

Young Minds



FEATURED ARTICLES:

Love and Compassion
by Houston Kraft

Unveiling Myself
by Kriti Shah

&

*NOT JUST CHUTNEY
SANDWICHES:*
Retreat Reflections

*LR SPOTLIGHTS, RECIPES,
and PHOTOS*

September 2017

A YOUNG JAINS of
AMERICA PUBLICATION

REFLECTIONS
on Paryushan,
school, life,
and more!

Photo caption: Vardhaman (Mahavir Bhagwan) performing
Samayik before renouncing his worldly life.

WELCOME!

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It is a friend's duty that he does not leave his friend in a difficult position but provide intimacy and support to him. In difficulty who leaves is a false and the one not quitting is a true friend.

- Acharya Mahapragya
Jain Scholar
(1920-2010)

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CO-CHAIRS

Avish Jain & Hetali Lodaya | EMAIL: chairs@yja.org



Jai Jinendra Readers,

As our Board says goodbye, we're reflecting on the wealth of experiences we've had this year - and the experiences we hope YJA has been able to bring to you, our members. Inside these pages, hear from prior convention speakers, like Houston Kraft; learn about a YJA member's struggle with mental illness and how engaging with the Jain community helped her find a purpose and place; and read reflections on Paryushan, managing stress, and how to bring non-violence and compassion to our day-to-day environments. These diverse stories reflect one of the best things about YJA - even though we all come from different backgrounds, this is a space where we get to come together and learn from each other!

We hope that you will find ways to keep making YJA a

part of your life this upcoming year - from events to educational programs to the 2018 YJA Convention, there's a lot in store! Even though our Board term is ending, we're excited to keep engaging with YJA and meeting new people. Whether at a local event, a retreat, online on YJA Forums, or at #YJA18 in Chicago next summer, we'll definitely see you around sometime soon.

With #yjalove,

Avish Jain and Hetali Lodaya
Co-Chairs, 2016-2017

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JAINA

YJA is the youth arm of JAINA.

Gunvant Shah - President

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NAVKAR MANTRA

Ṇamō arihantāṇaṃ

Ṇamō siddhāṇaṃ

Ṇamō āyariyāṇaṃ

Ṇamō uvajjhāyāṇaṃ

Ṇamō lōē savva sāhūṇaṃ

Ēsōpañchaṇamōkkārō,

savvapāvappaṇāsaṇō

Maṅgalā ṇaṃ ca savvēsiṃ,

paḍamama havaī maṅgalaṃ

णमो अरिहंताणं

णमो सिद्धाणं

णमो आयरियाणं

णमो उवज्झायाणं

णमो लोए सव्व साहू

एसोपंचणमोक्कारो,

सव्वपावप्पणासणो

मंगला णं च सव्वेसिं

पडमम हवई मंगलं

To Arhats, the perfect souls embodied,
possessed of infinite cognition, knowl-
edge, happiness, and power;

To Siddhas, the perfect souls in Nirvana,
formless and bodiless, free from all kar-
mic attachment;

To Acharyas, the masters of adepts in
spirituality;

To Upadhyayas, the adepts, guiding the
scholar-ascetics, and

To all Sadhus, the ascetics devoted to
the contemplation of Self,

I
Make obeisance humble
and

Place at their worshipful feet
this

Feeble exposition of their profound
teaching.

-- adapted from C.R. Jain



Michchhami Dukkadam To All

Khämemi Savve Jivä,
Savve Jivä Khamantu Me
Mi Mitti Me Savva bhuesu,
Veram majjham na Kenai.
Michchami Dukkadam

खम्मामसिक्व जीवेषु सक्वे जीवा खमन्तु मे,
मत्ति मे सक्व भू ए सू वैरम् मज्झणम् केण इ

सब जीवों को मै क्षमा करता हूँ, सब जीव मुझे
क्षमा करे सब जीवों से मेरा मैत्री भाव रहे,
किसी से वैर-भाव नहीं रहे

**I forgive all living beings.
May all souls forgive me,
I am on friendly terms with all,
I have no animosity toward any
soul.
May all my faults be dissolved.**



परस्परपग्रहो जीवानाम्

About photo

Steps leading up to the Palitana Tirth, or pilgrimage place, taken by Neehaar Gandhi in July 2017. There are 3500 steps to the main complex, which holds over 800 temples.

The universe is not for man alone, but is a theater of evolution for all living beings. Live and let live is its guiding principle.
Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah - Non-injury is the highest religion.

- Virchand Gandhi
Jain Scholar
(1864-1901)

from the EDITOR



Jai Jinendra everyone,

This was the first year that I have truly been a part of YJA's Executive Board, and it's changed my life. I didn't think one year would pass by this quickly, but as the cliché goes, time passes by when you're having fun.

It's not easy for many of us to write, and this is because even though we have thousands of thoughts a day, writing is about taking a few thoughts and developing them into something that has great significance to you. To all of the writers who were able to achieve this and contribute to every release that we put out, thank you. For me, being on the board was two things: working with my fellow board members, and working with myself on Young Minds. When it came to the latter, I read every single article/post/word written into Young Minds. In reading articles on meditation, politics, Ahimsa (अहिंसा), what struck out to me most was that there are men and women of all ages that find a way to apply Jainism to their daily lives in their own way. I was astounded by

this diversity, and it showed me that even in this 21st century in a religion with less than 10 million adherents, there is no shortage of ideas or exposure to Jainism. In the same way that Young Minds is only a vehicle (one of many) to spread the ideas of fellow Jains, the life that you and I are in is only a medium for the soul to exist. It is up to us to continue our own spiritual journey.

I have only really been a part of YJA/JAINA for the past 2 years, other than a YJA convention back in 2008. If you are thinking about getting involved in YJA, don't hesitate and please apply or contact a board member. To work with different Jains across the country for a common interest was one of the best experiences I've had. We traveled across the country to meet each other, and not only did we have fun, we were able to achieve so much this year. We have had more YJA retreats, released education material, and developed an online platform called YJA Forums for people to talk about Jainism, to name a few. I look forward to seeing what happens in the next year.

It's finally that time of the year for me to say goodbye. I unfortunately won't be a part of next year's board, since medical school is a huge commitment and I have to focus in school. However, I can say for sure that I will be back at some point in the future and I look forward to contributing to YJA once more.

Looking forward to seeing you all at a future YJA convention!

Micchami Dukkadam,

Salil Ojha

Director of Publications, 2016-2017

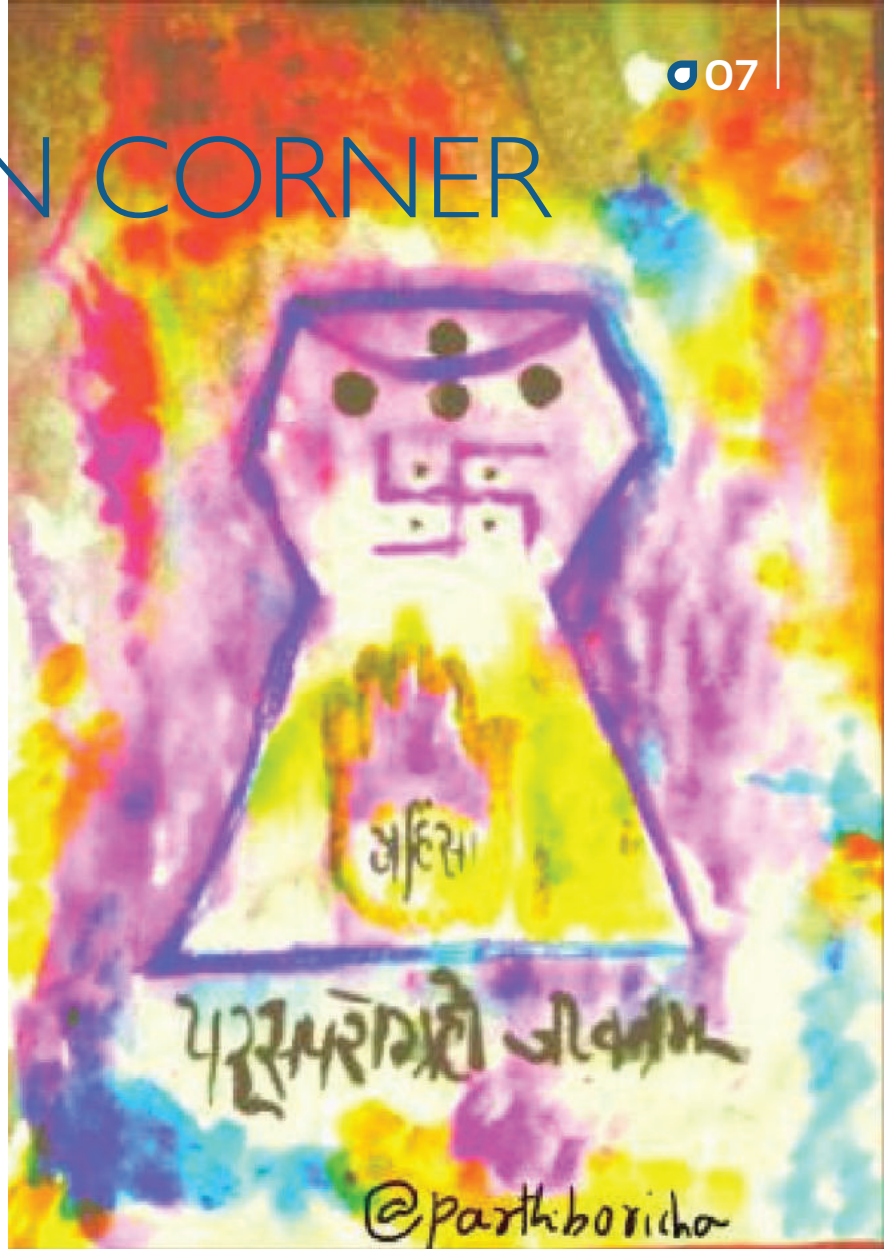
EDUCATION CORNER

ART CONTEST

Congratulations to the winner of this year's YJA Pathshala Art Contest, Parth Boricha!

