂત્ર છે. પાંચ ગાથાઓમાં રચાયેલા આ સૂત્રની પહેલી બે ગાથા ગણધર ભગવંતોએ રચી હોવાનું મનાય છે. બાકીની ત્રણ ગાથાઓ પૂર્વાચાર્યોકૃત છે, જે પાછળથી સૂત્રની સાથે જોડી દેવાઈ છે. આચાર્ય હરિભદ્રસૂરિએ 'લલિત વિસ્તરા' નામક ગ્રંથમાં આ સૂત્રની પ્રથમ બે ગાથાઓનું વિવરણ કરેલું છે.

જય વીયરાય ! જગગુરુ ! હોઉ મમં તુહ પભાવઓ ભયવં !  
ભવનિવ્વેઓ મગ્ગાણુસારિઆ ઈદ્ધફલસિદ્ધિ.

લોગવિરુધ્ધચ્ચાઓ ગુરુજણપૂઆ પરત્થકરણં ય;  
સુહગુરુજોગો તવ્વયણસેવણા આભવમખંડા.

વારિજ્જઈ જઈ વિ નિયાણબંધણં વીયરાય ! તુહ સમચ્ચે;  
તહ વિ મમ હુજ્જ સેવા, ભવે ભવે તુમ્હ ચલણાણં.

દુક્ખખઓ કમ્મખઓ, સમાહિમરણં ય બોહિલાભો ચ;  
સંપજ્જઉ મહ એઅં, તુહ નાહ ! પણામ કરણેણં.

સર્વ મંગલ માંગલ્યં, સર્વ કલ્યાણ કારણમ્ ;  
પ્રધાનં સર્વ ધર્માણાં, જૈનં જયતિ શાસનમ્.

જયવીયરાય સૂત્રને 'પણિહાણસુત્ત'-પ્રણિધાનસૂત્ર કહેવામાં આવે છે. પ્રણિધાન એટલે સંકલ્પ. એક સાચો જૈન સાધક જે આત્મ- કલ્યાણ અર્થે પ્રયત્નશીલ છે તેના સંકલ્પો કેવા હોય તેનો પરિચય આ સૂત્ર કરાવે છે. આ સૂત્ર 'પ્રાર્થનાસૂત્ર' તરીકે પણ ઓળખાય છે. પરંતુ તેના પ્રથમ શબ્દો પરથી તેનું 'જયવીયરાય સૂત્ર' એવું નામ વિશેષ પ્રચલિત છે. પહેલી બે



પ્રાર્થનાની વ્યાખ્યા કરતાં શાસ્ત્રકારોએ કહ્યું છે કે - 'પ્રકૃષ્ટ યાયનાઃ ઇતિ પ્રાર્થના ।' ઉત્તમ પ્રકારની યાયના તે ખરી પ્રાર્થના છે. વ્યવહારમાં સમાનાર્થી તરીકે વપરાતા શબ્દો 'પ્રાર્થના' અને 'માગણી'ની અર્થછાયાઓ ભિન્ન છે. માગણી બાંધે છે. જ્યારે પ્રાર્થના મુક્ત કરાવે છે. બાળપણમાં હોંશે હોંશે ગાયેલી પ્રાર્થના-'ઓ ઈશ્વર ભજીએ તને, મોટું છે તુજ નામ, ગુણ તારા નિત ગાઇએ, થાય અમારા કામ.'સમજણ આવ્યા પછી ખટકતી. આપણાં કામ થાય એ માટે ઈશ્વરને ભજવાનું ગળે ઉતરતું નહિ. કોઈને યાહો ને તેની પાછળ સ્વાર્થ કે ગણતરી હોય તેના જેવું વિચિત્ર લાગતું. આ અજંપામાંથી જ સાચી અને ઉત્તમ પ્રાર્થનાઓની શોધખોળ આરંભાઈ અને મને લાઘ્યું એક ઉત્તમોત્તમ પ્રાર્થનાસૂત્ર-તે જયવીયરાય સૂત્ર.

આ સૂત્રમાં પણ છે તો માગણીઓ જ, પણ માગણી શબ્દની ગરિમા વધારી દે તેવી ઉત્કૃષ્ટ માગણીઓ છે. કોની પાસે શું માગવું તેનો વિવેક બહુ ઓછા લોકો કરી જાણે છે. તો વળી, માગણી કરતી વ્યક્તિની માગણીઓ પરથી તેની કક્ષાનો ખ્યાલ પણ આવી જાય છે. કેટલાક મહાન લોકો આ પસંદગીની કલામાં જીતી ગયા છે. નરસિંહ મહેતા પર પ્રસન્ન થયેલા શિવે જ્યારે વરદાન માગવાનું કહ્યું છે ત્યારે દુન્યવી સુખ કે ઐશ્વર્ય ન માગતાં નરસિંહ માગી લે છે ખુદ ઈશ્વરની જાતને. "તમને જે વલ્લભ, હોય જે દુર્લભ, આપો તે મુજને દયા આણી રે" એમ કહી શ્રીકૃષ્ણને હસ્તગત કરી લે છે ને આપણે ઓવારી જઈએ છીએ તેની પસંદગીની કલા પર. આવી જ કેટલીક ઉત્તમોત્તમ બાબતો પર પસંદગી ઉતારી છે આપણા ગણધર ભગવંતોએ અને મહાન પૂર્વસૂરિઓએ.

વર્તમાન સમયમાં જ્યારે કહેવાતા જૈન પણ એવા ગીતો ગાવા લાગ્યા છે કે, 'જબ કોઈ નહીં આતા, મેરે દાદા આતે હૈ, મેરે દુઃખ કે દિનો મેં વો બડે કામ આતે હૈ'—ત્યારે નમ્રભાવે એ કહેવું જોઈએ કે આ જૈન પ્રાર્થના, સ્તવન કે સ્તુતિ ન હોઈ શકે. આપણે જ્યારે મૂળભૂત જૈન સિદ્ધાંતોને વિસરતા જઈએ છીએ ત્યારે જયવીયરાય સૂત્ર આપણને જૈન પ્રાર્થનાનું સાચું સ્વરૂપ સમજાવી જાય છે. સાચો જૈન શ્રાવક કે સાધુ ભૌતિક સુખ-ઐશ્વર્યની યાયના કરે જ નહિ. શું હોય એક સાચા જિનમાર્ગે ચાલતા સાધકની યાયના તે સમજવા આપણે જયવીયરાય સૂત્ર પાસે જવું પડે. જયવીયરાય સૂત્રની સૈદ્ધાંતિક ચર્ચા કરવાની મારી ક્ષમતા નથી. બસ, એક ભાવક તરીકે તેમાંથી પસાર થતાં જે હૃદયને સ્પર્શી ગયું છે, જે રસસ્થાનો સાંપડ્યા છે, તેની વાત કરવા યત્ન કરીશ.

સૂત્રનો આરંભ જ કેટલો મજાનો છે—"જયવીયરાય જગગુરુ." જય શબ્દ વિજયનો સૂચક છે ને વળી ઉત્સાહ અને આનંદથી ભરી દેનારું છે. 'જય' બોલતાં જ એક પ્રકારની ઊર્જા-ઉલ્લાસ-ઉત્સાહ મનમાં ઊભરાય છે. સામાન્ય રીતે જય શબ્દ છેલ્લે આવે અહીં તો આરંભ જ 'જય'થી થાય છે. કોનો જય? તો કહે વીયરાયનો- વિતરાગનો. જેઓ રાગ-દ્વેષથી પર થઈ ગયા છે એવા વીતરાગ પરમાત્માનો જયઘોષ અહીં પ્રથમ કરાયો છે. સામાન્ય રીતે જેમાં આપણને શ્રદ્ધા- વિશ્વાસ હોય તેનો જયકાર આપણે બોલાવીએ છીએ. સાધક અહીં પ્રથમ જ પોતાની વિતરાગ અને વિતરાગતા પ્રત્યેની શ્રદ્ધાને છતી કરે છે. એ સમજે છે કે વીતરાગતા છે ત્યાં જ જય છે ને સરાગતા છે ત્યાં પરાજય. પરમ સુખ-મોક્ષ માટે વીતરાગતા સિવાય બીજો કોઈ ઉપાય નથી. એટલે જયવીયરાય એમ બોલીને સાધક વિતરાગ અને વીતરાગતાને વંદન કરે છે. વળી વીતરાગ જય પામો અર્થાત્ અરિહંત પ્રભુનું શાસનનો આ જગતમાં વિસ્તાર થાયો. વધુમાં વધુ જીવો ભગવાનના આ શાસનને-જિનમાર્ગને સ્વીકારી અનંત સુખના સ્વામી બને તેવી ભાવના પણ વ્યક્ત કરાઈ છે.



વળી, જેઓ કેવળજ્ઞાની બન્યા છે એવા અરિહંત પરમાત્મા-જેમણે જગતનું યથાતથ દર્શન કર્યું છે-તેઓ જ જગતના જીવોને સાચું માર્ગદર્શન આપી શકે, સાચા ગુરુ હોઈ શકે-માટે જ સંબોધન કર્યું 'જગગુરુ'. આ જગગુરુ શબ્દ પણ એટલો જ મજાનો અને સમજવા જેવો શબ્દ છે. માત્ર કોઈ એક ધર્મ કે સંપ્રદાયના નહિ પરંતુ આખા જગતના-સમગ્ર જીવસૃષ્ટિના જેઓ ગુરુ છે. અરિહંત પરમાત્માએ જગતના સર્વ જીવો માટે અપાર કરુણા દર્શાવી છે. મુનિશ્રી અમરેન્દ્રવિજયજીએ કહ્યું છે કે 'સાધુ એટલે પ્રેમનો સંકોચ નહિ પણ વિસ્તાર. અરિહંત પરમાત્માનો પ્રેમપ્રદેશ એટલો વિસ્તર્યો છે કે જગતનો સૂક્ષ્માતિસૂક્ષ્મ જીવ પણ તેમાંથી બાકાત રહેવા નથી પામ્યો. એટલું જ નહિ ગુરુનું કામ છે સાચો માર્ગ દેખાડવાનું. અરિહંત પરમાત્માએ મુક્તિનો માર્ગ જીવમાત્રને કોઈપણ જાતના ભેદભાવ વિના સમજાવ્યો છે- માટે તેઓ જગતગુરુ છે.

આવા અરિહંત પરમાત્મા પ્રત્યે સાધકને જે અહોભાવ જાગ્યો છે તે અહોભાવથી પ્રેરાઈને કહે છે કે, 'હોઝ મમં તુહ પમાવઓ ભયવં' - ભગવાન, આપના પ્રભાવથી, આપે સ્થાપેલા ધર્મશાસનના પ્રભાવથી, આપે આપની વાણીમાં-પ્રવચનમાં જે સત્યો-સિદ્ધાંતો પ્રતિપાદિત કર્યા છે તેના બળથી મારી હવે પછી જણાવેલી પ્રાર્થનાઓ સફળ થજો. અહીં ભક્તની કૃતજ્ઞતા વ્યક્ત થઈ છે. ઉપાસ્ય પ્રત્યેનું બહુમાન કામ કરી જાય છે. ગુરુ દ્રોણાચાર્ય પ્રત્યેના બહુમાનથી જેમ એકલવ્યને વિદ્યાપ્રાપ્તિ થઈ તેમ પ્રભુ પ્રત્યેના બહુમાનથી સાધકની ઈચ્છિત પ્રાર્થના ફળે છે. વળી, આપના પ્રભાવથી એમ કહેવાથી માન આદિ કષાય દૂર થાય છે ને નમ્રતા જેવા ગુણોનો વિકાસ થાય છે. કઈ ભાવનાઓ-ઈચ્છાઓ શ્રી વીતરાગ દેવ પાસે રજૂ કરવામાં આવી છે. આવો જોઈએ:

પહેલી જ માગણી છે 'ભવ્વનિવ્દેઓ' - ભવનિર્વેદની. યાચના કરનાર સાધકની ઉચ્ચ કક્ષાનો પરિચય અહીં પ્રથમ માગણી દ્વારા જ થઈ જાય છે. સામાન્ય રીતે ઈશ પાસે સંસારસુખની પ્રાર્થના થાય ત્યારે અહીં સાધકે સંસાર પ્રત્યેની ઉદાસીનતા-અનાસક્તિ માગી છે. વિરક્તિ માગી છે. જ્યાં સુધી સંસાર મીઠો લાગે ત્યાં સુધી ભગવાન કે તેમની વાણી ક્યાંથી મીઠી લાગે ? આનંદધનજી મહારાજનો સંસાર પ્રત્યેનો રસ ઊડી ગયો છે એટલે જ તેઓ ગાઈ શક્યા છે:

‘મીઠો લાગે કંતડો, ખારો લાગે લોક, કંત વિહોણી ગોઠડી, તે રણમાંહે પોક’

સંસારનો આ ખીલો છૂટવો જોઈએ. આ રસ છૂટવો અઘરો છે. આ માટે નિર્વેદ જરૂરી છે. વ્યક્તિનું મન સંસારમાંથી ઊઠીને ભગવાનમાં લાગે ત્યારે કામ થાય. ભવનિર્વેદનો ગુણ સાધકમાં પ્રગટતાં તે આ જ સંસારમાં રહેતો હોવા છતાં સંસાર પ્રત્યેનું તેનું આકર્ષણ-વળગણ ઘટી જશે. કમશઃ ઘટતું જશે ને પછી દૂર થઈ જશે. સંસારની અનિત્યતા તેને સમજાતાં તેમાં જ રહેવા છતાં તેનાથી તે અલિપ્ત રહેશે-જળકમલવત્. નિર્વેદ માટે સરસ શબ્દ પ્રયોજાયો છે ઉદાસીનતા. અહીં ઉદાસીનતા એટલે ગમગીન રહેવું, મોં ચડાવીને ફરવું, દુઃખી દુઃખી રહેવું એવું નહિ, પરંતુ સંસારના સુખ કે દુઃખ પ્રત્યે એક પ્રકારનું તાટસ્થ્ય આવી જવું. સુખ-દુઃખ કશું તેને સ્પર્શે નહિ. એવી આધ્યાત્મિક ઉદાસીનતા કેળવાય કે ન તો સુખ એને ભ્રમિત કરે કે ન તો દુઃખ એને વ્યથિત કરે. આ પ્રકારની અધ્યાત્મિક ઉદાસીનતાની વાત પ્રેમાનંદકૃત 'સુદામાચરિત્ર'માં બહુ જ ઉત્તમ રીતે ગુંથાઈ છે. દુઃખોમાં સ્થિર રહેનાર સુદામાને જ્યારે દેવી વૈભવ પ્રાપ્ત થાય છે ત્યારે પણ તે તેના પ્રત્યે ઉદાસ જ રહે છે. વૈભવ તેને ચલિત કરી શકતો નથી. સંસારના સુખો તેને બહેકાવી શકતા નથી. પ્રેમાનંદ પંક્તિ ટાંકે છે:

સંસાર પ્રત્યેની આ ઉદાસીનતા મોક્ષમાર્ગ પર ચાલવા માટેની પ્રથમ આવશ્યકતા છે. સમ્યક્દર્શનના પ્રધાન લક્ષણોમાં પણ આ ગુણની ખાસ ગણના થઈ છે. પ્રભુ કૃપાથી આવી ઉદાસીનતા પ્રગટે એવી માગણી સૌપ્રથમ સાધક કરે છે.