In his own words, he describes his art:

"The different watercolors outside the Jain emblem are symbolic of the coexistence of the 9 tattvas, the 4 gatis and their interaction with each other, as well as the freedom of different gatis to change their state depending on the karma they accumulate. The void space represents the infinite nature of moksha."



yjapathshala



See the August mini-release on Bhagwan Mahavir (including a 2-part story in podcast form), as well as lessons on Jiv in Jainism and Jain Cosmology, at yja.org/pathshala!



YJA Pathshala

Episode 5 (Part 1) - "The Afflictions of Sulpani"

SOU

Share

LOVE AND COMPASSION

BY HOUSTON KRAFT

Kindness is a practice.

About 6 years ago, I was on a plane next to a woman who was relentlessly energetic and fidgety. I was tired and wanted to take a nap. But before I could go into “ignore mode,” she tapped me on the shoulder to introduce herself.

“Hi, my name is Helga!”

We got to talking and eventually it came up that I had started an organization in high school called R.A.K.E. (Random Acts of Kindness, Etc.). As I described what we did, Helga got very serious and told me that she thought “there was nothing more important in the world than Kindness.” I was curious why she was so passionate and, as the plane took off, she dove into a story about the last time she had flown; it was 3 years past and she was en route to Arizona because she had gotten sudden news her Dad’s health was on the decline. Just as the plane was about to depart to Phoenix, her father’s physician called to inform her that her dad had rather suddenly passed away. For the 3 hour plane ride, she sat in stunned silence around strangers.

When she arrived to the airport in Arizona, she walked to the nearest wall, sat down, and cried.

And here is the part I’ll never forget about Helga’s story: For 2 hours she sat and wept while thousands walked around in the airport. Helga looked at me and said, “Houston, not a single person stopped and asked if I was okay that day. Not one person asked how they could help. Not one person put their hand on my shoulder and said, ‘Is there anything I can do.’ Not one person. It was that day that I realized how much we need each other. It was that day I realized that Kindness Isn’t Normal.”

Kindness Isn’t Normal. That has stuck with me all these years - especially now that I work in with schools, events, and businesses nationwide speaking about compassion, kindness, empathy, and love. I’m reminded all the time that, for many of us, Kindness is NOT usually our default setting. We spend so much



time worrying about our problems, our lives, our comfort, our insecurities, getting to our flight - that we walk by or ignore people in need of Kindness every day. I'm oftentimes so worried about ME that I'm really bad at taking care of YOU.

When I had the opportunity to speak at the 2016 YJA Convention, I was thrilled to be introduced to the world of Jainism. My deepest fascination was in the concept of Ahimsa - the pursuit of non-violence in heart and mind. And, to me, it is exactly that - a pursuit! A constant striving for active non-violence.

When non-violence is pursued, it means that our compassion is proactive and not just reactive. It means that we must seek opportunities for kindness with the deep belief that they are available to us everywhere we go at nearly any time of day. That we must search for them and not just wait until a moment of convenience or comfort to give the gift of compassion. It requires of us honest self-reflection - the grinding realization that kindness goes against our natural selfishness and that we must choose against our feelings of fear or discomfort or insecurity to create non-violence in the world by being love.

I'm always on the lookout for Helgas - for the little opportunities that surround me every day to practice making Kindness my default setting.

May we all be tenacious, relentless, and hopeful in our pursuit of a more compassion heart, mind, and world. In the service of people like Helga, let's work to make Kindness normal.



STRESS LESS USING JAINISM

EXERCISES FOR MIND, BODY AND SOUL

BY APURVA BHANSALI

As a father of two high school teenagers (a senior and a sophomore), I have seen firsthand the stresses that our Jain youth face today. Our family is not alone. I have had the privilege of being a speaker at every YJA convention dating back to the 2010 convention in New Jersey. I still remember that moment in my first lecture when I asked an impromptu question to the audience – “how many of you know someone that has committed suicide?” I was expecting maybe one or two people to raise their hands, and so I was stunned when I saw almost every hand in the room go up. I have reflected on that moment many times. Unlike a lot of adults in my generation, I was born and raised in America and so I always felt that I understood what it was like to grow up, not only as an Indian, but also as a Jain in the United States. But I realized quickly that the pressures put on youth in America today are very different than they were in the 80’s and 90’s.



These modern-day stresses are found in all aspects of your lives. In high school, your course work is highly accelerated with a de-facto expectation from your parents that one or two years of AP college credits need to be completed before graduating. The cost and investment of college today brings on the tremendous pressure from your parents to get a very good job and to start earning quickly. In relationships, with arranged marriages becoming less common, you often find it very frustrating to meet new people with the same values you share and often you have no parental experience to lean on. In general, there is just a tremendous expectation to be “successful” in all aspects of life because it seems like there are unending comparisons being made between you and your peers.

Let’s face it, none of these pressures are going to go away. So, the question really is - can we use Jainism to help us manage these pressures. I’m guessing very few people came out of their Pathshala class on any given Sunday feeling less stressed about the big math test that they needed to study for the next day. We all know that the goal of Jainism is to go to Moksha – the place where there is eternal happiness and peace. So, it only makes sense that Jainism can

teach us how to help us reduce our stress in our daily lives as we progress toward Moksha.

What is stress?

Before we can see how Jainism can help us reduce stress in our daily lives, we must first really understand this feeling we call “stress”. A very practical definition of stress is that feeling we get when we are not in control of the outcome of a given situation. In other words, stress happens when we feel that the expectations we have set for a certain situation cannot be met.

Take the example of two students studying for the a math exam. The first student is studying hard, but is not confident that he will do well on the exam and thus feels stressed out because he does not feel in control of being able to get a good grade on the test. The second student however, feels that he has a great grasp on the material and is confident and happy going into the exam. Even though both students studied the same material and are going to take the same exam, their emotions are very different due to how much they feel in control over the outcome.

Take another example of a young man who has a girlfriend but has not told his parents. He feels stressed over the situation, because he believes that his parents will not approve and that there is nothing he can tell them that will make them happy about the situation. He is constantly worrying and fearing that his parents will find out. At the root of the stress is the young man’s feeling that he has no control over the situation and the ability to get his parents approval.

But now imagine how his emotions would change if he was told that his parents found out about his girlfriend and that they are actually very happy and understanding. That young man’s stress would immediately go away and he would be rushing to meet his parents and talk to them, because he knows the outcome of the situation is going to meet his expectations. When we introspect on the stressful situations in our lives, we can see that the stress is not caused by the actual situation or the persons involved, it is caused by our own expectation to see our desired outcome from that situation.

Real world Karma theory

Jainism teaches us that all of the situations that arise in our lives are a result of the karmas that we have previously accumulated. Our reactions to those situations determine if we create a new karma that is positive (Punya) or negative (Paap). But to reach Moksha, we have to stop the acquisition of new karma and

this can only happen if our reaction to any situation is neutral or like a “witness”. Of course, to remain in this state of neutral emotion all the time is very hard and that is why Moksha is so hard to attain. In fact, it took Mahavir Bhagwan twelve years of meditation to get to this state of neutral emotion.

The good news is that we can pull from this basic karma theory and apply the concept to our daily lives to achieve mental peace and happiness. While it may be very hard to have neutral emotions to every situation in our lives, we can work on learning to be “accepting” of each situation in our lives. If we can be accepting of the situation we are in, then we are no longer desiring a certain outcome from that situation. We have already established that stress is caused by having an expectation of a desired outcome from any situation we are in. So therefore, if we are accepting of the situation, we no longer have an expectation of a desired outcome and our stress is reduced.

Let’s again take the example of the first student who is stressed out while studying for the big test. We already determined that his stress is due to the fact that he has an expectation to do well on the test, but he is not confident that he can achieve that outcome. However, if this student changes his mind set and tells himself that he will be accepting of the outcome, good or bad, then he will find himself with less stress because he is truly okay with the work he has put into studying.

The young man who is stressed about the situation with his girlfriend, can also become happier by accepting the outcome, again good or bad, once he tells his parents. If he can truly get to a point where he is ready to accept the outcome, he will be very confident when he talks to his parents. Even if the outcome is not good, he will be ready to move forward to work on a solution, even if that may take some time. I’m sure at this point you are thinking, it is really not that easy to be accepting of these stressful situations. Again, we can turn to Jainism to give us some techniques on how to train ourselves to be more accepting of all situations in our lives.

Training ourselves to be more accepting

Learning to be more accepting of all the situations in our lives is really an exercise in training our minds. Our natural tendency is to have our expectations control our mind and emotions, but we need to train ourselves so that it naturally becomes the other way around – our minds need to be in control of our expectations and emotions. Just like we go to the gym to train our body, Jainism shows us exercises and techniques to train our mind. Let’s look at two of



A meditative sunrise at the Mid-West Retreat house.

these techniques that are very easy to do, meditation and yoga.

Meditation is an exercise that trains our mind to be aware of our thoughts and emotions. If we can become more aware of our thoughts and emotions, then when a stressful situation occurs, our mind will be ready to say, “I’m aware of this situation and I am ready to be more accepting of the outcome”. Once you start meditation, you quickly realize how untrained your mind really is.

Try this exercise: sit in a comfortable, quiet place with your eyes closed. Now, just try to count each one of your breaths. Watch the breath come in and out of your nose, and count one complete inhale and exhale cycle as one breath. Set a timer on your phone for 5 minutes and end the practice when the timer goes off.

Were you able to stay focused on your breath for the whole 5 minutes? For most people, after a few breath cycles, the mind will wander – you will start thinking about what you need to do later in the day, or you will recall something that happened earlier in the day, etc. At some point, you may realize that you have actually stopped counting your breath cycles, and hopefully you will try to refocus and start counting your breaths again. If you continue this practice, extending the time as you get better, you will find that you have more control over your mind and your approach to all stressful situations will change dramatically. Remember, it was the mastery of art of meditation over 12 years that allowed Mahavir Bhagwan to achieve Moksha.



YJA Retreat attendees try out some yoga poses.

The second technique is yoga. If you go to the gym, you can definitely find a yoga class for stretching and exercise. However, our ancient scriptures teach us that yoga is actually a spiritual practice designed to help us focus our minds while also keeping our bodies healthy so we can progress in our spiritual practice. In a good yoga practice, you will find the instructor constantly flowing the yoga positions (asanas) along with the breath. They will instruct you to move to a certain position on an inhale or exhale. The yogis who devised these practices intended for your mind to focus on your breath (like you do in meditation) with each movement of the body. So, while exercising the body, each yoga asana, if done properly, is actually designed to exercise the mind as well. If you can't go to a yoga class, then just go online and learn the Surya Namaskar yoga flow. This one flow will give you everything you need and can be done easily at home in a few minutes each morning.

Find the time

We always hear people say that you have to find the time to exercise your body. In high school, you may play some sports, and as you get older you may try to go to gym more regularly. Likewise, Jainism asks us to find the time to exercise our mind so that we can find more peace in our stressful lives. The stresses in your life will only increase as you get older. Just like saving for retirement, the earlier you start your spiritual practices, the more your mind will be ready to take on all the challenges life will throw at you, making your life more enjoyable and happy – a little like having a slice of Moksha on Earth.

FIGHTING SICKNESS LIKE A JAIN

PARALLELS OF JAINISM AND NATUROPATHY

BY SPARSH JAIN

"The external mystery of the world is its intelligibility. True religion fastens to this element of intelligibility and creates a system of thought and action which leads to true harmony and bliss. And it is indeed so with Jainism."

- ALBERT EINSTEIN



Living life and following the lifestyle practices of a Jain not only gives one spiritual gratification, but also acts as the best way to live healthy and disease-free. The ideologies of Jainism run parallel to the ideologies of Naturopathy and prove to be useful to preserve a healthy body that fosters the mind and instigates healthy thinking, which in turn forms the basis of shedding karmas to attain eternal bliss. It's common knowledge that following Jainism paves way for purity of health and thought. Not only does it help to prevent diseases, it also contributes towards speedy recovery from major and minor illnesses.

The practice of Ahimsa is the true essence of Jainism. Jain principles teach that our universe is filled with a profusion of life and that every living organism is of importance and that any harm, even unintentional caused to any organism affects the order of the entire universe.

We have come a long way – from limiting consumption of dairy products to even becoming vegan. We understand that any harm caused to animals, directly or indirectly is unacceptable. But when it comes to illness, how do we not bat an eye before taking medicine? We're aware that medicines undergo animal testing to check for toxicity levels, and yet we continue to consume medicine? If you think that there is no other alternative, think again. I'd like to provide a very simple example about water fasting – a marvelous technique that we practice, both in Jainism and Naturopathy.

A "Fast" Recovery

Nature cure is deep-rooted on the understanding that the human body is made of 5 elements – earth, water, fire, air and space. If it is made up of these 5 elements, then why can't these elements be used for self-healing and cure of diseases? Take this example – if you have a tear in your cotton shirt, will you use

wool, or polyester to stitch that tear? Or would you use cotton to stitch the cotton shirt? It is this rudimentary belief along with the self-healing properties of the human body that leads to the science of nature cure or Naturopathy.

In Jainism, water fast is done to purify the soul of past karma and for attaining salvation (jainworld). This means that one only consumes water and refrains from eating anything. Ancient medical systems acknowledged the significance of fasting for sustaining good health and for curing illnesses. It was observed that animals seldom get sick because they live on natural food and resources. Even if some animals do get sick, they resort to fasting to cure themselves (Patenaude, 2009). Similarly, this principle can be applied to the human body too. When the body is resting, specifically during sleep, it is mending and healing itself. Water fasting is a great way to boost this rest.

Our entire digestive system works continuously to process the food we eat. During water fasting, we give a break to the digestive system. It is imperative to understand that roughly 30% of the human body's energy is used solely by the digestive system. During water fasting, this energy becomes available and re-directs itself to perform necessary repair work in the body.

Toxins are formed in the body due to improper digestion and food habits. These toxins are then transported to the various organs through our blood. Diseases have at least some of their origin in accumulation of these toxins in those organs. If we keep eating during our illnesses (eg. Fever), the body never gets a chance to throw out these toxins, because the intestine is constantly processing the food. Through water fasts, the body gets a chance to eject these toxins through the intestine, the lungs and the skin. Fasting improves immunity and gives longevity. It improves glow and texture of the skin.

A healthy body can go a long way to shed karmas and attain eternal bliss. If the proper path of living through Jainism & Naturopathy is shadowed, our birth as human might prove to be more valuable and purposeful. Therefore, we need to rekindle the physical and spiritual forces within us and thrive through Naturopathy & Jainism to realize our objective before it is too late.

If you're wondering where you could go to learn and practice these treatments and practice, there's a program designed just for that. UTSAV is a monthly 3-day program run at the Deccan Park Resorts, Ooty, Tamil Nadu, India, which goes into greater depth about holistic wellness. I highly recommend you participate, to become a healthier and happier Jain - trustssnavyas@gmail.com.

POETRY

A SELECTION FROM *CATHARSIS*

BY TWINKLE SHAH AND DANA FARSAKH

the most effective way of growing your heart
is trying on shoes.

all of them.

try on

the barefoot sandals of the children

in india, in africa

the webbed feet of ducks

that lie on your dinner plate

the paws of those street dogs

that you ignore

the hooves of horses and cows

that break their backs and breasts

for you.

the claws of chickens

even the eggshells of their unborn chicks

the roots of trees and plants

that sacrificed themselves for this paper

the little legs of frightened insects

that tried to flee from your fly swatter

and if your feet fit

then maybe you'll see

have empathy.

- shoe closet

From the author:

"My friend Dana and I recently self-published a poetry book on Amazon titled Catharsis. I was inspired by Houston Kraft's life-changing speech from #YJA2016. We turned this into a community service project: all proceeds go to USA for UNHCR in support for refugees worldwide. Our book is sectioned by the Greek types of love from his speech! In short, Catharsis is about all the types of love—and the identity born from it. Thank you to YJA and Houston Kraft for your support and for inspiring me to become an agent of change!"



RECIPE:

MOLTEN CHOCOLATE LAVA CAKE

Servings: 3-4 people

Ingredients:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoon cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2-3 drops of vanilla essence
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- 1 3/4 cup boiling water
- Powdered sugar (decoration)

Retrieved from jainfoodie.com

Directions:

1. Preheat oven at 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Sieve flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a mixing bowl.
3. Mix milk and vegetable oil and add it to the dry ingredients.
4. Grease a deep pan and spread the cake mix smoothly on the bottom.
5. Mix brown sugar (firmly packed) and 1/4 cup cocoa powder in a bowl.
6. Sprinkle onto the cake mix.
7. Pour the boiling water on the cake mix. Do not mix it however.
8. Bake the cake for 40 to 45 mins.
9. Sprinkle powdered sugar on top to decorate. Serve hot and indulge in the molten chocolate.



CREATING HEAVEN ON EARTH THROUGH COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

BY HEMA POKHARNA

Editor's Note: We all feel compassionate towards people and animals that are suffering and can't help themselves. We are also willing to help our friends, relatives, coworkers in their time of need. But when communicating with others in a normal or a conflict situation, how often do we think of "need"? When a wife cooks a special dinner for her husband, her need is for feedback and appreciation for her efforts in preparing the dinner. When a manager assigns work to the staff, the manager needs timely completion of the assignments. It is quite understandable that a conflict arises when such needs are not met. Being aware of such needs and what matters most to our fellow human beings, communicating, and adapting our behavior with that understanding is at the heart of Compassionate Communication. Hema shows how we can transform our connection with ourselves and others with the NVC consciousness and practice of where we put our focus on; Judgments or Needs? We always have a choice!

"This is the starting point of nonviolence. The transforming power of nonviolence begins and ends with an awareness of the presence of God in everyone. It is this presence that breaks the spiral of violence."