બીજી ચાચના છે કે પ્રભુ આપના પ્રભાવથી હું માર્ગાનુસારી બનું, માર્ગાનુસારિતાના ગુણો મારામાં પ્રગટે. કર્મ અને કષાય રહિત આત્માની શુદ્ધ અવસ્થા તે મોક્ષ છે અને તેને પ્રાપ્ત કરવાનો તપ-સંયમ આદિરૂપ ઉપાય તે મોક્ષમાર્ગ છે. આ મોક્ષમાર્ગને અનુસરવું તે માર્ગાનુસારિતા. સાધકના જીવનની દિશા બદલી એટલે એ પ્રમાણે જ આગળની માગણી હોય તે સ્વાભાવિક છે. મને મોક્ષ મળી જાઓ એવી પ્રાર્થના કરવાને બદલે સાધક પ્રાર્થે છે મોક્ષમાર્ગે ચાલવાની ક્ષમતા-શક્તિ. મોક્ષમાર્ગ પર ચાલવા માટે જે-જે કંઈ કરવાનું આવે તે હું કરું. આ માર્ગે ચાલી ગયેલા કે ચાલતા સાધકો જેમ કરે છે કે કહે છે તેમ હું કરું. ઉપા. ભુવનચંદ્રજી મ.સા. 'ચિન્મય'ની કાવ્યપંક્તિઓ પણ કંઈક આવું જ સૂચવી જાય છે: “પગલા ધૂળમાં પૂર્વપથિકના શોધી શોધી જાવું પગલે પગલે પંથ ખૂલે છે નહિ અધીરા થાવું.”

સાધકની યાત્રા આરંભાઈ એની આ પ્રતીતિ છે. સાધક મૂળમાર્ગ તરફ વળ્યો. મૂળમાર્ગ હજુ આગળ છે પણ માર્ગાનુસારી બનશે તો તેમાં નૈતિકતા આવશે. પાપ-પુણ્ય, નીતિ-અનીતિ વગેરેની વાત તે સમજશે. અહીં ભક્તે સાચા રસ્તાને ઓળખી તેના પર ચાલવાની શક્તિ પ્રભુ પાસે માગી છે. શાસ્ત્રોમાં માર્ગાનુસારીના પાંત્રીસ ગુણો દર્શાવવામાં આવ્યા છે. માર્ગાનુસારી વ્યક્તિ પાપભીરુ, પરોપકારી, દયાવાન, સૌમ્ય, કૃતજ્ઞી, દીર્ઘદર્શી આદિ ગુણોથી સંપન્ન હોય છે. સંસારથી વિરક્ત થઈ મુક્ત થવાની યાત્રા આરંભી ત્યારે એ માર્ગ પર ચાલવા માટે જરૂરી શક્તિની ચાચના સાધકે અહીં કરી છે.

સાધકની ત્રીજી પ્રાર્થના છે ઈષ્ટફળ સિદ્ધિની. આગળની બે પ્રાર્થનાઓને ધ્યાનમાં લઈને એ જ ક્રમમાં ઈષ્ટફળ સિદ્ધિની વાત વિચારીએ તો સ્પષ્ટ સમજાય છે કે જેણે ભવનિર્વેદ માગ્યો, મોક્ષમાર્ગ પર ચાલવાની શક્તિ માગી, તેના માટે ઈષ્ટફળ મોક્ષ સિવાય અન્ય કશું સંભવી ન શકે. મોક્ષમાર્ગ પર ચાલવાની શક્તિ માગ્યા બાદ સાધક જાતે જ આત્મબળે આગળ વધી મોક્ષ સુધી પહોંચવાનો છે, તેમ છતાં તે એમ કહે છે કે મને આપના પ્રભાવથી ઈષ્ટફળ (મોક્ષ)ની પ્રાપ્તિ થાઓ. અહીં એક વાત ધ્યાનમાં રાખવાની છે કે પ્રાર્થના તો ઉત્તમ જ છે, પરંતુ તેને બોલનારના ભાવ અને કક્ષામાં તરતમતા રહેવાની. ઘણીવાર દુન્યવી દુઃખોના લીધે સાધક ધર્મમાર્ગ પર ચાલવામાં અસમર્થ થઈ જાય ત્યારે ધર્મકાર્ય થઈ શકે તેવા આશયથી એવા દુઃખ દૂર કરવાની ચાચના જો તે કરે છે તો તેની કક્ષા મુજબ તે યોગ્ય જ છે. આમ તો, કુદરતના માર્ગે ચાલનારને કુદરત પોતે સંભાળે છે. સાધક જાણે કુદરતના ખોળામાં જ આવી જાય છે. તેમ છતાં, સાધકને જ્યારે સાધનામાં રત રહી જેમ બને તેમ ઝડપથી મોક્ષ પ્રાપ્ત કરવો છે ત્યારે તેમાં બાધારૂપ બનતી બાબતો દૂર થાય, સાધના માટે અનુકૂળતા થાય ને અંતે મોક્ષસુખરૂપ ઈષ્ટફળની પ્રાપ્તિ થાય તેવી પ્રાર્થના ઉચિત જ છે.

**(To be continued in the next issue of Jain Digest)**



## 2024 JAIN LEADERSHIP FORUM - MAYUR SHAH, DR. MANOJ JAIN (LRP CHAIR), CHINTON SHAH & SOHA SHAH

### “Jainism from Success to Significance”

The Long Range Planning (LRP) Committee, a committee of JAINA, the Federation of Jain Associations in North America, hosted the **Jain Leadership Forum from April 5th-7th in Chicago, IL** to bring together, in one place, new and experienced leaders to strategize on the future of the Jain community in North America. Under the leadership of Dr. Dipak Jain, former Dean of Kellogg School of Business, and Dr. Manoj Jain, 125 Jain leaders from across North America gathered to collaborate on leadership development, community engagement, and the formulation of strategic initiatives for the purpose of steering the Jain community towards a unified vision of Jainism in North America.



Attendees included leaders from various facets of the Jain community, including [JAINA](#), [Young Jains of America](#), [Young Jain Professionals](#), [JITO](#) and numerous Jain Centers from across North America.

As with many minority communities, North American Jains face a myriad of organizational, generational, leadership, religious, and community challenges. Recognizing these challenges, the Jain Leadership Forum invited speakers who could ignite excitement and reach into each attendee's passion to create engagement and synergy that will reverberate throughout the coming days, weeks, months, and years for the 200,000 Jains In North America.

Friday evening, the forum kicked off with a keynote address from former Dean of the Kellogg School of Business at Northwestern University, Dr. Dipak Jain. Dean Jain is the first Jain dean at a North American academic institution of higher learning and he shared how the core Jain principles of *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Anekantvad* (multiplicity of viewpoints), and *Aparigraha* (simplicity/non-possessiveness) enabled him to have a successful career and overcome numerous life challenges.



Dean Jain's passion is summarized in his own words during his keynote address, *"Excellence has no bounds, you can reach any height but there is always more to do. No challenge ahead of you is greater than the force behind you."*

Throughout the weekend, the participating Jain leaders heard from many different speakers, including educators, business executives, medical professionals, academics, students, and community leaders, both volunteer and elected, and many more. Current US Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL) and former US State Representative (AZ) Dr. Amish Shah, both echoed the need for Jains to have voices heard in local, state, and national politics.

Saturday's sessions provided an opportunity for the attendees to be active participants and take the first steps towards identifying challenges that the Jain community faces, and brainstorm multiple ways to address these challenges in order to help foster growth and strength while working with the local community. Round table discussions allowed attendees from around the US to share best practices and actively learn from one another on topics such as increasing Jain Center engagement and increasing awareness of Jainism in the broader North American population.

Sunday, as the Jain Leadership Forum's last day began, the energy and excitement around the question of 'when can I start implementing what I have learned?' was palpable. Before participants enjoyed the last vegan meal of the weekend, there were over 20 Jain projects in varying stages presented to the captive audience.

For the attendees, JLF 2024 provided a solid foundation from which to build new initiatives, create synergies, expand on networking opportunities, and to define a clear picture of how to shape Jainism's future in North America.

Each 2024 Jain Leadership Forum attendee traveled home with an expanded toolkit of how to inspire their local Jain communities to plan for the future and a broader network of Jain leaders to help strengthen the foundation of the large North American Jain community for future generations to come. The 2024 JLF attendees are the ambassadors for taking Jainism from success to significance!

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## About the Long Range Planning Committee

The Long Range Planning Committee is a committee of JAINA. Its mission is to develop a strong, sustainable strategy for JAINA to pursue its vision and initiatives. LRP supports this mission by promoting and sharing a Jain Way of Life by increasing awareness about the 3 As – Ahimsa, Anekantvad, Aparigraha, strengthening the Jain way of life, Jain Center, and Jain family connections, and working closely with YJA, YJP and local sanghs to develop young leaders within the Jain community.

For more information on JLF 2024, the JAINA LRP committee, various Jain projects, or JAINA and to share your interest in becoming more involved in shaping the future of Jainism, please visit [www.jainleadership.org](http://www.jainleadership.org) or email [jlf-info@jaina.org](mailto:jlf-info@jaina.org).

# JINA AND KALPASUTRA FOLIO AT VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS VMFA

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*For this month, we feature two objects in the VMFA (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts), in Richmond, VA which are very interesting pieces in their collection, as they represent some anomalies from the popular understanding about them within the Jain community. These objects raise some interesting questions and thought-provoking conversations when looking at art from its historical context.*

### Jina and Kalpasutra Folio at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA)

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) has a very interesting collection of Jain Art objects. Of which we shall be discussing some art objects that arouse the curiosity of a museum visitor. The first one we shall be discussing is titled Jina of 1160 CE, a white marble statue that has some traces of pigment, indicating at one point it was an idol with color. The date, name of the Tirthankar, and its installation details are inscribed on the seat of the cushion as seen in Figure 1A and Figure 1B. The inscription states in its third line (Fig 1B), *Sreyans Jina Pratima*, idol of Shreyans Tirthankar, eleventh in the current series of the 24 Tirthankars.

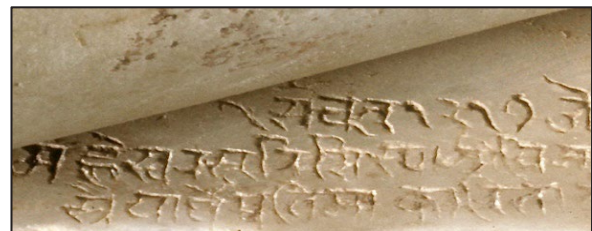


Figure 1B



Figure 1C

Figure 1A, 1B, 1C: Jina 1160 CE (Samvat 1217) probably Abu, Rajasthan. White marble with traces of pigment. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.  
Adolf D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund. 2000.98

(Fig 1A and 1B Photo: Katherine Wetzel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Fig 1C Photo: Author)

In Figure 1B, the name Shreyansnath is clearly inscribed, but it is not with certainty that we can say it is the idol of Shreyansanath, as the *lanchhan* (symbol) in Figure 1C is a conch. Conch is associated with the twenty-second Tirthankar Neminath. Should we consider it as an error in the inscription or is there an error in the *lanchhan*? Or neither? What is the history of Jain sculptures? Per Arpit, from Stories by Arpit, prior to the *lanchhan*, there were

just inscriptions stating the names of the Tirthankars. Before the inscriptions, there were *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* on the sides of the idol, assisting the identification of the Tirthankar. And in the very early stages, we had some obvious clues, as the hair on the Rishabhadeva and the snake hood on Parshwanath Tirthankar. The sculptures were demonstrated with *lanchhans* only after the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, per Arpit. Hence, in this case, the weightage should be given more on the inscription and hence, likely the idol was meant to represent Shreyansnath, and not Neminath.

The second object under discussion is a Kalpasutra folio which has interesting artwork depicting the Ashta Mangal. These are a group of eight (*ashta*) auspicious symbols, which per the Jain scriptures accompanied the Tirthankars as he travelled (*vihar*) and spread the knowledge. Digambar and Svetambar have a different list of *Ashta Mangal* symbols. The Svetāmbar Ashta Mangal are represented in the Kalpasutra Folio image in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Page from a Manuscript of the Kalpasutra 1416 CE

(Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund. 2001.229.2  
Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

The first row depicts (l to r): *Darpan* (mirror), *Bhadrasan* (seat), and *Vardhamanak* (Vessel).  
The second row from (l to r): *Kalash* (pot), design, and *Matsya Yugal* (Pair of Fish).  
The third row depicts from (l to r): *SriVatsa*, *Swastik*, and *Nandyavarta*.