- FRIAR LOUIE VITALE
LOVE IS WHAT MATTERS

Namaste also means seeing and acknowledging the divinity in others, does it not? Thus we step into every interaction with compassion and care.



This article introduces a way to actively practice compassion in our daily communication, through Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and create a new dimension of increased harmony, love and success in our homes, communities and work places.

Although not a small task, I invite you all to take on this challenge.

The first step is making needs and values central to our thoughts, words and actions. This shapes how we relate to ourselves and influences every interaction we engage in.

If someone says, for example, "You never listen to me!", they probably have a need to be heard. If they say, "You're so stubborn!!", they're probably needing openness and flexibility. If you tell yourself, "I never follow through on things!" you may value and long for integrity for your words and actions or completion and effectiveness (what "following through" might give you).

Notice how the focus on the need (effectiveness) is the opposite of the judgment (I never follow through). Doing this, shifts us from a negative assessment of what is wrong, to positive value, and opens space for understanding and choosing a different action. This can be a very liberating experience.

The next time someone is complaining or critical, see if you can listen for what value they are expressing under their words. This will help you focus on their needs and support you in experiencing a moment of connection and moving you in the direction of compassion, care and possibilities.

A key concept in NVC is learning that needs and values are universal and so, by definition, abstract. Our needs, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled, are the roots of our feelings. Relating our feelings to our needs, as parents, we could say “I feel frustrated because of the need for respect,” instead of “you make me frustrated when you talk back at me.” The latter entices our children into believing they are the guilty for our feelings.



“When we are not able to say clearly what we need and only know how to make analyses of others, it sounds to them like criticism.” In such a scenario, wars are never far away, whether they are verbal, psychological, or physical wars.

Let us examine a few needs - support, interdependence, choice, rest, etc. None of these can be picked up in your hands or held. They are all experiences and in terms of grammar, are abstract nouns. Judgments, thoughts and evaluations are descriptive and so are in the form of adverbs and adjectives.

Let's see how this knowledge can help us be compassionate. Say you are upset and say, “He is rude and a pain in the neck!” What would be the opposite, positive assessment? Probably, it is being considerate, understanding, easy and comfortable to work with. Knowing this, you will realize that these needs of yours possibly were not fulfilled in that interaction, giving you space to choose your next action as a response rather than a reaction.

Here are some more examples:

When you say that someone or something is:	You probably need:
Inconsiderate	Consideration
Incompetent	Competency
Difficult	Ease
Inflexible	Flexibility

Some judgments have little real meaning, for example, “You’re a jerk” or “That’s cool!” Such words that have a high level of judgment are more expressions of intensity of feeling than the needs or values. Often, they come along with content words that do have values hidden in them.

For example, if someone says, “You’re impossible,” they might give next a more specific complaint (or imply in context): “You never take responsibility for your actions!” You might then focus on the feeling and need and say: “It sounds like you’re really frustrated and wanting responsibility and awareness?”

“Impossible” here could also be expressing exhaustion and a desire for simplicity, flow and ease or hope about change in the relationship.

I hope these tips support you in shifting your focus from wrongness or blame to the values and needs people are trying to attend to behind their words and actions. Also regardless of the words you use, what really matters in listening to others is your intention bringing your heart, as well as your head, into how you understand and connect with others and what they say.

An additional key to the possibility of compassion is the core insight that conflicts only take place at the level of strategies, method or actions we choose to meet these needs. Human needs and values in themselves are not in conflict. With the practice in nonviolent communication and support from uninvolved parties, every conflict situation can turn into a shared exploration of which human values are at the root of everyone’s actions, judgments and perceptions. That exploration is when we are preparing to take the Namaste posture internally as we connect with the divinity in our self and the other and access the divine flow between each other.

Since all violent communication and actions are simply the tragic expression of unfulfilled needs, we can easily translate any judgments and wrongness of oth-

ers and ourselves into needs that want fulfillment. By freeing ourselves from judgments, we are able to connect compassionately within and without.

Next time when anyone says or does something you don't like, know you have four options:

Blame yourself: "I'm not good enough, it's my fault and I made them angry"

Blame them: "He / She is so selfish or rude"

Connect to your feelings and needs: "I feel disappointed, because I need recognition for the effort I've made"

Guess and connect with his/ her feelings and needs: "Are you feeling reluctant because you are wanting to make your own choices?"

When we connect to our true feelings and needs, others' need for connecting with us gets met and they are more likely to want to cooperate, to making life more wonderful for us. When we understand and celebrate their feelings and needs, we can joyfully find ways to meet everyone's needs simultaneously and create a win - win situation!

NVC in Action

The Center for Nonviolent Communication was founded by Marshall Rosenberg to teach people how to resolve differences at personal, professional and political level. The NVC community is active in 65 countries. My sister, Mandakini and I were instrumental in taking NVC to India. We organized Intensive International Trainings with Marshall as a lead trainer for 10 days in 2004 in Bangalore and 2006 in Pune, my home town.

This year, from 9th January to 15th, we trained 100 people from around the world in Pune. After that, we had an opportunity to be part of a 7 day post-earthquake healing event in Nepal from January 31st to February 7th,

2016. This event was held to bring healing to those affected by the April, May 2015 earthquakes. Many people are in a state of shock, grief, and trauma, and unsettled with the challenge of how to rebuild their lives.



NVC was the chosen modality for this training. The purpose of this training

was to bring healing through nonviolent communication. According to NVC, healing and mourning are human needs and need space for the healing to occur. To provide this space, and to continue building local NVC capacity, Pro Public, a NGO dedicated to cause of public interest in Nepal, organized an



international NVC training bringing together Nepalese practitioners with potential to become NVC trainers and local peacemakers from the earthquake-affected communities, to equip them with skills to support healing in and between others in their own families, communities, and constituencies.

The success of this event in Nepal was evident from the comments we received from the participants. The organizer of the program expressed immense gratitude and joy for the training and the time and energy invested by the trainers. “The trainer’s contributions are multi-fold and have a ripple effect reaching far and beyond.”

One of the field workers expressed his gratitude for the training which has given him more confidence and empowerment to do the work he does, supporting and facilitating arrangements and access to commodities for the earthquake victims and their families.

Other participants expressed their joy and gratitude. There was an immense sense of relief and support in self connection and ability to understand and relate to others in life enhancing and life serving ways.

In the peace-building field, Nonviolent Communication is increasingly recognized as an effective way to repair and strengthen intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intercommunity relationships. I hope that you will experiment with NVC, make your life an expression of compassion and create Heaven on Earth for yourself!

LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE (LR) SPOTLIGHTS

YJA's LR's represent us every day at Jain centers across the country. With each Young Minds issue, we highlight a few of them and what YJA means to them, their favorite part of being an Local Representative, and what they envision YJA to be.

Parth Tamboli

NORTHEAST (SHREWSBURY, MA)

Being an LR was extremely fun and a great thing to be a part of. Planning different events to meet different Jains around the community was wonderful. It brought us closer together and brought in many new friendships. Seeing everyone enjoying themselves at dinners, walks around Boston, and many other places made me feel good because we have such a great and involved young Jain community.



Yug Chauhan

MID-WEST (ANN ARBOR, MI)

As a Jain, I have always been asked a lot of questions about my religion while growing up. Many times, I had no answer, because I didn't know the reasoning behind things. YJA has given me an environment in which it is acceptable to challenge and question religion, while developing an understanding, and learning more about religion. As an LR, my most memorable experiences have always been the retreats. Retreats gave me an opportunity to network with some great people, and learn amazing things in a short span of time. While three words isn't enough to describe YJA, I would use family, encouraging, and networking.



Divya Shah

SOUTH (HOUSTON, TX)

YJA has influenced me to live a Jain way of life by showing me how many other Jains there are in America that have the same background as me. My most memorable experience as a Local Representative was at the South retreat. I had an amazing time meeting all the other youth in my region and it was especially fun when everyone was cooking and singing along to throwbacks together. Three words that I would use to describe YJA to someone else would be family, bonding, and love.



Janvi Shah

MID-WEST (PALATINE, IL)

Prior to becoming a LR for YJA, my main connection to the Chicago sangh was through pathshala. Don't get me wrong, because our Chicago pathshala is amazing!! But after becoming a LR, I've grown from learning about Jainism to truly practicing Jainism. This is all due to our YJA activities – some examples are practicing compassion through our YJA volunteering, practicing non-possessiveness through the clothing drive, and practicing anekantvad through Jain debates. YJA has given me some amazing friends across the US and I feel like a stronger Jain. My favorite memory from this past year is our meditation break-out during the midwest (midbest) retreat. Three words to describe YJA are introspective, loving and family.



Shilpa Dalaut

WEST (LAS VEGAS, NV)

Every Jain practices dharma in their own way, but it has been great to hear and learn from fellow young Jains about how/what they follow and different ways to become a more conscientious Jain in today's society. Also, there were not many Jains growing up in Las Vegas, so it was so refreshing to meet so many people like me at YJA convention and at West Retreat. We shared similar perspectives, had similar questions and laughed at the same gujju jokes.



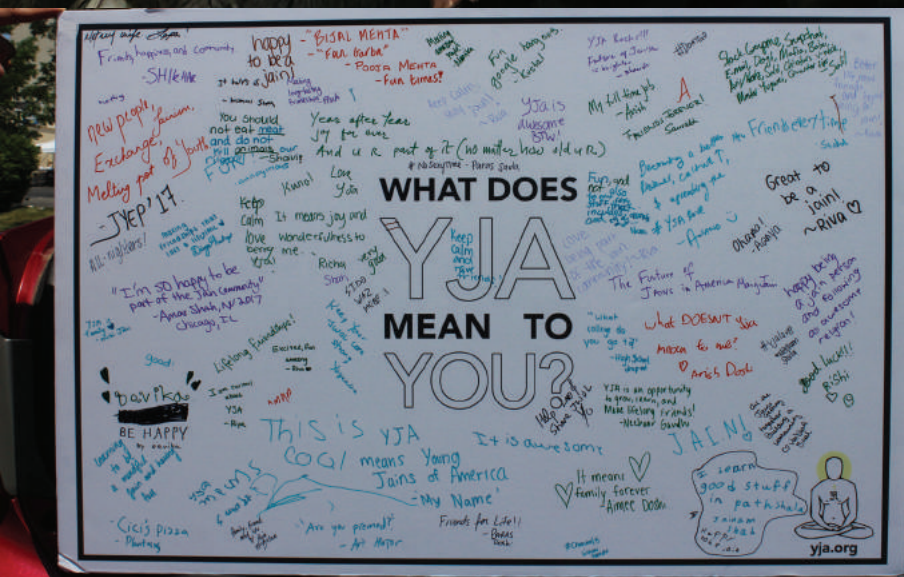
Last year was my first ever YJA convention, and I had a blast! As an LR, I had a great time at West Retreat – learning and then non-stop playing CONTACT during every break, having really thoughtful group discussions and going on a very entertaining hike in the rain. YJA is a unique, valuable and fun community.

Mansi Shah

MID-ATLANTIC (PARAMUS, NJ)

When I attended my first YJA convention in Tampa five years ago, I had no idea that I would leave with such a refreshing perspective on the principles I was brought up with. My vision for a Jain way of life is simple – I want to live every day with compassion and love. The meaning of Jain values go beyond just following a particular diet or reciting the stories of our Tirthankaras (although YJA has definitely showed me how even that can be achieved). These ideas came up again during one of my early events as an LR, where a group of friends with diverse religious beliefs came together for an honest conversation about the future of our faiths. In three words, YJA to me is talented, unforgettable, and family!





We loved getting to see so many members of the YJA community at JAINA 2017! From speakers and sessions on YJA Pathshala, to an LR meetup, to a Board and Convention Committee Alumni Reunion where we got to hear from the founders of YJA, it was an awesome opportunity to connect with our roots and meet new people.





Mid-Atlantic Summerfest attendees in Philadelphia!





SIDDHACHALAM

KIDS CAMP REFLECTIONS

LIVING AND LEARNING THE JAIN WAY OF LIFE

YJA was proud to partner with the JAINA Long-Range Planning Committee to put on the first annual Siddhachalam Kids Camp from July 28-30, 2017. Jain youth came together from across the country to learn, make new friends, and have fun! In these reflections, hear from some attendees about their time spent in the peaceful tranquility of one of America's oldest Jain centers, the Siddhachalam Tirth in Blairstown, NJ.



Sanay Doshi (NORWOOD, NJ)

The Jain Kids Camp was one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life! Despite the fact that this camp is relatively new, the experience that I obtained in the camp was truly outstanding. Campers like me were assisted by our amazing counselors who were always there for us whenever one of us needed anything.

There were many aspects to this camp that I thoroughly liked. First and foremost, I made many friends of all ages during this short three-day camp. Although the ages are scattered, the counselors introduced clever games that made us talk to one another, thus allowing us to form a bond and become closer.

With these friends, we walked the beautiful model of the Shikharji Trail Walk. Because of this walk, I was able to learn more about the tirth itself and learned the value of a tirthankar attaining moksha there.

Along with learning about the tirth, we had the chance to learn Jain principles and how they can be applied to everyday actions. I was able to attain a practical understanding of Jain philosophy and learn how to apply Jain principles such as ahimsa, aparigraha and anekantvad into our daily lives.



Instead of being bombarded with facts, the counselors used clever ways to teach us the information, whether that was performing skits in front of everyone or having a fun group discussion! In addition to learning the key principles of our religion, we also had a peaceful and fun session of yoga and meditation, further allowing us to really practice Jainism in its purest form.

In addition to the dharma aspect of the camp, there were outdoor activities for several hours a day. These activities included sports - we were able to play in one of the large fields at Siddhachalam. All in all, this camp is an experience that allowed us to enjoy a weekend of dharma, fun, and memories that will last a lifetime!

Yashvi Shah (LAUREL, MD)

The Jain Kids Camp at Siddhachalam was definitely a unique experience filled with learning and laughter. Whether it was sessions, or games, or even the prayers and meditation; everything was done in a creative way to engage the different age groups.

All of the sessions we had were interactive and were followed by related discussions and activities, like making posters and doing skits. They focused not only on Jain principles, but on how to apply those principles to living values and

everyday skills like resolving conflicts, controlling your mind and thoughts, and being positive and compassionate. As a result, I've tried to adopt these principles, and that has helped me become more aware of my actions and their impact.

One of the most special parts of the weekend was the jatra of Siddhachalam. The entire path was surrounded by greenery and life, but it was so calm and peaceful. We encountered everything from deer, to turkeys, to even peacocks. While walking and praying, we talked about the history of Siddhachalam and its connection to Sametshikhar, and I was amazed by the benefits and importance of praying at each of the tonks.

Besides the religious aspects, over the course of the three days at camp, we did various fun activities from yoga and sports outside, to group challenges and icebreakers with M&Ms! I got to know so many incredible people who taught me new things, and made every moment exciting and memorable.

Together, the campers and counselors became one big family! I'm really grateful to all the volunteers and their hard work, and I'm glad that I had the opportunity to be a part of this camp. Siddhachalam is truly an auspicious and beautiful place, and I made so many wonderful memories. Every time I think back to camp, I can't help but smile.



UNVEILING MYSELF

JAINISM, MENTAL HEALTH, AND MY EXPERIENCE AS A FIRST-GENERATION YOUTH

BY KRITI SHAH

Like many of you, I'm a first generation kid; and also probably like many of you, I have gone through the rollercoaster of being in an Indian family. Now don't get me wrong, I consider being Indian one of the greatest things about my identity, and I am proud to boast about all the great things that my ancestors have done, and the richness of my culture. Unfortunately, being from an Indian family also meant that the topic of mental illness was taboo - to the point that it was almost non-existent. That was until I suffered from it.



To give you a little background, I come from a strict Jain family, and both my parents have always been very active in the Jain community wherever we moved (which was very frequent). They left their mark wherever they went and were loved and respected by everyone. It was almost like they were politicians; they were always busy, with every move being watched over and scrutinized, which meant for me that if I did anything to shame them, then I would be the black sheep of the family. As I move along in this article I might be very critical of them, but I want to make sure that it is clear that they are amazing people. They work hard to make sure every need of mine is met, and they love me beyond belief. They have literally worked blood and bone to come to where they are today, and through all the struggles, they have never let it affect my sister or myself.

Perhaps this is the reason that the idea of mental illness doesn't resonate with them. They've been always told to "be strong" or "power through," and they've never had the opportunity to embrace their feelings. This is not to say that they don't have emotions or problems, it just means that because of the years of suppression of their feelings, they don't understand when someone cannot easily overcome. The struggle to be more accepting and understanding of mental illness exists everywhere. In Indian families, there is the additional

challenge of maintaining your status in society, and following the millions of rules that exist. It's very much a "don't ask, don't tell" culture.

I was diagnosed with a chronic disease in 2009. Although the diagnosis actually runs in the family tree, to tell others about my condition would mean it would ruin my future; I would never be seen the same way, and our family would be tarnished in our community and would be the topic of speculation. Though their reasoning was that they have seen what the condition does to you and they didn't want others to know about it, to me in that vulnerable state I felt I did not belong in society anymore, and this one thing would ruin my entire life. We never disclosed to anyone what my condition was, and during the brutal few years of trying different treatments and many concoctions of medicine, I was simply having "stomach problems."

Eventually, this led to a diagnosis of a mental illness. This was even more difficult to deal with. Not only did it make me more of an embarrassment to my over-achieving parents, but they did not understand. Undoubtedly, they were beside me every step of the way, but it was rarely about my experience.

I went through years of trying to convince my parents that I need to seek professional help for my mental illness. They thought that seeing a doctor would only be a constant reminder that I had a problem, and it would just be worse for me. Also, to acknowledge that I had a problem would just conjure more problems for me rather than arriving at a solution to solve it. There was nothing professionals could do that they couldn't solve at home. This led me to believe that I was a burden on society and my parents, and I wanted to die. I also knew, however, that to kill myself would cause a miserable amount of hurt to my loved ones, and so I was left in a pit of confusion. I decided instead it was best to just harm myself. I always tried to hide it from my family, but eventually my mom found one of my scars and they sat down to talk to me.