By considering the middle square as a design here, we arrive at the eight symbols of the Ashta Mangal of the Svetambaras. These folios often were the cover pages of manuscripts as shown in Figure 3. On comparison of the 15<sup>th</sup> century image in Figure.2 with Figure 3, we observe that the middle design in Figure 2 is shown as *darpan* in Figure 3 of the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE.



Figure 3

(Figure 3 Credit: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Western India, 16th century. From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection. Museum Associates Purchase (M.72.53.23))



Further, the middle image of Figure 2 is shown as *Vardhamanak* in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as observed from another manuscript cover in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Book covers of a Jain Manuscript Ref: 78.5/1 & 2  
( Source: Chhatrapati Shivaji Museum, Mumbai )

The last image of Figure 4 gives us a clue as to the possible identification of the middle square of Figure 2. It likely represents Vardhaman Mahavir (derived from *Vardhamanak* in Figure 4), or represents a Tirthankar, around whom the eight auspicious *mangals* rotated. These *mangals* were found under Asoka tree as noted from the Uvavai Sutta when Mahavir gave discourses after obtaining *Keval Gnan*. Multiple images of *Ashta Mangals* above also indicate to us that there was no order for depicting them. The Digambar Ashta Mangal list varied slightly with the inclusion of *Chamar*, *Vyajan*, and *Dhvaj*. Digambar Ashta mangal included *Chattra* (Parasol), *Dhvaj* (Flag), *Chamar* (Fly Whisk), *Simhasan* (Seat), *Kalash* (Water pot), *Vyajan* (Fan), *Bhringra* (Gilded Vase) and *Darpan* (Mirror).

Not only the Jains, but Buddhist and Hindus also have their set of *Ashta mangal* symbols. The Tibetan Buddhist list includes Parasol, White Conch Shell, Two Golden Fish, Knot of Eternity, Vase of Great Treasures, Victory Banner, Lotus Flower, and Dharmachakra. *Matsya Yugal* and Parasol (royalty or seat of honor) are common across the Jain and Buddhist traditions. The gilded vase and *Dhvaj* of the Digambara match the vase of great treasure and the victory banner of the Tibetan Buddhists. Thus, similarities are observed between the Jain and Buddhist traditions with respect to the symbols representing auspiciousness.

The above two objects highlight the importance of understanding the historical context of the development of art and practices in the traditions. The Jina idol points to some other meaning of conch shell. Since the Jina sculpture in Figure 1A is a consecrated idol, it was worshipped by the people, who understood conch shell as representing Shreyansnath. Similarities of the *Ashta mangal* symbols between the Svetambar, Digambar, and Buddhist sects indicate a common knowledge base and a contemporaneous period of Mahavir and Buddha.

*The author is immensely grateful to the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sanghralaya, for graciously allowing free usage of the licensed images. The author would also like to show immense gratitude to Acharya Shri Nandighosha Suriji Maharaj for valuable information about Figure 2.*

## YJA - CREATING A VIBRANT COMMUNITY OF YOUNG JAINS IN NORTH AMERICA

### SURYARAJ JAIN, VANSHIKA SHAH



*Suryaraj currently works full-time as an engineer at SAP Concur. He is serving on the 2023-2024 YJA Executive Board as the Director of Project Development, as well as a Co-Lead for the 22+ Programming Committee for the 2024 Convention Committee. Suryaraj looks forward to bringing new experiences to the YJA community and helping keep YJA sustainable for the future.*



*Vanshika is a third-year student at the University of Maryland studying bioengineering. She serves as the Director of Events for YJA, as well as the Security Committee Co-Lead for the 2024 Convention Committee. She is super passionate about strengthening the Jain community and furthering YJA's mission.*

The Young Jains of America (YJA) organization is dedicated to promoting spiritual and cultural awareness of Jainism across North America. With a focus on Jain principles of non-violence, compassion, and spiritual growth, YJA aims to create a vibrant community where young Jains can connect, learn, and serve others. Through a variety of events, programs, and initiatives, YJA encourages personal development, leadership skills, and the preservation of Jain heritage and values.

Founded in 1991, YJA currently serves over 10,000 youth in North America and continues to see exponential growth each year. The Executive Board, which consists of 16 members, passionately serves its community through local, regional, and virtual events, national projects, educational content, social awareness, and much more. From Regional Retreats and National Dinners to our Educational content including Pathshala Modules and Younger Minds magazine, and our recently formed Seva Project team and Humans of YJA articles, YJA has much to offer to our community to interact with and get involved in.

Since 1994, YJA has held biennial conventions in various cities in North America. This year's convention will converge in Atlanta, Georgia, from July 4th to July 7th, with over 900 attendees coming to the state of Georgia, an increase from the 2022 convention held in Dallas, TX with about 775 attendees! The Convention Committee consisting of 43 Committee members (including the Executive Board) is busy planning a lot of new sessions and fun activities for our attendees this year, while keeping our

traditional social programming such as garba and formal.

Here is some information about our recent In-Person and Virtual Events

### In Person Events

#### 1) National Dinners



National Dinners are a way for the YJA community to come together in small groups within their region to meet new friends, while catching up with old ones. They're a super successful event, as attendees have a good time over some good food! With the help of Local Representatives, we choose the restaurants that we believe attendees will enjoy the food at, while making sure Jain and vegan options are also available!

- Dinners in 50 cities across all six regions
- Served ~300 attendees across all dinners
- First time local event in Ithaca, Plainsboro, Naperville, Santa Clara, and West Lafayette
- Collaborated with 5 YJA affiliated college chapters

## 2) Cocoa 'n Convos



A first of its kind! The YJA Cocoa 'n Convos local event was geared towards the community meeting up before the kickoff to YJA's annual retreats. With so many members of the community wanting to join retreats and other events, our hopes with this event were for people to meet others who were going to retreats, the 2024 YJA Convention, or wanted to meet new people if they couldn't make it to retreats.

- Local meet-ups to build hype and connections before regional retreats
- Events in 23 cities across all six regions
- High new attendee turnout

## 3) Regional Retreats



Outside of Convention, the Regional Retreats are YJA's most anticipated event! At YJA retreats, attendees engage in high-energy games, learn in depth about the core principles of Jainism, eat delicious Jain and vegan food, and participate in fun activities such as ice skating, bowling, skiing, hiking, amusement parks, and much more. There is so much for attendees to look forward to at these retreats. Most importantly, attendees get to meet people from those

regions and make connections with like-minded people, fostering new and lasting friendships!

- All six retreats sold out, serving a total of ~315 attendees
- YJA history was made:
  - Fastest sellout, where Midwest and Mid-Atlantic sold out in less than 24 hours
  - Largest Midwest and Northeast retreats
  - Outdoor activities at all six retreats
  - Seva session led at all six retreats

## Virtual Events

### 1) YJA Talk with Dikshartis: Q&A

Young Jains of America hosted a Question and Answer session with two Dikshartis, Tanyaben Shah and Karanbhai Shah, on November 16th at 9 PM ET. The Diksharti's answered a wide range of questions from our community.

They have also provided a more in-depth written response to all the questions which can be found here at [https://bit.ly/Diksharti\\_Written\\_PDF](https://bit.ly/Diksharti_Written_PDF)

- Total Attendee Count: almost 200

### 2) Thanksgiving Jaap Zoom Event:

The National Thanksgiving Jaap event brings Jains from across North America together to reflect on the suffering experienced by millions of turkeys that are slaughtered around Thanksgiving every year and to show gratitude for Jainism and this human life. As a community, we prayed for their souls and wish that they are in peace. With the help of many community members, we were able to recite many sutras.

- Total Attendee count: 115+

## Reaching Out

### 1) Paryushan:

- First day post:
  - Accounts reached: 2,577
- Micchami Dukkadam post:
  - Accounts reached: 7,980

### 2) Das Lakshan:

- First day post:
  - Accounts reached: 2,167



- Uttam Kshama post:
  - Accounts reached: 2,213

### 3) Giving Tuesday Campaign

Instead of a Giving Tuesday campaign dedicated to donating money toward YJA, this year we decided to promote and showcase three different education non-profits that we believe have a huge impact on the society around us. Our hope was for our large community to donate to such causes to support education and the future of the youth.



- Empowering Education, promoted three different organizations
  - Akshaya Patra: helping to eliminate classroom hunger by implementing mid-day meal programs
  - Shanti Bhavan: a residential school for children born into India's lowest socioeconomic class
  - Arihanta Institute: promoting better education and accessibility to increase the practice of Jain philosophy

### 4) Humans of YJA (HOY)

Inspired by Humans of New York, a project to inspire, connect, and showcase our community by sharing the stories of young Jains in North America. These individuals have showcased resilience in their journeys and we highlight them to our community in hopes that it drives others to do the same.

- Hillary Shah:
  - Instagram: 2,937 Accounts reached
  - Medium: 67 Article Views
- Saloni Nahar:
  - Instagram: 2,082 Accounts reaches
  - Medium: 33 Article Views



### 5) Newsletter

Our bi-weekly newsletter connects a subscriber community of over 3,000 people with updates on ways to get involved, content releases, and news regarding events taking place from YJA!

- Active subscribers for general newsletter: 3,202
- Average reader view per month (since October 2023): 2023: 5,032
  - Roughly 2-3 newsletters sent out per month
  - About 1,500-2,500 views per newsletter (depending upon content)
- Convention Registration Launch newsletter saw 2,509 viewers!



YOUNG JAINS OF AMERICA

# SAHASTRAVDHAN: A MARVEL OF EXTRAORDINARY MEMORY AND SPIRITUAL MASTERY

## DILIP V. SHAH



*Dilip V Shah of Philadelphia is the past president of JAINA. He is currently serving as chairman of JAINA's Overseas Relations Committee and a member of the Academic Liaison Committee. In addition to being an advisor for Jain Digest, he is also the publisher and General Editor of Jain Avenue magazine – a publication of JAINA India Foundation.*

*(The author gratefully acknowledges the contribution of notes prepared by Ruchika Chitrabhanuji who was present in the auditorium for the Sahastravdhan.)*

On May 1st, 2024, a historic event unfolded in Mumbai at the NSCI stadium in the presence of 8,000 spectators, including 250 Sadhus and Sadhwis and tens of thousands more watching live worldwide on YouTube and other platforms. Pujya Ganivarya Dr. Ajitchandrasagar Muniji performed Sahastravdhan (1000 Avdhans), an extraordinary feat of memory in which one recalls 1000 random things. Munishri embarked on this challenge in the presence of his Guru, Acharya Shri Pujya Nayachandrasagarji; following in the footsteps of Acharya Shri Munisunderji, the author of Adhyatma Kalpdrum and Santikaram Stotra, who first demonstrated this feat some 650 years ago. While the vidya of Shatavdhan has been showcased by numerous Rishis, Munis, and scholars throughout history, Sahstravdhan, deeply assimilating 1,000 experiences to be recalled with intense concentration, has not been documented elsewhere in Jain history (or even world history!). These experiences may include sights, sounds, sensations, or observations encountered once, whether in sequential or random order as desired.



The event commenced at 9 am with a series of questions presented in languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Sanskrit, or Prakrit, excluding foreign languages. Everyone in the audience was provided a notebook containing a structured series of categories of questions that may be posed across assorted subjects such as history, mathematics, and religion. These questions were delivered via visual and audio means, and randomly selected audience members had the opportunity to pose them. Each set of questions,

comprising 10 or 25 queries, covered a wide array of topics, including Jain terminology, trees, festivals, mountains, rivers, pilgrimage sites, scriptures, saints, proverbs, foreign language words, and more, as provided by the audience.

To test Muniji's visual memory (avdhan of sight), collages featuring 25 pictures, chosen by the audience, were presented. These collages included flags from various countries, notable figures from science, politics, philanthropy, and religion, global landmarks, and everyday objects. Mathematical challenges were introduced through a grid of 625 number blocks (25x25), where audience members circled 25 random numbers for Muniji to mentally sum up within a few minutes. Despite the event's duration of 9 hours, filled with activities, sounds, and distractions, Muniji maintained a consistent posture, sitting upright without any backrest, demonstrating his ability to absorb and assimilate information amidst the noise and interruptions.

A couple of hours into the event, leading neurosurgeon Padmashree Dr. Sudhir Shah of Ahmedabad spoke of the human brain's capacity to store vast amounts of information, such as up to 90 million books with a page count of 1000 each. However, working memory, or short-term memory, can only retain five to seven pieces of information for a duration of twenty to thirty seconds, demonstrating how underutilized our brains are. Dr. Shah marveled at Munishri's demonstration of Sahastravdhan, showcasing the exceptional development of his prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala as he utilized his working memory for an impressive six to eight hours. He expressed the bewilderment of medical professionals and scientists worldwide, who are unable to comprehend this extraordinary feat.

What adds to the fascination is that this remarkable ability stems not from mental prowess, as employed by mentalists, but from a spiritual source. Munishri achieved this through rigorous Sadhana and reverence for Goddess Saraswati. Munishri's journey involved eight years of profound silence, during which he shunned worldly knowledge and human interaction, devoting himself entirely to Sadhana. Only when seeking spiritual guidance from his Guru did he break his silence, exemplifying a level of dedication and discipline that is truly awe-inspiring.



There were a series of Avdhans called Sanyukt (collective) Avdhan, where 15 Avdhan were performed at one time. As the audience grappled with a multitude of tasks, the Munishri noted each event and successfully recalled all 15 items displaying multiple skills.

A noteworthy mathematical item was a 15-by-15 grid to be filled by Munishri. A gentleman was asked to share a figure that could be divided by 15 and be at least 1695 but not more than 2000. He provided them with the number 1800. Munishri was asked to begin at row 6 and provided the audience with the calculated numbers for that row. Remember, he was doing all of this mental math, and was not taking any notes. After being asked to respond to questions for randomly selected rows, he proceeded chronologically. The audience had trouble with writing down the figures because of how quickly he was delivering them. He revisited a row after he was unable to provide the final number at one point. He solved a few more rows and went back to the row that had the missing number. By this time, he had already made the necessary mental adjustments and spoke the numbers out loud. It's critical to recognize the subtlety of this: as he was figuring out and distributing the other rows' numbers, he was also finding the missing link in this row as well as calculating and assigning the numbers for the other rows. The miracle of Avdhan lies in the Soul's ability to cultivate the virtue of simultaneously solving several problems at various levels. He recited the row with the missing number after mentally changing the numbers. The audience verified each row, and every time it totaled to 1800, the elation grew louder. The total from all directions was 1800 when the grid was eventually filled.

As the clock approached 5:30 p.m., marking the culmination of the event, Munishri initiated his final Avdhan, captivating the audience with yet another astounding feat. He inquired a gentleman about his time of birth, to which the response was 7:30. Munishri fixed his intense gaze on the dial attempting to move the watch to 7:30 through the power of thoughts expressed through the eyes. Munishri had been staring at the dial for five minutes. His eyes began to water under strain. The entire audience held their breath, their eyes fixed on the screen, anticipating the miraculous movement of the hour and minute hands to align with the desired time. As Munishri wiped his tired eyes, it seemed he requested a brief pause to recuperate. With a gentle lowering of the hand, the gentleman glanced at his watch, only to discover that it indeed read 7:30. A moment of awe swept over the stadium as chants of Jainam Jayanti Shasanam filled the air, marking the successful completion of the 1000 Avdhan challenge. This extraordinary event will be permanently etched in the memories of those who witnessed an incredible event not seen in past 650 years!

While the performance had technically concluded, its impact lingered. Munishri's profound statement emphasized that this feat was not a miracle but rather a demonstration of the soul's power, attainable through

rigorous Sadhana and vigilance, accessible to all. He said that "Everyone can do it if I can". The things that stuck with me were his humility, his surrender to his Guru, Dev, and Dharma, and his poised demeanor amid the celebration by the public with loud applause and even during the appearance by Eknath Shinde; the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

The event, orchestrated by the **Shri Saraswati Sadhna Research Foundation** (SSRF) under the guidance of Acharya Shri Naychandrasagarji, was graced by the presence of esteemed spiritual leaders such as Acharya Nardev Sagarji, Acharya Shri Raj Shekharji, and Acharya Shri Phoolchandra Suri Maharaj Saheb, among others.

SSRF has trained 50,000 students to embark on the journey of improving their memory skill by sharpening their ability to concentrate their minds through daily 25-minute sessions spanning 36 days. Highlighting the foundation's commitment to enhancing memory skills and concentration through rigorous Sadhana, the occasion marked the inauguration of a digital course set to benefit over 500,000 students in the next five years by Chief Minister Shinde. The first batch will begin on Guru Purnima day July 21. The Chief Minister also expressed hope that it can be offered to all the school students in Mumbai initially and later statewide. The goal of this Sadhna is to enhance students' absorption, concentration, retention, and recall of knowledge. It addresses a significant gap in today's education system, where insufficient emphasis is placed on strengthening internal processes of knowledge absorption. We sincerely hope that children across the world are able to tap into their true potential through the sadhana.

Dr. Jitendra B. Shah concluded the event by seeking permission to honor Munishri, receiving resounding approval from both the Sadhus/Sadhvis and the audience. With thunderous applause, Dr. Jitubhai Shah bestowed upon Munishri the title of SAHASTRAVDHANI PUJYA SHRI AJITCHANDRAJI, a fitting tribute to his extraordinary abilities and unwavering dedication to his spiritual journey.



**Video link to the event:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jETiys9TFZE>



# OPRAH WINFREY: THE BEACON OF INSPIRATION

## REENA SHAH



*Reena is the section editor of the Inspiration section of Jain Digest. She has a Ph. D. in English literature and a USC grad. She currently teaches English to high school students. Teaching has always been a passion and she loves to read and write. She is dedicated to lifelong learning and continuing education. Her industry experience includes Market Research, Non-Profit, and educational institutions. She practices deeper aspects of spirituality and is a follower of the Late Param Pujya Pappaji at Shrimad Rajchandra Aatma Tatva Research Centre, Parli, Near Mumbai.*

In the vast landscape of human achievement, certain individuals emerge as guiding lights, illuminating the path for others with their resilience, compassion, and unwavering determination. Among these luminaries stands Oprah Winfrey, a woman whose journey from humble beginnings to global icon hood is a testament to the power of perseverance, authenticity, and the relentless pursuit of one's dreams. Born into poverty in rural Mississippi in 1954, Oprah faced adversities from an early age that would have deterred many. Yet, she refused to be defined by her circumstances, instead choosing to carve her own path through the dense forest of challenges that lay before her. From the ashes of hardship, she rose like a phoenix, fueled by an indomitable spirit and an unwavering belief in her own potential.



Oprah's ascent to success was not without its trials. She endured a tumultuous childhood marked by abuse and instability, yet she found solace in the

power of storytelling. At the tender age of 19, she embarked on a career in media, starting as a local news anchor before eventually becoming the host of her own talk show, "The Oprah Winfrey Show." Little did she know that this would be the launching pad for her quick rise to prominence. What set Oprah apart was not just her talent or charisma, but her ability to connect with people on a deeply personal level. Her show became a platform for meaningful dialogue, addressing issues ranging from social injustice to self-improvement with empathy and insight. Through her interviews, she gave voice to the voiceless, shed light on taboo subjects, and inspired millions to confront their own struggles with courage and grace.

While Oprah Winfrey may not explicitly identify as a Jain, many of her actions and qualities do resonate with these Jain principles of non-violence, truthfulness, non-attachment, compassion, and humility:

### Non-Violence

Oprah has often advocated for non-violence in various forms. She promotes peaceful conflict resolution, empathy towards others, and kindness in interactions. Her talk show, "The Oprah Winfrey Show," often highlighted stories of forgiveness and reconciliation, promoting a message of non-violence. She facilitated discussions on sensitive topics such as racism, abuse, and social injustice, encouraging understanding and compassion among her guests and audience members. Oprah has featured guests who have overcome personal conflicts through forgiveness and understanding. She has spoken out against physical violence in various forms, advocating for solutions that prioritize non-violent approaches.

### Truthfulness

Oprah is known for her commitment to truthfulness and authenticity. Throughout her career, Oprah has been candid about her own life experiences, including her difficult childhood, struggles with weight, and past

traumas. By openly sharing her journey, she has inspired others to confront their own challenges with honesty and resilience. As the host of "The Oprah Winfrey Show," she conducted interviews with a genuine curiosity and a desire to uncover the truth. She asked probing questions and encouraged her guests to share their stories authentically, creating a space for honest conversations about a wide range of topics. Oprah has never shied away from addressing controversial or sensitive topics on her show. From discussions about racism and discrimination to conversations about mental health and addiction, she has tackled difficult subjects with courage and honesty, sparking important dialogue and raising awareness.

## Non-Attachment

Although Oprah has achieved great success and accumulated significant wealth, she has demonstrated a sense of non-attachment to material possessions. She has donated millions of dollars to various charitable causes, including education, healthcare, and empowerment initiatives. Her philanthropy reflects a sense of detachment from material wealth, as she uses her resources to make a positive impact rather than hoarding them for personal gain.

Despite her fame and fortune, Oprah has maintained a relatively simple lifestyle in terms of material possessions. She has spoken about the importance of decluttering and simplifying one's life, emphasizing the value of experiences and relationships over material wealth. Oprah has been open about her experiences of trauma and adversity, including childhood abuse and other challenges. However, rather than allowing these experiences to define her or hold her back, she has demonstrated resilience and a willingness to let go of the past to move forward. This ability to release attachment to past traumas and embrace personal growth exemplifies non-attachment in a psychological sense. Through her various platforms and initiatives, she has empowered countless individuals to pursue their own dreams and aspirations. Her focus on lifting others up rather than seeking personal glory suggests a sense of detachment from ego-driven ambitions and a commitment to collective well-being.

## Compassion

Oprah's philanthropic efforts and advocacy for social justice exemplify her compassion towards others. Her

philanthropy is a testament to her compassion for those in need. She has donated millions of dollars to charitable causes around the world, with a particular focus on education, healthcare, and empowerment initiatives. Through initiatives such as the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG) in South Africa, she has provided opportunities for education and leadership development to young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. One poignant story that highlights Oprah Winfrey's compassion revolves around her involvement with the opening of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa.



In 2007, Oprah fulfilled a long-held dream by establishing OWLAG, a boarding school for academically gifted girls from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa. The school aimed to provide these young women with a high-quality education, mentorship, and opportunities for personal and leadership development. In 2012, in the post-Apartheid South Africa, Oprah held her emotions together at her school's first graduation in January, when 72 girls in neat white dresses filed out of the auditorium into the midsummer sunshine, every single one headed to university in a country where only 14% of the black population graduated from high school. She considered each one her own child and said, now she knew why she did not have her own children. For the girl's dormitory Oprah personally chose the white sheets, towels for their softness, pillowcases bearing an embroidered O, and the colors for the bathroom tiles - orange, green and happy yellow. This demonstrates Oprah's genuine care and compassion for the students, her unwavering dedication to their success, and her ability to find meaning and inspiration in everyday moments. She understood the significance of this moment for the girls and shared their emotional experience. She has also been a vocal



advocate for mental health awareness and destigmatization. Through her talk show and other media projects, she has facilitated conversations about mental health, sharing stories of resilience and recovery and encouraging others to seek support and treatment. Her compassion for those struggling with mental health challenges has helped to reduce stigma and promote understanding.

## Humility

Despite her immense fame and influence, Oprah has maintained a humble demeanor and acknowledges the contributions of others to her success. She often expresses gratitude for her opportunities and remains grounded in her values, reminding others to stay humble in the face of success. Throughout her career, Oprah has consistently recognized and thanked the team of professionals who have supported her endeavors. Whether it's her production crew, staff members, or collaborators, she often credits their hard work and dedication for her success, emphasizing that her achievements are the result of collective effort rather than individual merit. Oprah frequently expresses gratitude for the opportunities she has been given and the experiences she has had throughout her life and career. She acknowledges the role that luck, timing, and the support of others have played in her journey, demonstrating a humble appreciation for the blessings she has received. Despite her vast knowledge and experience, Oprah remains open to learning from others.

In 1990, Oprah visited Forsyth County, Georgia, to film a segment for her talk show about race relations in America. Forsyth County was known for its history of racial tension and was predominantly white at the time. As Oprah and her crew prepared for filming, they faced hostility and resistance from some local residents who were wary of outsiders addressing the sensitive topic of racism in their community.



Despite the challenges, Oprah remained committed to fostering dialogue and understanding. She conducted interviews with the residents, listening to their stories and perspectives with empathy and respect. Throughout the process, she encountered individuals who were skeptical of her intentions or who questioned her authority to speak on the topic of race. However, amid the tension and skepticism, Oprah maintained her humility and grace. She approached each interaction with an open heart and a willingness to learn, recognizing that she was not immune to the complexities of the issues at hand. Rather than becoming defensive or confrontational, she remained steadfast in her commitment to promoting empathy and understanding. She connected with residents on a personal level, sharing her own experiences of overcoming adversity and discrimination. She listened to their concerns and acknowledged the pain and division that had plagued their community for generations. Despite the initial resistance, many residents expressed gratitude for her willingness to engage with them openly and honestly.

Today, Oprah Winfrey stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration for people everywhere. Her story reminds us that no dream is too big, no obstacle too insurmountable, if we dare to believe in ourselves and embrace the power within. She teaches us that success is not measured by wealth or fame, but by the lives we touch and the positive impact we make on the world. As we navigate the complexities of our own lives, let us draw strength from Oprah's example. Let us strive to emulate her resilience, her compassion, and her unwavering commitment to making a difference. For in doing so, we not only honor her legacy but also ignite the flame of possibility within ourselves, lighting the way for others to follow in our footsteps.

## Resources:

Oprah as a Religious Leader <https://bit.ly/3Uvys8I>

The Education Of Oprah Winfrey: How She Saved Her South African School <https://bit.ly/3JrXjn0>

Oprah Winfrey a Transformational and Charismatic leader <https://bit.ly/3UqvZMi>

Oprah Winfrey Show. [1987-02-09], Live From Forsyth County University of Georgia Kaltura [https://kaltura.uqa.edu/media/t/1\\_958u30nt](https://kaltura.uqa.edu/media/t/1_958u30nt)



# UNVEILING THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT OF MONASTIC CHOICES

## PAYAL SETH



*Payal Seth is an economics researcher at the Tata-Cornell Institute, Cornell University. She is also a passionate author who crafts illuminating articles, dedicated to exploring and celebrating the profound significance of spiritual values in our modern lives. Her articles have been published on several national and international platforms.*

I was fortunate to come across an article in the last edition of Jain Digest that discussed how the two young USA-born sister and brother duo, Tanya and Karan, are planning to take *Diksha* to become nun and monk, respectively. Their decision stirred me to the core. I was inquisitive to know what exactly would inspire such young people to make the biggest and most selfless decision of their lives. The following article is a tribute to their decision. We explore how like a butterfly effect, where small actions lead to significant consequences, the brave decisions of several brother monks and sister nuns, have unknowingly inspired and shaped the lives of their community, bringing them closer to self-realization or enlightenment which then propels them to their ultimate goal of Moksha.