They didn't ask me why I felt the need to do this, or what was wrong; they asked me if I thought of how much I might hurt them or again, what society will think. What followed was hours and days of discussions which mostly contained yelling and them telling me that I just need to be stronger. I heard it all: "crying is for weak-minded people," "just make your mind stronger," "what will society think," "you're just using this as an excuse," "you're hurting us and your sister," "it'll just go away if you think positive." My dad said if I was cutting for attention then I would receive none from him, because to cut meant run-

ning away from the problem and he would not believe a child of his would take the cowardly way out. My mom tried to tell me that this was the karma I was receiving from a previous life and I should just power through, because I probably did something so atrocious in my previous life that I deserved to suffer in this life. In retrospect, whatever they said was out of love, and they were trying to help, but because they had never gone through this, the way they worded their support was hurtful and harmful. They thought that by using this kind of tough love they would help me get over my problems, because it's how they learned to get over their grievances.

This is the thought process of most Indian families. Any illness, especially when it comes to mental illness, is something to be ashamed of. The thought is that everyone goes through problems, and it is something that can be gotten over if you just try hard enough. The truth is that the mentality of hiding what you're going through will not help anyone in the situation. Of course, you'll come across the people who will judge you and talk about you, but more often than not you will find people who will want to help you. They will be willing to listen and try to help you however they can whether it be through helpful advice or by just being a shoulder to cry on.

In today's day and age, kids have it hard with the pressures of school, life, their peers, society's standards, and more. They are growing up very fast and there are many dangers lurking. If they have a problem they should be able to get help, not be made to feel like they are an outcast. For me, the addition of being a Jain student in a community where not many people understand what Jainism is and what it means, just added to that difficulty. Sure, I met some Jain kids at the temple, but they were all much younger than me and the ones that were my age did not value Jain rituals like I did.

I began to feel like Jainism was a burden; and if my parents who were highly recognized and acclaimed in my Jain community were the ones who ridiculed me for having problems I had no control over, then maybe the teachings of Jainism were not ones I wanted to follow. I fell into a dangerous black hole. It took me 4 years to complete grade 12 because of all my difficulties, and by now I was the disgrace of my family. They never told anyone the truth about me, and I had to hide it too. By the end of my fourth year of grade 12 I was doing everything to make myself disappear from this world and make sure no one knew what happened. I felt no hope, no joy, no fear, and no feelings at all.

The truth is, at this point I was brainwashed to think that no one should know what I was going through, so my facade was one of a person who was very content. I had immersed myself into starting a youth group in the Edmonton Jain Society to make sure no one felt like a lone wolf like I did in the Jain community. I wanted them to have a platform where they shared common backgrounds, and could have the support of each other, and learn what Jainism really was and should be about.

Somewhere during this time, I felt alive again. I felt like I had a purpose, and my spirits started lifting. I finished high school and I got into University. I started a successful Jain Youth group and I was using every free moment I could to volunteer. In April of 2017 I finished my first year of University with a 3.8 GPA, while being part of many Executive Boards in many organizations. Best of all, I discovered YJA and became a local representative. Currently, I'm working with the Jain Youths of Edmonton to start a Jain Study Program.

I'm here to tell you that that is okay. It is okay to be selfish. It is okay to talk about your downfalls, and your successes. Not only is it okay, it is something you should definitely do. The thought that you are a burden is not true, the thought that you should be hidden is definitely not true, and the thought that you are alone is never true. Somewhere out there is a community for you. Look in your local Jain community, or YJA. There is an outpouring of love and support in these communities and you'll feel like you belong. Immerse yourself into something you love, and make sure to be honest with yourself and others.

For me, it took 8 years to finally be comfortable about myself and my flaws. My parents still have some times where they don't understand my conditions but they are much more open to listening to my problems because of the conversations we've had. They understand that I need help from a doctor and I need to take medication to stay stabilized and they are okay with that. In fact, they now understand that if that is what it takes for me to be the best version of myself, then they will do everything they can to make sure I receive that treatment. My relation has immensely improved with them, and my conditions are much better too. For some this may take a longer period of time, for some it may be shorter, and for some it may not happen at all, but for all I promise there is a light at the end of the tunnel and there are people who love and support you. Just remember to never be afraid to ask for help, and never give up. You are an integral part of this world, and you belong; you are someone's reason to smile, so never stay hidden.

RECIPE:

JAIN PANEER TIKKA

Servings: 2 people

Ingredients:

- 1 cup paneer cubes
- 1 cup (12-15 cubes) bell peppers
- 1 cup de-seeded tomato (12-15 cubes)
- 1 tbsp butter/ghee
- 1 tbsp besan (gram flour)
- 1 1/2 tbsp warm yogurt
- 1/2 tsp carom seeds (ajwain)
- 1 tsp green chilli paste
- 1 tsp red chilli powder
- 1/2 tsp garam masala powder
- 1 tbsp mustard oil
- 1/4 tsp turmeric powder
- Salt to taste
- Lemon juice & chaat masala powder to serve

Directions:

1. Take butter in a pan and add gram flour in it. Roast the gram flour until it is cooked (changes color with aroma), and allow it to cool. Warm the yogurt and add it to roasted gram flour. Add salt, red chilli powder, garam masala powder and green chilli paste and mix together. Heat mustard oil in a pan until it is smoking hot, remove from stove, and add turmeric to it. Add this oil to the marinade.
2. Cut the paneer, peppers and tomatoes in same sized cubes and add to the marinade.
3. Take metal skewers and arrange paneer, bell peppers and tomatoes in alternate manner.
4. Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 minutes. Line the grill in the oven with aluminium foil and arrange the skewers on it. Grill the tikkas in oven for about 15-20 minutes (check in between if it turns slightly black from the corners - you can flip the sides so that it is cooked evenly from all the sides). Spray some oil or butter on tikkas and grill for a minute more.
5. Sprinkle the tikkas with lemon juice and chaat masala, and serve hot with mint chutney and shredded cabbage salad.

Retrieved from jainfoodie.com



NO MAN IS AN ISLAND: THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

BY RACHNA SHAH

Society has long been based around an organizational unit. It might just be human nature to seek affection and friendship through our communities. Unlike the Neanderthals' hunter-gatherer societies, however, the modern-day unit tends to be a family. Families are constantly evolving - from rising divorce rates to a shift towards adoption and the inclusion of friends in one's family, but the notion itself is still fundamental in most people's lives. Actor Michael J. Fox encapsulated this notion in stating that, "Family is not an important thing. It's everything." While the traditional family may be on the decline, staying connected with your family, regardless of how you define it, continues to reap emotional, physical, and financial benefits.



The promise of unconditional love begins with your family. In spite of the struggles and adversities you face, they are always there to support you and cheer you on. If you need help in making complex decisions, your family will be act both as angels and as the devil's advocates. They understand your habits - from eating ice cream at three in the morning to studying in a particularly odd setting. While they might make suggestions, they never ask you to change your identity. They accept you for who you are, and see the potential in you that you might not even have realized. In this way, a family can be the center of your existence, a refuge or a safe place you can come back to at any time. When all else seems lost, they will be there to welcome you home. After my cousin failed her notoriously difficult MCAT exams three times in a row, thus prompting her to take a gap year, her family only encouraged her forwards towards her goal of attending medical school. As the people who raised you, your family provides security and stability in the face of an ever-changing world.

As the foundations of your life, families can also easily instill healthy habits in you. Family fitness programs have consistently been proven successful, whether they involve a simple trip to the beach or a more onerous hike in the woods. While the world is often perceived to be increasingly frenzied, it is still important to stay just as active outside of as inside the workplace. Both of my parents both work long hours, but like many other families, we spend an hour

each weekend walking through our local forest preserve. In this manner, harnessing the power of one's family is a way to bond as well as stay healthy. Studies have shown that families who eat together at the dinner table, as opposed to in their own rooms or in the office, are less likely to be overweight. This is partially due to the fact that dinner-table meals include healthier alternatives to fast food. Furthermore, families who eat in a relatively healthy manner are likely to instill balanced eating patterns in all members. As part of our healthy eating plan, my family has cut out processed foods and sweets from our pantry and fridge, and thus, from our diet. Each individual is not only held accountable but also motivated by the progress of others. Moreover, physical activity interventions are much more likely to be effective if they come from people closer to you rather than from schools or even your peers. Spending more time with your family has been shown to reduce risks of engaging in unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking, and even increase your self-esteem.

In addition, families aid you in developing your morals and belief systems through an equilibrium between punishment and reinforcement. Learning definitions of ethical behavior from a young age is key to becoming successfully integrated into society. Your family, regardless of whether they are biologically related to you or not, can nurture you to respect both those who are similar and different from you. While my family itself is not culturally and ethnically diverse, my "friend family" has roots from across the world and political spectrum. The sheer amount of time that we spend together allows everyday experiences to become moments of teaching and learning. My biological family often corrects my bad habits and are oftentimes models on what behavior is respectable, from how to eat in a restaurant to how to answer the phone. Your family's guidance can be indirect, as well; for instance, allowing you to diffuse conflicts between yourself and a sibling and/or cousin on your own. In this manner, they begin to step back, allowing you to grow.

At an Indian get-together a few months ago, one uncle said something that struck me as particularly profound. "In life, family is like the salt in our food." Jain monks sacrifice all worldly attachments - from something as trivial to salt to something as personally significant as familial ties. As lay people, however, we take limited non-attachment vows. I believe that family is one of the few attachments we should value. As the Tattvartha Sutra said, our souls are, "Bound together by mutual support and interdependence" (Umaswati 5.21), a statement that can describe the relations between human beings. No matter how much the definition of a family evolves, it will always hold a special place in our hearts—don't forget your roots.