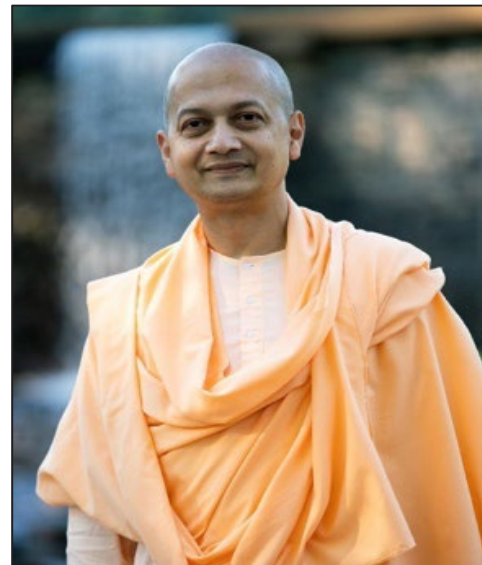
*Tanya and Karan*

### The Road Less Travelled

As Karan and Tanya narrated the story behind their decision to take *diksha*, I realized that what seemed momentous to us was not just easy but rather a natural decision to them. Karan explained how even as a six-year-old when he first saw the picture of Maharaj Saheb, he felt that a latent curiosity was kindled. When he saw his mother watching a video of a Jain Maharaj, he asked her a lot of questions: “Who is the person speaking? When do you take *diksha*? What do you do in it?”. As expected, this surprised his mother, and she instantly realized that there must be a connection between the two. His display of devotion continued (for instance he would bow down whenever he heard Maharaj’s *pravachans* on TV) and it melted the

parents. For the sake of giving their children an adequate cultural environment, the parents decided to move back to India.

The family’s first morning in India was welcomed by a *darshan* of Acharya Vijay Ratnasunder Sureshwarji Maharaj, as planned by their grandmother. At this point, I wondered how selfless and blessed the family is, to be making these sacrifices and receive this divine grace; but just then the story got even more interesting. Karan, now nine years old, wanted to take *diksha* with the Maharaj. Tanya found her guru in Pujya Sadhviji Shri Samvegnidhi Shri Ji Ma Sa. Both brother and sister believed that they found their path through the divine grace of their gurus. The parents saw that the desire to take *diksha* was firm and unwavering and gave them permission to leave school. They lived and trained with their gurus for two years, where they were deeply loved and nurtured. Karan and Tanya received the biggest surprise when on April 11, 2023, their Gurudev permitted them to take *diksha* in front of family which was held on January 24, 2024, in Dhulia, Maharashtra, India.



*Swami Sarvapriyanada*

Swami Sarvapriyanada, a Hindu monk belonging to the Ramakrishna Order and mentioned by Fortune India

as one of the best-known lecturers of the Vedanta, also had a similar longing to become a monk. He explained how he had a deep sense of conviction since he was ten years of age that all he wanted to do in life was to be a monk. As much as he loved his parents, he knew that if he followed their path, then it would be deeply unfulfilling for him.

So, on one hand, he had intense dispassion for worldly life, and on the other hand, he developed a deep desire to understand the meaning of life. His parents had filled their home with books on the teachings of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Their wise words assured him that the meaning of life is Self-realization or God-realization. He thought that if these saints were saying that God is real or can be experienced, then why not do this?

These reminiscences took me back to the story of how the Buddha when young, had encountered an old man, an ill man, a corpse, and an ascetic and was convinced that life is suffering. He renounced his worldly possessions and princely title and became a monk in the hope of comprehending the truth of the world around him or finding a way of liberation for himself and others.

### Why Them, Why Not Us?

Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Sikh, and other philosophies that believe in the doctrine of *karma* can explain these decisions through *samskaras* or past life impressions, a factor that is not attributed to nature or nurture. For instance, when Arjuna asks Krishna in Gita,

*“What is the fate of the unsuccessful yogi who begins the path with faith, but who does not endeavor sufficiently due to an unsteady mind and is unable to reach the goal of Yog in this life?”* (6.37)

Krishna answers:

*“The Supreme Lord said: O Parth, one who engages on the spiritual path does not meet with destruction either in this world or the world to come. My dear friend, one who strives for God-realization is never overcome by evil. On taking such a birth, O descendant of Kurus, they reawaken the wisdom of their previous lives, and strive even harder toward perfection in Yog. Indeed, they feel drawn toward God, even against their will, on the strength of their past discipline. Such seekers naturally rise above the ritualistic principles of the scriptures. With the accumulated merits of many past births, when these yogis engage in sincere endeavors to make further progress, they become purified from material desires and attain perfection in this life itself.”* (6.43-6.45)

### How Does This Inspire Us?

The ripple effect of these momentous decisions has a beautiful impact on our lives as well.

#### 1) The Realization

Once we are mature enough or have attained the goals of our lives, it will be glaringly obvious to us that suffering is an enmeshed fact of our lives. Just when we think that we have successfully overcome one type of suffering, it will be inevitably followed by another one. It will either be in the form of not getting what one wants (hence the desire to have the pleasant and familiar, leading to attachment or craving) or getting what one doesn't want (leading to aversion). It also ranges from physical to mental suffering, and from struggles in families to international conflicts. That is when one is likely to turn to spirituality. Spiritual teachings offer us the most effective solution to overcome this suffering, which is *nirvana*, *moksha*, salvation, or liberation from the cycles of birth and death.

#### 2) Experiencing the Holy Company

As one begins to explore the teaching of any spiritual path, the profound influence of direct contact with a *guru* or holy individuals becomes abundantly clear. Reading stories about monks and nuns who had intense dispassion for the world is one thing, and witnessing a holy person who has willingly renounced worldly possessions (something that we are unable to let go), and yet emanating an aura of tranquillity and radiance (something that we desperately want), validates the rationality of their decisions.

The significance of holy men in our spiritual journey cannot be overstated. As the closest embodiments of truth and our authentic nature, they serve as living examples of the path we aspire to follow. From them, we receive not only inspiration and teachings but also a transmission of spiritual energy that transforms and elevates our consciousness. The importance of holy men thus extends beyond mere instruction; it becomes a transformative force that shapes our spiritual journey, leaving an indelible mark on our hearts and minds. They bridge the gap between the profound wisdom of scriptures and its practical application in our everyday existence, guiding us towards a more enlightened and fulfilling way of life.

#### 3) Understanding True Spirituality

Having realized the nature of suffering and that there are people who are successful on the path to transcending it, we now get inspired to develop the peace that holy men and women so naturally exude. As a word of encouragement, even for naïve

practitioners like us, any step that we reverentially tread on this path benefits us and others immensely.

The true meaning of spiritual practices is the development and training of our mental state, attitudes, and psychological and emotional state and well-being. Years of persistent meditation, mindfulness, and contemplation on subjects such as impermanence, the value of compassion and altruism, etc are bound to yield fruits in the form of a calmer mind and a change in the attitude towards oneself and others. Most spiritual traditions include practices that seek to develop positive thinking and quiet the mind, put us more in touch with our deeper spiritual nature. Further, we realize that spiritual practices are not meant to be confined to some physical activities or verbal activities, like doing recitations of prayers and chanting, but rather to be fully integrated and practiced in every part of our lives.

For instance, people who believe in the doctrine of *karma* endure their suffering with complete acceptance and responsibility. Similarly, those who have an unshakable faith in God are often able to withstand intense hardship because of their belief in an omniscient and loving God—a God whose plan may be obscure to us at present but One who, in His wisdom, will ultimately reveal His love for us. Hence, the simple practice of combating negative states of mind such as anger, hatred, and greed, and cultivating positive states such as kindness, compassion, and tolerance, is true spirituality.

The Dalai Lama, says, *“if you understand spiritual practice in its true sense, then you can use all twenty-four hours of your day for your practice. True spirituality is a mental attitude that you can practice at any time. For example, if you find yourself in a situation in which you might be tempted to insult someone, then you immediately take precautions and restrain yourself from doing that. Similarly, if you encounter a situation in which you may lose your temper, immediately you are mindful and say, ‘No, this is not the appropriate way.’ That actually is a spiritual practice.”*

As a testament, extensive research also seems to confirm the fact that spiritual beliefs or religious faith can substantially contribute to a happier life. Those conducted by independent researchers and polling organizations (such as the Gallup company) have found that religious people report feeling happy and satisfied with life more often than non-religious people. Hence, spiritual teachings are meant for enlightenment, but also along the way, meant to make us calmer, happier, more peaceful, and the world, a better place.

Before I conclude, I will share an interesting conversation that Swami Sarvapriyananda once had with Prof. Parimal Patil, (Professor of Religion and Indian Philosophy at Harvard University), where they discussed that statistically, very few people will embrace monasticism and even fewer will achieve enlightenment, so why do we even follow this path? Being a monk, Swami Sarvapriyananda said that, once we have appreciated the opportunity of this life, what else would one do but seek enlightenment? The only valuable thing in life is a sincere spiritual quest.

To this, Prof. Patil gave an extremely practical reply, “The reason why lay people seek enlightenment is this. As we proceed on the spiritual path, the day-to-day benefits of spiritual practices like prayer and meditation that come to us, which are peace of mind, meaningfulness in life, guidance, strength, and blessings, are so great, that they are enough motivators. When enlightenment will come, it will come, we will see.” And, he is right. The spiritual ripple effect of the momentous decisions by Lord Mahavira and Buddha in the past and by many endearing Tanyas and Karans in the present, has a poignant and gratifying impact on our lives as well.

Indeed, we acknowledge that fully embodying the ideals of monasticism, as demonstrated by our revered Holy *Gurus*, remains a work in progress for us. But their inspiring decision to renounce the world, profound levels of realization, and boundless compassion serve as a benchmark we aspire to reach. Witnessing their unwavering faith and dedicated commitment to the spiritual journey for enlightenment inspires us to incorporate their teachings into our lives to the best of our ability. The blessings that unfold, resulting in a life filled with happiness and peace, serve as another profound motivator on our spiritual path.

With utmost reverence, we bow down to honor the sacrifices, teachings, and guidance of our Holy *Gurus*.

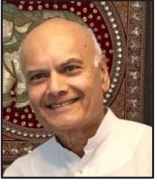
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## WHY MEDITATE?

### RAMESH KHANDHAR



*Ramesh Khandhar is a former secretary of the executive board and past head teacher of Pathshala at Jain Center of Southern California. He travels around to deliver spiritual discourses and continues to do intense introspection and contemplation. Currently, he is serving as Section Editor and Advisor of Jain Digest. ([ramesh.khandhar@gmail.com](mailto:ramesh.khandhar@gmail.com))*

In today's fast paced world, due to a variety of environmental, political, and personal issues, people are facing various physiological and psychological problems. Hence they are looking for solutions. Meditation practice, which dates back thousands of years, provides some hope. In recent years various types of meditation practices have been developed that address certain specific problems.

Some positive physiological effects of these meditation practices include reduced respiration rate, decreased heart rate, changes in brain wave patterns, and lowered stress. Some of the psychological positive effects include better management of symptoms related to anxiety disorders, depression, sleep disorders, pain issues, and high blood pressure, better stress management skills, better concentration, focus, and mindfulness, increased self-awareness, improved emotional well-being, and immunity. It also reduces or eliminates anxiety by inducing and soothing the neurological system.

Meditation is also an essential practice for spiritual advancement. From a spiritual viewpoint, the ultimate goal is enlightenment and nirvana (liberation). Across many different spiritual and religious traditions, meditation plays a vital role. It serves to foster inner transformation and a deeper connection with the divine, one's true self. For this type of meditation, some prior preparation is needed such as introspection of one's beliefs and shortcomings, contemplating who you are not and your true nature. This will help you to break free from identification with the body and mind. And then when you meditate you will be able to go beyond the mind and get closer to self-realization.

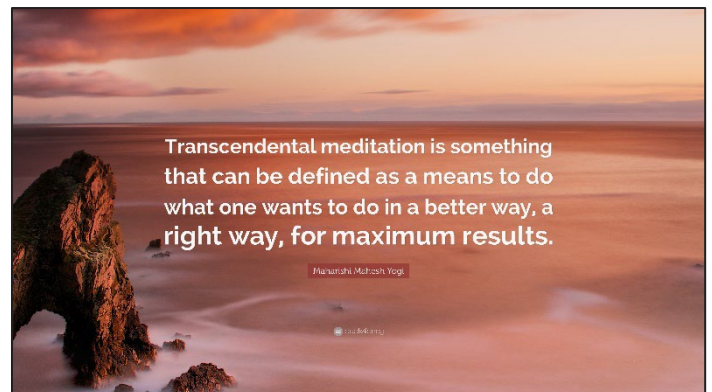
We will discuss this in another article in a future issue of Jain Digest.

In this article we will focus on the physiological and psychological benefits of meditation. Our intent is to provide you with some basic information on the type of meditation you can use based on your need.

#### 1) Mantra Meditation - To Improve Concentration and Boost Awareness

Mantra meditation helps improve concentration and boost awareness. It helps reduce wandering thoughts. Repeating the mantra in our head or out loud occupies our awareness and prevents it from drifting in another direction. This will help improve results in advanced meditation. It can also reduce some stress by reducing the negative thoughts arising out of an egoic mind. It is believed that the vibration and harmony of chanting some mantra enables the deep meditative state which will release any blocked energy disrupting our well-being.

Mantra is a Sanskrit term, with "man" meaning "mind" and "tra" meaning "release." One form of Mantra meditation is Transcendental Meditation (TM).



It consists of silently repeating a mantra with "gentle effortlessness" while sitting comfortably with eyes closed and with or without assuming any special yoga position. We select a mantra that reflects our goal which will help us to focus on what we want to get out of meditation. It strengthens our commitment to the practice and makes the most out of meditation. Mantra can be a deity mantra or healing mantra or chakra mantra. We can also choose a small sentence for the purpose of affirmation, such as: "I have compassion for myself and others", "Every day is a new beginning", "I am calm", "My life is full of joy", "I am Shudhdhatma", "So-hum (I am)".

## How to do it

Sit in a quiet place with no external distractions. Assume a position which can be held steady for the length of meditation. Mudras or hand positions are okay, but they are not necessary. Set a timer for how long you want to meditate. It is desirable to do it at the same every day, if possible. Start with a few deep breaths. Pay attention to breathing without trying to change the breathing pattern. Just focus on the sensation of air entering the lungs during inhalation and leaving the body during exhalation. Try to match the mantra with the breathing rhythm. When any random thoughts arise, just acknowledge them and they will start to dissipate. Get back to the mantra chanting in mind. When the timer goes off, don't rush to get up. Enjoy the calmness of mind for a few moments.



TM allows the mind to go beyond surface level thinking towards silence. The consistent practice results in increased concentration, focus, creativity, and boosts awareness. It could strengthen the connection of the prefrontal cortex with other parts of the brain and regulate our emotions better. In some cases, it increases the cerebral blood flow and cognitive function. Chanting can help synchronize the left and right sides of the brain and promote relaxing (alpha) brain waves.

Mindfulness, deep breathing techniques, and yoga practices also have similar benefits. They are discussed later in this article. The most common benefits are increased self-awareness, reduced stress, a greater sense of calm, increased self-compassion, and a more positive outlook.

## 2) Mindfulness - To Develop Awareness of Physical and Mental Activity

Many people lose their awareness of the present moment and remain a victim of a stream of thinking by an egoic mind. This stream of thinking has its roots in past conditioning or future expectations or simply just the daydreaming habit. These negative or random thoughts drain our conscious energy.

The mindfulness practice is one of the main meditation practices that directs our attention away from this kind of thinking and keeps us in the present moment scenario we are facing. The focus of the practice is on the present moment, bringing awareness to the thoughts that pass through our mind and gently acknowledging them before letting them go without judgment. It is aimed at developing awareness of physical and mental activity.

Mindfulness is studied in many clinical trials for the purpose of reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and high blood pressure. It cultivates the awareness of the present moment by arresting the ongoing stream of wasteful thinking. One variation that has become popular is called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which was popularized by John Kabat-Zinn in the West. Today, MBSR is used in hospitals,

schools, and offices around the world. The method uses mindfulness and yoga approaches to deal with unconscious thoughts which lead to stress and illness. Some of the most popular MBSR Techniques and exercises include breathing exercises, body scans, focus mindfulness, mindful eating, and walking meditation.



Our conceptual thoughts do not dominate and our perceptual outlook without any labels and judgmental attitude, starts to take hold. This facilitates happiness, peace, bliss, and other spiritual virtues to flow from the inside out. It helps us to act in a potent and healthy way allowing us to accept all types of circumstances which eliminates stress and anxiety.

We become more open and compassionate. We must remain unbiased and attentive to our own present-moment experience. The unbiased observation opens the door to enjoying the serenity of the present moment. A judgmental attitude locks us into patterns of reactive and repetitive thoughts, feelings, and behavior. During this type of meditation, we should identify the judgmental thinking as it arises. Eventually, we should be able to develop a non-judgmental attitude which eliminates stress and anxiety.

It should be noted that many of these attributes are also realized in Zen, Jainism, yoga, and deep breathing meditation techniques.

### 3) Breathing Techniques - To Prevent Stress, Anxiety, and Shortness of Breath

Breathing is a bridge between consciousness and body. Our emotions-feelings have a direct impact on our breathing. During anger our breathing is fast and short. During calmness our breathing is slow and rhythmic. Proper breathing is a powerful tool to manage the mind, emotions, and imbalances in the body. Good yoga practice starts with slow deep relaxed breathing later followed by postures and asanas. Deep breathing helps Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) to relieve the shortness of breath by preventing air from getting trapped in our lungs and allows us to breath more fresh air. We feel more relaxed and centered. Some patients with asthma and anxiety may experience easier breathing, the lungs strengthening, and it may even stop wheezing.



While breathing, focus your attention on a specific part of your body without looking at it. You may feel small pressure, some heaviness and/or warmth. In essence, you have shifted some part of your consciousness to that part of the body. This way we can shift our conscious energy with our thoughts by focusing on it and visualizing it. In mindfulness, we do the same; except we shift our energy to the thought stream in the moment and become aware of it. The consciousness subjectively becomes aware of the object of thoughts prevailing in that moment. "I am just a witness to thoughts reflecting on my knowledge screen."



## ESSAYS BY PATHSHALA STUDENTS IN NORTH AMERICA

Beginning with the February 2023 issue, the Jain Digest Editorial Team has started a new series of articles – essays written by the Pathshala students in North America. Many Jain Centers in USA and Canada have been conducting Pathshala classes for several years. Many volunteers provide selfless service to the Jain communities by teaching the students about Jain principles, values, rituals, culture, Indian languages, etc. Essay competitions are held to motivate the students to stimulate their thinking and analytical skills about what they have learned in Pathshala. We continue this effort to showcase the winning entries from one Jain Center in each issue of Jain Digest. In the February 2024 issue we showcased essays by students from **Jain Center of Greater Boston (JCGB)**. In this issue we bring you essays by the students from **Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington (JSMW)**. We hope that you will enjoy reading these essays and be pleased with the talent these students exhibit. We would love to hear from you. Write us note at [jaindigestpublication@gmail.com](mailto:jaindigestpublication@gmail.com)



**Topic - Applying Jain Principles to the 3 R's  
Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle  
Winner - Rutvi Shah (age 9)**



*Rutvi Shah is 9 years old and in fourth grade. She loves to go to pathshala so she can meet her friends. She loves to learn about Karma Theory this year. Rutvi says it made her more conscious in her day to day life. She would like to thank her teachers and family for giving her this opportunity.*

The three R's reduce, reuse, and recycle should always be in your mind when protecting the environment. The three R's are essential for directing us on how to approach protecting the planet. Daily waste production by humans is enormous and continues to increase. The Three R's are an effective way of managing waste in an environmentally beneficial way. Waste is often an unavoidable result of human activity. It occurs in our homes, schools, temples, factories, and pretty much everywhere. How we choose to handle that waste affects the air, water, and land and the humans, plants, and animals that rely on them. We must manage our waste responsibly. The environment is the world around us. We should take care of our whole environment so we can be

healthy. We can take care of our environment by using the 3 R's reduce, reuse, and recycle.

The word reducing means minimizing the amount of waste we make and avoiding getting a lot of possessions. I reduce by donating things I don't use anymore such as clothes or toys. There are other people in need who could make use of it. Another way I reduce is by saving electricity and water. I turn off the lights when I am not using it. I also take short showers and do not leave the tap on while brushing my teeth. I also walk to my nearby friend's house instead of using a car so I'm not polluting the air. That way we also follow one of the main principles of Jainism "Ahimsa". By reducing our needs and wants we can follow another principle "Aparigraha" or non-attachment and Aparigraha teaches us not to have a lot of possession.

The word reusing means to keep using things over and over until you can't use them anymore. This includes using food scraps for other purposes, donating excess materials, and giving them a new life cycle. Here are some tips that I follow to reuse. I make old containers into art. When I go shopping, I carry a reusable bag to the store. I don't buy over-packed goods. I keep cardboard boxes for moving, I take lunch in a lunch box instead of a ziplock or paper bag. I also use reusable water bottles to pathshala and school. I use both sides of paper for art, and instead of throwing away old toys or clothes that I don't use, I give it away. By reusing you buy less items which makes you lose greed. We should donate broken appliances to a local vocational school or charity so students can practice repairing them or utilize them in art workshops.

Recycling is gathering and processing materials that would be thrown away to transform them into something fresh and new. Recycling causes a lot of good things. For example, we can save 17 trees

and 7000 gallons of water by recycling 1 piece of paper. Recycling glass bottles or jars can save enough electricity to light a 100-watt bulb for 4 hours. The things I recycle are: paper, boxes, food cans, plastic bottles, and other plastic items. By recycling plastic bottles and bags we can stop hurting sea creatures as dumping them in the ocean can hurt them. Recycling is a good method of converting trash and waste into usable products. It is a preventative approach to stop the demolition of things that might be valuable. Additionally, it aids in lowering the consumption of fresh raw materials, energy, and natural resources. Recycling includes composting or reusing trash, such as food scraps, kitchen garbage, and garden waste. Doing this you save living beings like trees or other plants because when you recycle paper that paper you recycled becomes another paper so instead of chopping trees for paper you just take the recycled paper.

Out of all the 3 Rs, I think the best one in my opinion is reduce, because when you reduce you lose greed. If we practice it often we can get rid of greed and by getting rid of greed we can remove our remaining kashayas Anger, Ego and Deceit easily. By practicing it we follow the principle of Ahimsa and Aparigraha too.

We should always follow the 3 Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle in our day to day life. These will lead us to a better life and more punya! I hope you enjoyed my essay about the 3 R's reduce, reuse, and recycle.

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#### Topic - Jain Practices for a Healthy Mind, Body and Soul

**Winner - Vivaan Shah (age 12)**



*Vivaan Shah is 12 years old and in 7th grade. He loves to go to pathshala as it helps him learning Jain values and he can meet others who follow the same values. Pathshala also offers many cultural events that he heavily enjoys. He would like to thank his teachers and family for giving him this opportunity.*

Jainism is a religion of peace and can lead everyone to a better life. We as Jains, help all living beings and strive to make our world a better place. Our motto is Live and let live. Jainism can help us obtain a healthier body, mind, and soul. We can obtain a healthy body, mind, and soul through our Yoga, Tapas, living values, and Bhavnas.

**Yoga** is a big part of Jainism. There are many books about yoga including Yoga Shastra, Yoga Shatak, and Yoga Drashti Sammurchaya. Many yoga poses enhance our mind, body, and soul. Some examples of these yoga poses would be Bhujangasan, Padmasana, and Vajrasana. These poses are known as asanas. These poses help our body, mind, and soul. Bhujangasana helps keep our dorsal spine flexible, reduces pain in the ribs and spinal cord, and stretches the abdominal muscles. Bhujangasana makes our body healthier and keeps us from becoming old. Padmasana helps keep the mind relaxed, increases concentration, and relieves tension. Padmasana helps us learn more. Vajrasana makes you reflect on what you did yesterday and develops awareness and introspection. It also gives us control over our emotions which makes our kashaya (passions) less severe. This brings us closer to liberation. There are many more poses such as Shasakasan, Dhanurasana, Supta Vajrasana, Tadasana, and Trikonasana each with specific benefits of body, mind, and soul. There are four types of yoga which are Bhakti yoga, Jnana yoga, Karma yoga, and Ashtanga yoga. Jnana yoga is all about studying, and it helps our minds. Jnana yoga can help us to think about who we are and bring us closer to the soul. Bhakti yoga helps us realize the truth of our universe and dissolves ego. Karma yoga also dissolves ego. Many jain acharyas have said that Ashtanga yoga can lead to liberation. The goal of yoga is controlling the Chitta Vritti (the thought process). Better control of our Chitta Vritti reduces stress and increases awareness. Less stress leads to a healthier mind and body, and increased awareness helps us become more vigilant about our actions which can lead to a healthier soul. I often do padmasana with my dad and tend to do jnana yoga by reading Jain books. Yoga is essential for a healthier body, mind, and soul. I do yoga sometimes with my family. That helps me concentrate better and we can spend some family time together.

**Tapas:** Acharya Umasvati once said "Tapasa nirjara cha" which means eradication of karma can be acquired through austerity. There are 6 Bahya tapas Anasana, Unodari, Vritti-sankshepa, Rasatyaga, Kaya-klesha, and Sanlinta. The 6 Abhyantar tapas are Prayaschitta, Vinaya, Veyavachama, Swadhyaya, Dhyana, and Kayotsarga.

Anasana means fasting. A study at the Pennington biomedical research center concluded, *"We found that eating between 8 am and 2 pm followed by an 18-hour daily fast kept appetite levels more even throughout the day"*. This study proves that Chauvihar (not eating or drinking after sunset) is healthy for your body. Some other benefits of Chauvihar are better digestion, weight loss, better sleep, making the body ready for the next day, controlling cholesterol, and it is healthy for people with diabetes. Fasting every other day can fight against diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and many heart diseases. Fasting can also help our immune system, especially for those who have done chemotherapy. Intermittent fasting (having periodic fasts) can protect against many brain diseases, including Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease. Another bahya tap is rasa tyaga. This means to stay away from tasty foods like those with sugar, and fast food. Staying away from these unhealthy foods makes our body healthy as sugar can cause many diseases including diabetes and when it goes with fat it can reduce memory. Another tap is Swadhyaya. In Swadhyaya, people read Jain scriptures and become aware of their faults and limitations and try to work around them. When people realize their limitations. They will try to break through those limitations which makes our minds stronger. Another abhyantar tap is dhyana. There are four types of dhyana. Two of them are good : Dharma Dhyana and Shukla dhyana. Dharma dhyana means contemplating on spiritual aspects to get rid of defilements and Shukla dhyana means to be absorbed in the nature of the soul. These help the soul to get liberated.

These tapas are the ways to do Nirjara (eradication of karma), which leads to healthier souls. When we do the austerities with the right faith and right knowledge we can eradicate the karma and soul gets closer to Moksha which is the ultimate goal of all living beings. I fast during paryushan and do tivihar daily during the summer. I also do pratikraman

during paryushan which helps me repent of my mistakes and sins I have done by knowing or unknowingly. This helps me purify my soul.