NOT JUST CHUTNEY SANDWICHES

FOOD FOR THOUGHT FROM A YJA RETREAT

BY UTSAV GANDHI

Should Jains serve in the military? Would you go to war if it meant survival of Jainism for the next generation?

Are there ways in which traditional practices of gheeboli could evolve or adapt to remove some rather unflattering aspects of opulence and magnanimity?



Can you be a feminist and yet entirely support the law laid out that women on their monthly menstrual cycle cannot enter derasars?

But also, can one short weekend combine so much food for thought, while also throwing in roller coasters and close to 40+ introductions, friendships, and new acquaintances?

The Midwest YJA retreat to Cedar Point, Sandusky, OH sounded like a fun place to be even before it was officially announced (confession: I'd heard rumors about it beforehand). But it ended up providing much more than the promised thrills of the amusement park.

The adventure started right away as the five hour expected drive from Chicago ended up being... a little bit more than that (can you always rely on the GPS?!), but the time spent in the car somehow still seemed short. Cards Against Humanity and Taco Bell stops gave way to conversations about personal and professional goals, friendship, dating, family, and even identity. The seven of us in the car came from various parts of the country, even the world, and studied or worked in vastly different professional fields. But it was remarkable how we bonded so easily and related with each other simply on similarities in our upbringing.

The weekend also had the expected ingredients of what makes a YJA retreat great. An hour-long game of Psychiatrist (harrowing for my beginner-level team to be victimized by a village of 30+), staying up until 4AM, Jain pasta and a tub

full of delicious green chutney for amusement park sandwiches, a GroupMe chat that continues till date (does retreat actually ever end though?!), the care-free laughter of being “those Indian kids” singing Antakshari in an hour-and-a-half long line at a roller coaster (it got competitive), and the rare, strange, understated pleasure that can only come with availing a Chipotle buy-one-get-one deal with someone you only met 36 hours ago.

(As for the rollercoasters themselves, don't get me started. I grew up in India and there was a time when I wanted to come to the U.S. not for education – which is what I ultimately ended up doing – but to go to Cedar Point. It's been seven years and I still hadn't made it, until now. A big thank you to YJA for literally making my dreams come true.)

But what I'll take away is actually even more than all of the above. It's the people I met, and the discussions I had – to know that there are others who have questions about the evolution of our faith just as much as I do. For whom being Jain influences other, important aspects of their lives. It's a special thing we've been born with, this unique faith of ours. To be able to explore it – and find our own individual answers, if we must – in a social setting such as this retreat weekend is to me a rare, rewarding privilege. Those questions I mentioned at the beginning don't have easy answers by any measure, but I feel strongly that even getting us all to think about them is moving the needle in the right direction. A big thank you to the #MidBest (and national) leadership for organizing and congratulations on a successful retreat!



WHAT HOLDS TRUE?

EXPRESSING OR CONFORMING

BY DARSHI SHAH

As cliché and basic as it sounds, following religious values and teachings becomes very difficult in college because of the social setting, and what the college experience can demand in general. This statement/thought was hard for me to believe until I had a first hand experience as a freshman. In 2015, my freshman year, Paryushan was in the first couple of weeks into my first semester of college. Coming from an affluent white town and high school with little diversity in Rhode Island, where being Indian or vegetarian was alien to people, I thought connecting with people in college who I could relate with would be comforting. And it did feel reassuring when I met a few Jains/Hindus on campus, until I heard a few saying: “She is being too religious and picky”; “It’s college, she needs to calm down”; “She’s acting as if she’s the 25th Tirthankar”, when I was trying to pick Paryushan friendly food from the dining hall, and abstained from eating late at night when everyone went out to socialize.



Naturally, these social comments made me question whether following religious principles that I have been practicing all my life would label me as a conservative, whether continuing to follow my beliefs was okay or not in college, and whether I would make friends or not. I did not feel obliged to follow a Paryushan friendly diet because it was my first time being on my own, so it was understandable. Plus, my parents understood the challenges of practicing Paryushan during college, so there was no parental pressure as well. However it did not feel right for me to “fit in” and act more “socially acceptable,” by sacrificing my beliefs and practices because that was the easiest thing I could do. Nevertheless, I knew once I would break that self-control and belief, it would be very easy for me to break it again in the future.

I went through a great deal of self-interrogation and self-introspection, and I concluded that I wanted to continue practicing and preserving my values, and my set of beliefs. Growing up, my parents instilled in me the core Jain principles that taught me to do the right thing, to be true to oneself, to be kind to everyone, and to help others in any way possible. Learning and practicing Jain principles have shaped my character and the person I am today in regards to

the morals and values that define me. It is a part of me and my identity. I did not want to continue practicing something for the sole reason that I had been doing it all my life, but because it was of great importance to me.

Although this experience early in college was not pleasant, it tested how strong my faith and morals were, helped me strengthen my self-control, and connected me with the right and like-minded people, who became some of my closest friends in college. Noticing me asking literally almost all the chefs in the dining hall whether the bread or the pizza had eggs, my roommate (who is also Jain) stopped eating desserts that contained eggs. She claimed “I see you trying hard to avoid eating food that contains eggs; if you can do it, it’s practically possible in college, and I can aspire to do the same as well.” Maybe her change was trivial, but her intention and words really touched my heart and further inspired me to take an initiative to connect with more Jains and help preserve those Jain values.

I realized how a lot of people in our generation misinterpret the term “being religious.” It is not a mere byproduct of going to a temple, performing rituals, and following a strict Jain diet. It is following what “religion” means to you. It is sticking to what you feel is right for you, by being compliant to your own set of morals, and culturally following and maintaining your own personal religious faith.

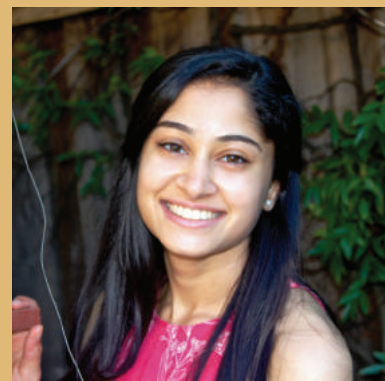
This one incident strengthened my belief in myself, and encouraged me to get more involved and be part of the e-board for the Jain group on campus - BU JIVA (Boston University Jains In Voice and Action). Soon following the first semester of freshman year, I also become a Northeast Local Representative for YJA, participated in JAB (Jain Academic Bowl) at YJA '16 in Los Angeles, CA, and interned with JAINA for the summer.

I wish to take this opportunity to advise the young Jains in America, especially those who are rising freshman in college, to never think following religious principles, whether it be in terms of food, morals, drinking etc. is “uncool”. You can think of yourself as that rare “follower” or you can think of yourself as a leader, influencer and pioneer, and connect with the like-minded people around you!

THE LOST ART OF LISTENING

BY ANOKHI SAKLECHA

Listening. A seemingly simple term — one of the most basic of human skills. And yet, an incredibly complex concept, requiring months to understand and years to master. An idea that is unequivocally integral to our lives as young Jains, but much too frequently overlooked.



Shrimad Rajchandraji, a devout follower of Mahavir Swami and spiritual guru of Mahatma Gandhi, believed that good listening was key to leading a compassionate and productive life. It allows us to understand the needs of others, learn from our teachers, and engage in meaningful discussions.

But, as sad as it is, listening is becoming a lost art in our generation. In today's day and age, we have become so focused on speaking, expressing, and voicing, that we often forget to listen, understand and learn. In conversations with others, we spend so much time on ourselves — devising our responses, deciding whether we agree with them, questioning our own opinions — that we fail to truly absorb the information relayed to us.

Perhaps this is because we are mistaking hearing for listening. By perceiving the sounds of words as they enter our ears, we trick ourselves into believing that we are absorbing their meaning, when in reality, we are not. In the era of cell phones, social media, and television, we are continuously distracted, our minds racing from one topic to the next, until it is our turn to speak again. The truth is, very few people truly know how to listen; it requires an incredible amount of patience, devotion, and awareness. But, the benefits it can bring are undoubtedly worth the small cost.

One of the main tenets of Jainism, anekantvad, teaches us to recognize and understand different viewpoints and opinions. But, how can we learn to comprehend and accept these viewpoints, if we do not listen to them in the first place? You see, listening stands at the core of Jain values; it is what allows us to communicate, educate, and help others.