Our **living values** are Kshama, Vinaya, Saralata, Santosh, Karuna, Maitri, Aparigraha, Ahimsa, and Anekantavada. Having these traits helps you make friends, which will help you learn and have a healthier mindset. It also helps you get rid of stress which makes your body stronger. Rabbi Harold Kushner said that *"friendship makes life easier and richer. It has been proven that people with more friends live longer and are healthier and happier than people who do not have friends."* These values lead us closer to liberation as they help us stop the influx of karma (Samvara), and they also help get rid of karma (Nirjara). These values help overcome our kashaya. For example, Kshama is the opposite of anger, Vinaya is the opposite of ego, saralata is the opposite of deceit, and Santosh is the opposite of greed. These living values can be brought into our day-to-day lives. We can do Karuna, Aparigraha, and Santosh by donating our clothes, food, toys, etc, to charity. We can do kshama and ahimsa by forgiving our siblings when they annoy or hurt us. We can follow saralata by admitting when we broke something, Instead of blaming it on a sibling or friend. If we try to bring these living values into our day-to-day lives. We will be happier, make more friends and be closer to liberation. I try my hardest to follow these values in my day to day life by trying to avoid stepping on grass, bugs and insects. I am trying to be humble and truthful. I am trying not to get angry on my sister when she annoys me. I always appreciate others that help me make friends. Following these values help me be mindful.

**Bhavas:** Per Jainism, our body and mind are tools for a pure soul without a healthy body and mind following religion is very hard. We should focus on Bhavas to enlighten our souls. Bhavas are reflections. There are twelve bhavas. Most of the omniscient reflected on the Bhava before getting omniscience. One of these Bhavas is Anitya Bhava. Anitya Bhava focuses on how everything besides our soul is transitory, and nothing is permanent. This Bhava helps us walk on the path of morality and helps us not be troubled in times of adversity. Anitya Bhava can also help us follow Aparigraha because we learn that all of our possessions are impermanent. Focusing on these



Bhavnas helps us do Samvar and Nirjara. These Bhavnas help bring equanimity and restraints into our lives. Many of these Bhavnas help us get detached from our body, such as Anitya Bhavna, Anyatva Bhavna, and Ashuchi Bhavna. There are also four auxiliary Bhavnas which support the other twelve Bhavna. These Bhavnas are Maitri Bhavna (contemplation of friendship), Pramod Bhavna (contemplation of appreciation), Karuna Bhavna (contemplation of compassion), and Madhyasthya Bhavna (contemplation of neutrality). Maitri Bhavna teaches us to help every living being, Pramod teaches us to respect others, Karuna Bhavna teaches us to help those in need, and Madhyasthya Bhavna teaches us to be detached from others. These Bhavnas can help us get a healthy soul. When we contemplate these Bhavnas we can get rid of stress which helps having a healthy body and mind too.

Following Jain practices can help us obtain a healthier body, mind and soul. Jain practices also teach that the body and mind are temporary and a tool to get rid of karma and help the soul to reach their inherent quality. We should use these Jain values in our day to day lives. Following these Jain values has made me a better person and has helped me connect with others.

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#### Topic - Jainism: Connecting to Future Generations

Winner - Lay Shah (age 14)



*Lay Shah is 16 years old and a sophomore based in Ellicott City, MD. He is also an involved member in his Jain community (JSMW) as a pathshala student, JAB team captain, and active volunteer. Lay's favorite part about pathshala is learning principles that are immensely applicable to the real world, such as seva and Anekantvad.*

Every morning, as the sun paints the sky with shades of gold, I find myself joining my hands together, side by side, to pay homage to the 24 Tirthankaras. The two curved lines on my palms represent the Siddhashila, and the individual creases on my fingers represent each Tirthankar. With a sense of reverence, I gently close my eyes, uttering the serene words of the Navkar Mantra, three times. The melodious words resonate deep within me, as I bow down to the Panch Parmeshthi, hoping that this foremost benediction eradicates all of my sins and negative vibrations.

This simple, yet profound ritual was passed down to me by my parents. From an early age, I have been instilled with the core belief of Ahimsa. Through pathshala classes all the way from nursery, and now going into class G, this is the main fundamental my learning has built off of, and it is the main fundamental I continue to live my life by. When I was young, I learned to treat all living beings with care, whether it be walking fifty extra feet to stay off the grass or transporting insects safely from my home to out in their habitat. Now, through some of the various organizations I am exposed to, I am able to take Ahimsa to another level. For example, I have been able to spend more time doing seva.

Like Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The best way to find yourself is in the service of others." Every time I go to India, I find myself doing many selfless acts, whether it be anonymously donating to the Bhandar (donation box) of a derasar, or waking up early in the morning to feed the cows. Through small activities like these, my grandparents and relatives constantly encourage me to do good things, without the expectation of a reward, as it is the supreme duty of an individual. As you can see, being selfless is a value that has been passed down to me through the encouragement of my elders, and it is still very much prevalent in my life, through the support of pathshala programs, and youth organizations. In order to give back to the community, I have also been fortunate enough to participate in seva. To me, seva is a way of being compassionate for other living beings, without expecting anything in return, and this idea is encapsulated very well by the Jain motto - *live, and help others live*. To live up to this motto, and to follow in the footsteps of my parents and grandparents, I take part in a number of seva events, organized by youth organizations, such as Young Jains of America. Just recently in the 2022 YJA Convention, I, along with over 700 attendees, handcrafted and decorated teddy

bears which brightened the mood of young patients at a children's hospital in Dallas. Additionally, we got the chance to make care packages with basic necessities to help local homeless shelters. Even through more local organizations such as Jain Youth of the Capitol (JYOC), I have been able to successfully partake in seva. Last year, we held an event to prepare over 400 lunch bags containing fruits, snacks, drinks, special messages, and PB&J sandwiches to support the So Others Might Eat (SOME) organization. Every time I perform selfless service, I genuinely feel as if I am doing something meaningful. It brings a sense of fulfillment and purpose to myself, and to those around me.

Another value that has been passed down to me through my grandparents, teachers, and parents is the worship of Tirthankars through various sutras and rituals. From an early age, I learned and memorized many sutras that are recited on different occasions, from the Navkar Mantra, all the way to the Bhaktamar Stotra. I still remember the days when I was so dedicated to learning a new stanza of a sutra, such as Vandittu, every single day, and I ended up revising it in the evening with my grandparents. Although I do not have the time to recite every single sutra nowadays, I still make sure to do daily darshan, while saying a couple of sutras. This way, I am able to revise them frequently, and still perform Chaivisattho (praying and appreciating the qualities of the 24 Tirthankaras). After reviewing the sutras, I always make sure to say them in Pratikraman on special occasions such as Chaumasi Chaudas, or during Paryushan.

In order for Jainism to continue to thrive in the 21st century, it is important to keep these beliefs and values present. One way to do this is to expose children to the Jain religion from an early age. Parents, teachers, and other community members can teach new generations about the core beliefs and values of Jainism through stories, songs, and activities. For this, organizations such as JAINA and YJA play a big role. There are several initiatives that these organizations take throughout the year, and I constantly stay involved with them. One of the most well-known is the Jain Academic Bowl, or JAB, a quiz-bowl style competition on Jain knowledge. I have been doing JAB since 2017, in the biannual JAINA conventions, and even in the 2022 YJA Convention. The JAB curriculum includes a vast amount of material including stutis, philosophy, conduct, and many stories, so it is great to get younger generations

exposed to the material. Now, as I start to age out of being a JAB participant, I will still make sure to be involved, whether it is as a moderator or a coach for our sangh's future JAB teams.

Now, as we enter the era of technology, and as we see the rise of Artificial Intelligence in our daily lives, it is very easy to get distracted with Jainism. However, it has never been easier to transmit knowledge through the resources we have available. While brainstorming for this essay, my curiosity led to me finding an entire English translation of the Bhagavati Sutra, one of the eleven canonical texts that Jainism is based off of. Upon finding this, I was astounded, as this text was produced over 2500 years ago by the disciples of Bhagvan Mahavir. If we can access this information with a simple Google search in 2023, then it should be our first priority to preserve it. Of course, the Bhagavati Sutra is not understandable for your everyday adolescent, which is why it is so important to make easier-to-understand material. In order to do this, YJA has an extensive library of content, through articles, videos, and other online materials. As I am currently on the YJA Education team, I have gotten the opportunity to create and publish lots of content for the YJA Online Pathshala, in hopes of keeping the values and beliefs intact for the upcoming generation. For example, I recently helped create a video on the Bhaktamar Stotra that was published on YJA's YouTube channel. Videos like these allow us to keep the values of learning and memorizing sutras alive, and I aim to make more of these types of videos this year.

Over two millennia ago, our Tirthankars said *Vatthu Sahavo Dhammo*, meaning the intrinsic nature of a thing is its Dharma. Just as the nature of fire is to burn, and the nature of water is to produce a cooling effect, the essential nature of the soul is to attain self-realization and help others on the path to liberation. It is up to us to follow the Jain values and beliefs that have been preached by the Tirthankaras, and to carry forward the values to other living beings through the resources we have available.



# CONVERSATION WITH PHILIP WOLLEN

*Mr. Philip Wollen from Melbourne, Australia, is probably one of most passionate proponents of Ahimsa. He believes that the most beautiful word ever written in any language is **Ahimsa**. He was a keynote speaker at the 2019 JAINA Convention in Los Angeles. He is a prominent member of the animal rights movement. He conducts intervention programs to rescue abused animals and funds outreach programs that promote animal welfare and abstinence. He is champion of Veganism and calls himself as "Ahimsan". We wanted to catch up with Mr. Wollen to find out what he meant by being an Ahimsan and learn more about him and his current activities. Due to his busy schedule, we were not able to talk with him. Hence, one of editors, Dhruvi Rathi, sent him a few questions and we are very thankful to Mr. Wollen for taking the time to reply in detail answers. Here are excerpts from his thought-provoking responses.*

## 1. You refer to yourself as an Ahimsan. Please share what inspired you to coin this word?

Firstly, a confession. I have stolen something from you. It is not a Tangible Asset. It is more valuable than all the wealth of King Croesus. I stole a word. "Ahimsa".

30 years ago, I coined a new noun, describing myself as "Ahimsan." I did so because people constantly asked me "What are you?" The unspoken question was "What religion do you practice", pigeonholing me into their own narrow world view. Since then, I have used that word "Ahimsa" every single day in a speech, interview, or article. It has taken over my life. And it won't end until the day I cease to draw breath.



I am proudly "Ahimsan". I think Buddha is beautiful and Berlusconi was a brute. I am rejuvenated by Tagore and repulsed by Trump. I believe in Democracy. So, I treat everybody equally brusquely! I am a card-carrying Capitalist who believes in safety-nets for the poor and compassion for the powerless. With Camus in my ears, Kafka in my fears, Orwell in my nightmares, "Ahimsa" in my heart, Gandhi on my mind, I am a Marxist, in the mould of Groucho!

## 2. As a big champion for Veganism, how does it grant the "Peace Dividend" to you?

Facts matter and consequences must be calibrated. Livestock releases more greenhouse gas pollution and

warming than all of transport combined; cars, trains, planes, buses, and ships. The Himalayan ice fields, correctly called the 3rd pole, irrigate half the world's population through the Ganges, the Indus, Brahmaputra, Yangtze, Irrawaddy, Mekong, and Yellow Rivers. These glaciers are melting fast. The melting Siberian permafrost is now a ticking time bomb. When it releases its sequestered gas, we face an existential threat of our own making.

I delivered this message in the Rajiv Gandhi Centre to 2,000 successful Indian entrepreneurs in New Delhi, including Amartya Sen, India's Nobel Prize winner in Economics. I mentioned to Mohammad Younis after he won the Nobel Peace Prize that all the good he had done with Grameen Bank would vanish when Bangladesh drowns; to say nothing about Manila, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok.

We freak out when 1,000 refugees arrive on our shores. Imagine greenhouse gases hitting 500 parts per million. Or a 3-degree temperature rise, creating 100 million eco-refugees. Admiral Denny McGinn, Chief of US Warfighting Requirements said, "We have learned that nations will raid and invade, long before they starve".

This calamity will reshape the geopolitical landscape forever. We are facing the perfect storm. If any nation had developed weapons that could wreak such havoc on the planet, we would launch a pre-emptive military strike and bomb it back into the Bronze Age. But we can't. Because it is not a rogue state. It is an industry. Meat. The good news is we don't have to bomb it. We can just stop buying it.

George Bush was wrong. The Axis of Evil doesn't run through Iraq, or Iran or North Korea. It runs through our dining tables. Weapons of Mass Destruction are our knives and forks. And increasingly nowadays, our chopsticks.

I addressed the Parliament of World Religions. "The Peace Map is drawn on a menu. Peace is not just the absence of war. It is the presence of Justice. Justice must be blind to race, colour, religion AND to species.



If it is not blind, it will be used as a weapon of terror. And there is unimaginable terror in those ghastly gulags we call slaughterhouses, where, as Lord Acton said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely".

The Nobel Laureate, Leo Tolstoy wrote: "As long as there are slaughterhouses, there will be battlefields." It was the blood of animals that first stained our weapons. Talking of Peace while killing animals is like loving literature and burning books. They are mutually exclusive ideas. They are incompatible in the same way that Science is incompatible with the Flat Earth Society.

A peaceful and sustainable future is possible. But ONLY if it is Ahimsan.

**3. In your talk on the Swiss knife approach for civilization in ISJS lecture series, you mentioned: "When we suffer, we suffer as equals" and "Ahimsa rearranges the furniture of the mind. Could you elaborate on it?"**

I heard the screams of my dying father as his body was ravaged by the cancers that killed him. And I realised I had heard those screams before.

In the slaughterhouse, on the cattle ships to the Middle East and the dying mother whale as a harpoon explodes in her brain as she calls out to her calf. Their cries were the cries of my father. They were identical. I discovered when we suffer, we suffer as equals. And in their capacity to suffer, a dog is a pig is a bear is a boy.

The horror of everyday life affects me profoundly. I now see previously mundane events through the Ahimsan prism of animal cruelty. Passing a crowded restaurant, knowing it conceals a smorgasbord of murderous opportunities. Seeing an attractive woman at the ballet and being repulsed by her fur coat. Knowing that every butcher shop is a broker of body parts from murder victims.

The astrophysicist Carl Sagan's photograph from the Voyager Spacecraft shows "Planet Earth", an insignificant speck in Space, a "mote of dust", lost in a cloud of galaxies. He described it as "Our beautiful Home. Our Pale Blue Dot. Suspended on a Sunbeam". What an arresting, captivating, enchanting thought! Our Pale Blue dot. Our Home. Suspended on a Sunbeam.

Well, today, on our beautiful home, humans comprise 30% of the biomass of land animals. Animals in slaughterhouses account for 66%. And Wild animals living freely in nature are decimated down to a mere 4%. And 70% of all birds, descendants of the

dinosaurs, are in cages awaiting slaughter. We have turned Carl Sagan's "Beautiful Blue Planet Earth" into "Bloodstained Planet Slaughterhouse".

1 billion people today are hungry. 20 million people will die from malnutrition. Cutting meat by only 10% will feed 100 million people and eliminating meat will end malnutrition forever. Poor countries sell their grain to the West for hard currency while their own children starve in their arms. And the West feeds it to livestock. So we can eat a steak? I am not the only one who sees this as a crime.

Every morsel of meat we eat is slapping the tear-stained face of a hungry child. If everyone ate a Western diet, we would need 2 Planet Earths to feed us. We only have one. And she is dying. The earth can produce enough food for everyone's need. But not enough for everyone's greed.

The oceans are dying in our time. By the next generation, all our fisheries will be dead, the lungs and the arteries of the earth. Oceans sequester more CO<sub>2</sub> than all the forests of the world combined. Every second breath of oxygen we inhale, is produced in the ocean. But we use the ocean as a Private Pantry and a Public Toilet. The Pacific Gyre is so full of plastic, junk, and human faeces, it has created a floating footprint bigger than India.

10,000 entire species are wiped out every year because of the actions of one species. We now face the 6th mass extinction in cosmological history. If any other organism did this, a biologist would call it a virus. It is a crime of unimaginable proportions.

So, I say. "Ahimsa" is the Swiss Army Knife of a civilized and sustainable future. One instrument solves our ethical, economic, environmental, water, health problems - and ends animal cruelty forever.

Poring over books in my library, I discover new ways of seeing our place in the Universe. The first great "Illumination" was by Galileo and Copernicus. It told us **WHERE** we lived in the heliocentric Solar System. But it was basically about Real Estate. Location. Location. Location. The Second was Charles Darwin. He showed us **HOW** we got here. All of us. From the humble street sweeper to the King of England. We are kin. To each other, including our cousins from other species.

But today, I say with conviction. There is a "Third Illumination", the greatest of "Illumination" all. And that is AHIMSA. It shows us **HOW** we should live. Without knowing **how** to live, it does not matter **where** we live or **how** we got here. Ahimsa earns us the right to be here in the first place.

The pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus's notion of "arche", the origin of a principle from which all other ideas are derived. I see "Ahimsa" is the "arche" from which all that is noble in the human spirit is born. Ahimsa is our friend. It is our future. It is the only future worth having. After Ahimsa, everything else is just commentary. Without Ahimsa, our lives will be Hobbesian, "solitary, short, poor, nasty, and brutish".

In a world without Ahimsa, I dread the words of the poet John Whittier.

"Of all words of tongue and pen,  
The saddest are "It might have been."

#### **4. What is the Winsome Constance Kindness project?**

It is a mask to conceal my identity, and the umbrella under which my "Ahimsan" projects are sheltered. I support some 500 projects in 40 countries: promoting veganism, delivering speeches on non-violence, and helping the victims directly.

I support children, animals, & the environment with schools, orphanages, animal protection, shelters, clinics, medicines, biogas plants, ambulances, borewells, films, an incubator for NGOs, sponsoring a married vegan couple (one a cancer survivor) to run one marathon a day for 366 consecutive days around Australia's coast, I have funded marine vessels, whale & seal rescue centres, primate sanctuaries, food, medicines, disaster relief, help the homeless, victims of domestic violence, the arts, health, and undercover anti-poaching operations on land and at sea.

I award the annual Kindness Medal & Cash Prize. Past recipients include Sir David Attenborough (UK), Dr Professor T. Colin Campbell (USA), Dr Ian Gawler OAM (Australia), Dr Jane Goodall DBE (United Kingdom), Smt Maneka Gandhi MP (India), Captain Paul Watson (USA), Dr Jill Robinson MBE (China), Dr Christine Townend (Australia), Captain Peter Hammarstedt (Sweden), Mr Christopher DeRose (USA), Rev. Dr Andrew Linzey (Oxford), Mr Damien Mander (Zimbabwe), Sri Pradeep Kumar Nath (India), Dr Chinny Krishna (India), Dr Sailesh Rao (USA), Dr Neal Barnard (USA) and many others.

#### **5. Please share in your view an Ahimsan initiative that the Jain community can take forward.**

The Jains are in a perfect position to create a paradigm shift, changing the zeitgeist for the better.

An "Ahimsan Movement" is a broad church. Everyone is welcome. It can change the world in one generation. Their "Ahimsan" diet alone would massively reduce our crippling health budget deficits, land clearing and deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, hypoxic

dead zones in the oceans, and the egregious cruelty to innocent animals.

And "non-violence" to any living being includes oneself. Our propensity for self-harm, particularly in the rich West, and among young males, would be unthinkable to anyone with an "Ahimsan" mindset. And it is not limited to deeds of physical violence but includes violent words and thoughts as well.

I am not a Jain, Buddhist, or Hindu. But I can say with confidence. Ahimsa is the Perfect Paradigm for efficient resource allocation. The "Highest and Best Use" of what I define as our Five Dwindling Finite Resources. Air, Land, Water, Time & Capital.

Imagine a new idea called the "Ahimsan Movement". And assume only 1 in 10 humans may follow the "Ahimsan" doctrine. I have calculated that this decision alone would save the lives of Two Trillion sentient living beings over the lifetime of a single child born in the West today. This is not a trivial number! If Ahimsa became universal, it not only saves the world. It gives us the right to share it.

I go further. What \$ value would a rational, civilized world place on the Ahimsan Movement, including all the environmental, economic, ethical, and health benefits it provided? Is there one nation, religion, organisation, or individual who would NOT want to be a member of this Ahimsan family? The impact would be incalculable.

This "Ahimsan Movement" would be a worthy recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. I hope the "Ahimsan" ethos will ignite a fire in the hearts of every human being on the planet. It is a precious gift, a priceless key to locked doors of secret rooms, in your own castle. Ahimsa rearranges the furniture of your mind.

I have visited cathedrals, temples, mosques, shrines around the world. These edifices are a source of spiritual nourishment, on every-days and holy days, in moments of joy and in sorrow, and fearful times of war, pandemics, flood, fire, drought and doubt. That is the special quality of all sacred sites. What vile person would dare to smash the Black Stone in the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the most revered site in Islam? Or chip souvenirs off the Meenakshi Temple sculptures in Madurai, dedicated by Hindus to Lord Shiva? Or have a barbecue at the Manilakshmi Tirth, so beloved by the Jains?

No decent human being would even contemplate committing such an atrocity. But the same human beings have no hesitation in vandalising, trashing the greatest "cathedrals" temples and wonders of the natural world. Our oceans, rivers, and lakes; our mountains, valleys, and rainforests; our air, aquifers,

and glaciers. The consequence of this barbarism will be dire, indiscriminate, and terminal. And as usual, the innocent, the powerless, will suffer first and the most.

Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the Manhattan Project watched the Trinity nuclear test in horror and quoted the Bhagavad-Gita. "Now I am become Death, Destroyer of worlds". He wrote: "The physicists have known sin, and this is knowledge they cannot lose. They knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent."

Our lifestyles are building our own Manhattan Project, wreaking more destruction than the atomic bomb every year. These acts could never be done by a true and faithful "Ahimsan".

Abraham Lincoln's address to Congress before signing the Emancipation Proclamation against slavery reads: "We shall nobly save the Last Best Hope of earth. It is plain, peaceful, generous, and just. If it is followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless". "Ahimsa" resonates deeply in me. It is our "Last and Best" hope.

#### **6. As a champion of Ahimsa, Reduction of Greed, and Speaking the Truth, you follow the Anuvrats of a practicing Jain - Ahimsa, Aparigraha and Satya. Would you say Jainism is a source of inspiration for you?**

You give me more credit than I deserve. I was once generously described as an "Accidental Jain". I came late to the party. I had read and travelled widely, learning important lessons along the way, embracing the idea of "Ahimsa" before I had ever heard the term.

Rejecting "Greed" was easy. I knew that "Greed is not good" despite Gordon Gecko. And I understood Epicurus. If you want to increase a man's share of happiness, do not increase his possessions. Simply decrease his desires. And "Telling the truth" was drummed into us as teenage Boy Scouts. How was I to know that it was also the basis of Gandhi's "Satyagraha"?

I learned these truths over a long period of time. It was joyfully reassuring to discover that the Jains knew it earlier and expressed it better! I said to a group of young Jain men in California. "I envy you. You learned things in your mother's arms that I had to learn from experience. Late to the party, indeed".

The surprised Monsieur Jourdain says in Molière's, The Bourgeois Gentleman. "Well, what about that! These forty years I've been speaking in prose without knowing it!" So, I was pleasantly surprised that my cherished values, amorphous as they may be, were

already well documented in Jain history. I was actually practicing, clumsily perhaps, without knowing it, some aspects of the Jain teachings. But the Jain principle plays a bigger role globally than first meets the eye.

#### **7. How do you apply Ahimsa in your daily life besides being a Vegan?**

Apart from actively supporting some 500 Ahimsan projects in 40 countries, I find that "Ahimsa" unconsciously informs my daily life.

Playing golf, and noticing ants behind the ball on the fairway, I take a penalty rather than risk injuring them; feeding families of possums and hundreds of birds in my garden; secreting flat water bowls under the bushes in the park for insects, birds and butterflies, rejuvenating micro ecosystems during the baking hot cauldrons of Australian summers; asking shop assistants if the apparel uses leather or wool. Frequently in the public eye, I wear my "Ahimsa" jacket whenever possible. I have noticed that it affects the way I behave and feel; more conscious, more gracious, polite and respectful. I imagine that Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists with the bindi, Sikhs with turbans, Muslims with taqiyahs, and Jews with yarmulkes share my feelings!

#### **8. Do you have anything that you would like to share with our readers?**

I have championed "Ahimsa" in thousands of articles and speeches in Parliaments, Congresses, conventions, and universities on every continent. This is my constant refrain. "The most beautiful word ever written, at any time, in any language, in any country at any time in human history came from India. Ahimsa. Non-Violence to any living being".

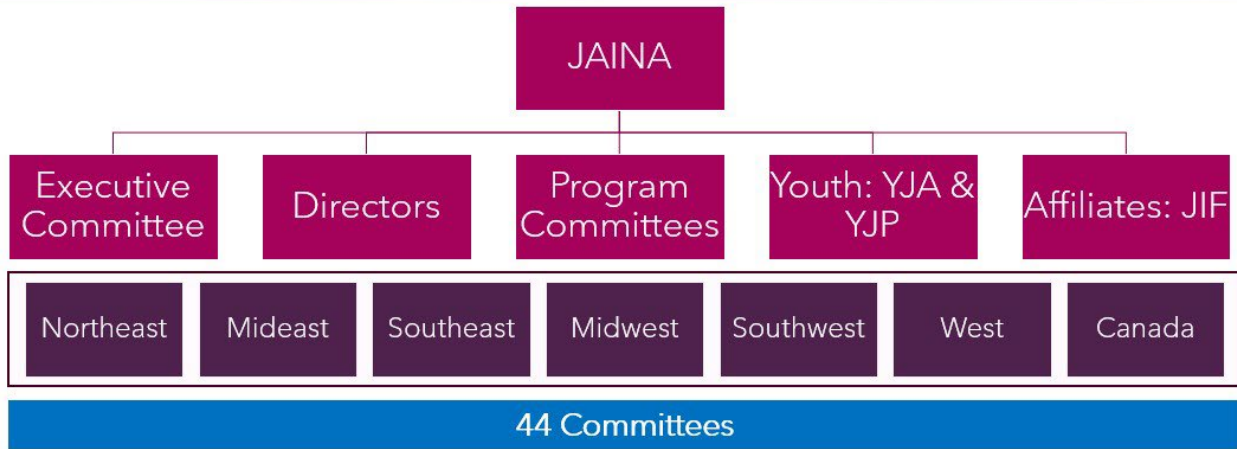
It is beautiful not because it describes our nationality, our politics, our religion, our diet, or our lifestyle. But because it describes our CHARACTER. It says we oppose violence wherever it occurs. I encourage audiences to practice the "Ahimsan" principle even though most of them are not Jain. Indeed, the Jain community is a welcome soulmate in the rapidly growing global vegan movement.

"The "Ahimsan Movement" will be the greatest Social Justice issue since the dawn of writing, 6,000 years ago in Mesopotamia. It is a revolutionary event more powerful than the Industrial Revolution, The Reformation, the Hubble telescope, or anything conceived by Galileo, Copernicus, Einstein, Darwin, or Freud...

Because it protects the most precious of all things: LIFE !!



# JAINA ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE



## JAINA Committees