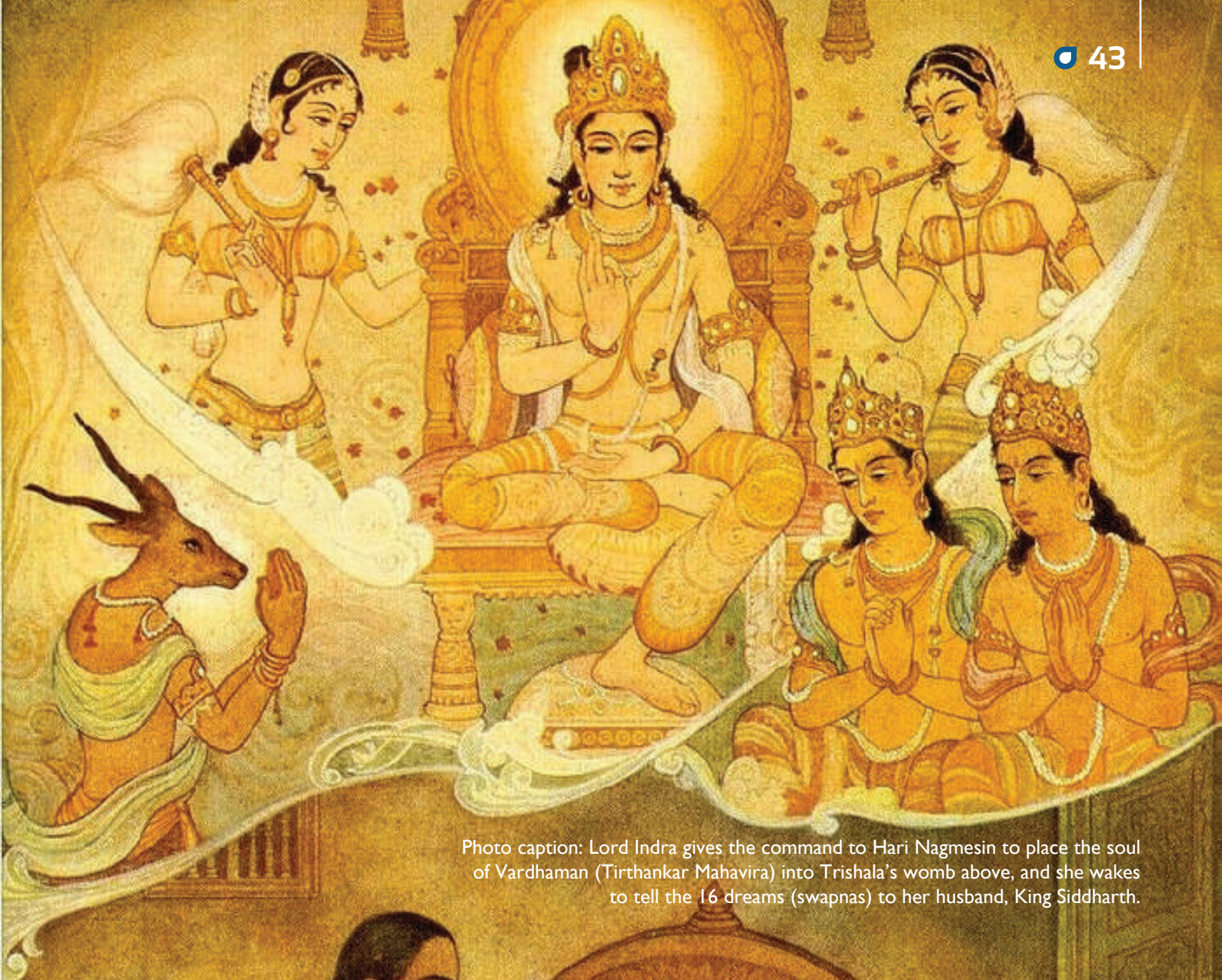
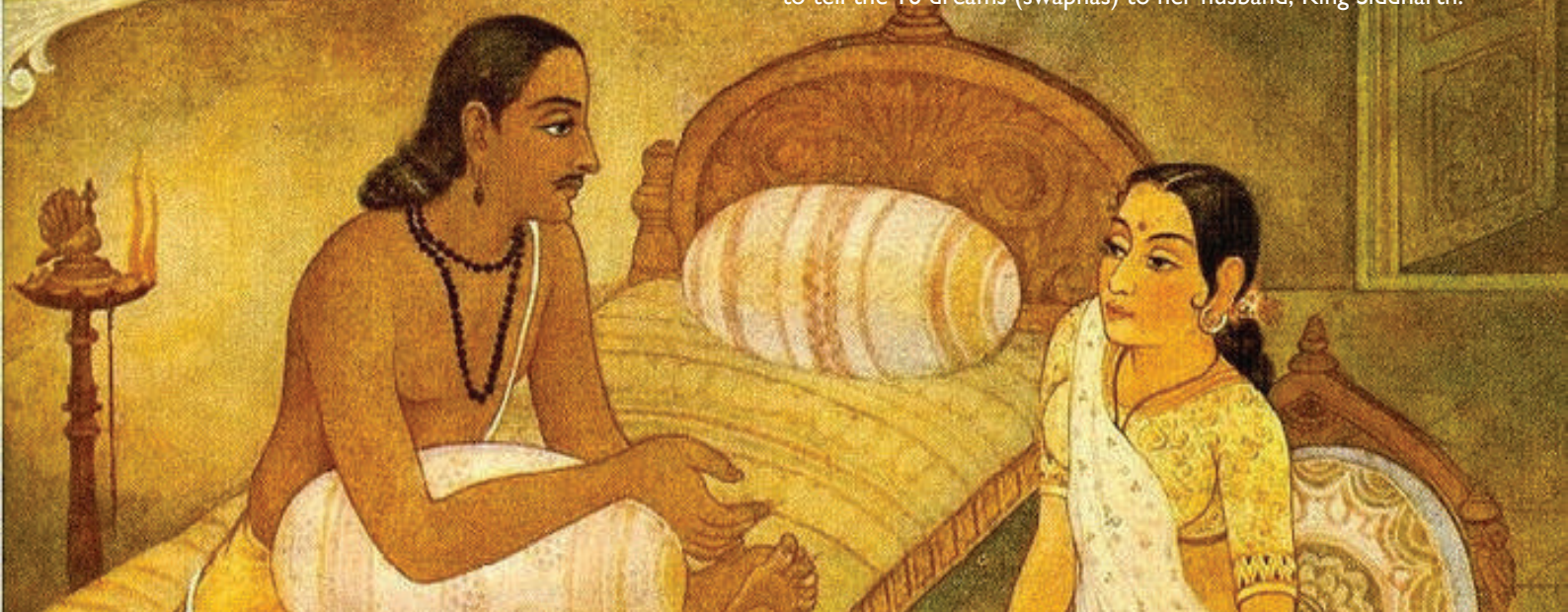


Photo caption: Lord Indra gives the command to Hari Nagmesin to place the soul of Vardhaman (Tirthankar Mahavira) into Trishala's womb above, and she wakes to tell the 16 dreams (swapnas) to her husband, King Siddharth.



Enhancing our listening skills can also help us attain inner peace. By enabling us to focus on the world around us, listening can allow us to become more humble, observant, and introspective.

Give listening a chance. Be it for a few days, hours, or minutes, make a conscious decision to listen the next time you're in a conversation. You never know what you might gain.

REFLECTIONS ON PARYUSHAN

BY HARSHA NAHATA

For the first time in many years, I didn't have work or school obligations this Paryushan. I was excited to be able to devote a significant amount of time to reflection and spirituality throughout the holidays.



During Paryushan, my family, like many other Jain families, tries to follow a stricter diet - not eating fresh fruits and vegetables, not eating after dark, and cooking fresh meals every day. I grew up also seeing so many people in our immediate family and friend circle fast.

I've long been in awe of those who can fast for days on end. This Paryushan, it felt as if I finally had the time and space to engage in that way. And so, I started out trying to fast in some way every day, by limiting myself to sitting and eating in two places or in one. But fasting has always been difficult for more. And as weakness started to build during the week, I felt myself getting discouraged. It seemed like such a simple thing—why couldn't I do it?

I realized it was time to reevaluate. I started to reflect on what exactly about fasting I was trying to engage with - why was it important to me to be able to fast? And I relaxed a bit, focusing instead on being compassionate and forgiving even toward myself.

In doing so, I was able to see all of the ways in which tap, no matter how intense or for how long, helps focus my attention and awareness. Tap makes me more sensitive to the changes around me, to the part I play in affecting those changes. As I continued to move throughout the week, I took note of all the little things I noticed. The times I stepped on grass, when I could have taken a different route. The times in which I wanted something just because. The times I would crave something I might not need. I noticed all the moments where I was inclined to take a little extra, out of fear or greed; fear that I wouldn't be able to make it without, greed that just a little more would be extra satisfying.

For me, the theme of this week has been awareness. Increased emphasis on

understanding why I do something and being forgiving both toward myself and those around me in this process of gaining self-awareness. Awareness of how many types of food I eat in a meal, of what is present in them, what goes into making them. Awareness of the conversations I take part in. Of what I say, and what I don't. The times I speak, when I would rather stay quiet. The times I stay quiet, when I should speak. How this energy gets passed on and manifests in those around me.

Awareness of how much I ask of the universe in a given day. What I sow back. Awareness of the labor expended by others to help my day go smoothly. The labor I often take for granted.

I've noticed myself hold my tongue, but I've also had moments where frustration slipped through. And I've noticed how that has felt and the work that has to be done to come back to equilibrium.

Last but not least, I've seen on multiple occasions how peaceful and calming just being in the presence of a dehrasar can be for me. And if I don't have that opportunity, how nice it can be to hear a stavan in the background.

I think my biggest takeaway has been that more than a week where I automatically switch gears into spirituality, Paryushan is a teaching week. A week where a little more intentional self-awareness and inclination toward our Jain religion has made me focus on all of the moments in which my energy is creating an impact around me. Moments I often do not consciously notice.

It is this reflection and awareness that I hope to carry past this week-long holiday and channel into habits I create and incorporate throughout my life.

So, from me to you, Micchami Dukkadam if I have hurt you in any way or if I have said or done something mistakenly this year. And I wish you a fulfilling year ahead.



*Micchami
Dukkadam*



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