

# Young Minds

Federation of Jain Associations in North America

*A Non-Profit Tax Exempt Religious Organization. IRS Code Section 501 (c)(3) El #54-1280028*

*yja-exec@egroups.com • <http://www.yja.org>*

## Remembering Los Angeles...



In this issue:

- convention photos
- information about upcoming regional conferences
- Mahavir Jayanti 2600 events

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**Young Jains of America (YJA)** is the umbrella youth organization of the **Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA)**. The mission of YJA is to be recognized nationally and internationally as an umbrella youth organization for establishing a network to share Jain heritage and religion through youth.

## It Happened: The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual YJA Convention

The Young Jains of America Biennial Convention was held in the Westin of Los Angeles over the Independence Day weekend where over 800 young Jains from the ages of 14 – 29 were in attendance.

The first day of the convention was spent settling in the attendees and in group icebreakers. After icebreakers, there was entertainment of a hypnotist enjoyed by each attendee as either a spectator or one of the hypnotized. They were followed by a young Hindi singing group from the East Coast called Dharma. The night came to an end at curfew and the attendants returned to their rooms.

Early Saturday morning, the actual convention began with the opening ceremonies, which were accompanied by breakfast. All were welcomed to the fourth biennial YJA convention. Once the opening ceremonies ended, attendees were on their way to a session/discussion filled day. The seminars were split into three age groups so that they would bring focus to specific topics faced by each.

The seminars included speakers such as Ocean Robbins, the founder of the group Youth for Environmental Sanity; Atul Shah, the founder of *Jain Spirit*; Prem Jain, Vice President of Cisco Systems, and many others. In addition, discussion groups led by youths covered topics such as “The Jain Identity Matrix” and “Bodybuilding, the Jain Way”.

The keynote speaker on Saturday was Sadhvi Shilapiji who catered to youth of all ages and answered questions in a knowledgeable yet comprehensible manner for those with or without a great background in Jainism.

The evening brought time for relaxation and fun, straying away from seminar-like activities, through the dancing of raas-garba. Most were dressed in their traditional Indian outfits to fit the occasion and as they danced in the garba circles, the colors of different dresses spun as attendants enjoyed the night. The raas-garba night ended with intense bhangra. On Sunday the convention continued with one seminar before the guest speaker. This guest speaker was Ingrid Newkirk, director of PETA, bringing awareness to the diets of each attendee. She brought forth ideas and facts that many could not imagine and brought forth compassion from her audience. She also gave importance to the Jain religion, as she mentioned it as what she always wished she could practice.

However, Sunday will be remembered best by the three hour “real world” session where groups (broken up by age groups) of about twenty to thirty people are placed in a room with a moderator to discuss topics that members face in the real world. Though they were expected to be long or boring, the session actually played a vital role in the learning of what other Jain people across the country believe. This was one of the better discussions because it did not limit what could be discussed allowing members of discussions to bring up what may be occurring around them or in their life.

The formal was held Sunday evening where ladies wore elegant dresses and gentlemen wore suits. The night was banquet style, accompanied by dinner and entertainment with dancing to follow. The entertainment was a band that brought Indian flavor to musical styles of today. The band had the audience on its feet and on the dance floor it cheered them along. The night went on with dancing and lounging in the hotel lobby.

The formal dresses and suits soon became the most comfortable pajamas and warm-ups for people to casually talk and enjoy themselves. The hotel lobby was filled until closing ceremonies when the YJA convention officially came to end and all that remained was the final checking out. Most were leaving with new friends from different parts of the country with whom technology would allow them to keep in touch!

Mansi Shah

## From the Editor

Working on *Young Minds*, the question most frequently asked of me isn’t about the articles or the layout. The question most frequently asked of me is, “Why do you have the same quote on every other page?” The quote referred to is the one at the top of this page; you can read it for yourself. It has graced every other page of *Young Minds* as far back as 1997, so I naturally saw no reason to discontinue the tradition when I began editing the magazine.

But of course the question still begs itself—why? What is it about this quote that makes it important enough for YJA to effectively shout it out, to bear it as our rallying cry throughout the pages of our publication? I feel that the answer to this question lies in the existence of YJA, as an organization of Jain youth. If you were to converse with me for some time, you’d find that I’m obsessed with the power paradigm of society; power divides itself incongruently in favor of males over females, in favor of the rich over the poor, etc. Is that the way it should be? Of course not, but it is. In particular, youth are at the short end of the power paradigm. Young people don’t always have resources at their disposal, but they certainly have *ideas*. And in a battle of ideas, all other inequalities are meaningless. There is nothing more powerful than an idea. Remember that—if you lose faith in everything else, you may be left with nothing but ideas. The quote is to remind us—that’s not so bad. Keep the ideas coming.



# Young Jains of America

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## Jai Jinendra!

First of all, we would like to thank each and every one of you that either attended or volunteered your time for the YJA convention this past summer. For those of you that were not able to join us, the convention was a huge success and enjoyed by all. Since then, the YJA executive board has been hard at work uniting and educating young Jains across North America.

In mid-August we held an executive board meeting in New York. The new board members came together with new ideas and enthusiasm. We established goals for the organization and want each of you to assist us in achieving them. This year we are making an attempt to reach each of our members by either a local representative or a regional coordinator to increase your participation in Jain activities across the nation.

Our activities and projects will be based around the 2600<sup>th</sup> Mahavir Jayanti. With such an auspicious event coming up in April 2001, we decided to seize the opportunity. We are planning to have nationwide activities to celebrate the day of Mahavir Jayanti, as well as throughout the rest of the year.

We are starting off by having regional events in five of our regions this coming Thanksgiving weekend. Each of the regional events will be unique, but will share the common mission of reaching out to our members. The events will be held at Jain temples, host family homes, and hotels in Siddachalam, NJ, Washington DC, Dallas, TX, and San Francisco, CA. We encourage each of you to contact the regional coordinator for your area and get registration information. This will be an excellent opportunity to meet other Jain youth in your region, learn more about Jainism, and get involved in your community.

While these activities occur, we are hoping to gain involvement from all of our members, whether it be interest in being a local representative, hosting an event in your city, volunteering in your region or even writing an article for Young Minds; we just want to see you involved directly!

Check out our website and read more about what is going on in YJA both nationally and in your region. If you have any questions, concerns or ideas, please feel free to contact us. We look forward to seeing you at the upcoming regional meetings.

Yours in Ahimsa,

Birud Jhaveri and Nirav Shah  
Co-Chairs, Young Jains of America  
<http://www.yja.org>

**Young Jains of America (YJA)** is the umbrella youth organization of the **Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAANA)**. The mission of YJA is to be recognized nationally and internationally as an umbrella youth organization for establishing a network to share Jain heritage and religion through youth.

"There is nothing more powerful than an idea. No weapon can destroy it; no power can conquer it, except the power of another idea"

## 4 Days' Journey into the Self



"The goal of our organization (Youth for Environmental Sanity) is to help build a more compassionate world for all living beings."

—Ocean Robbins

"The true foundations and tenets of Jainism are the world's keys to peaceful co-existence and respect, and the practice of ahimsa is perhaps the most amazing and simple moral view."

—Ingrid Newkirk

*Above:* Some attendees get to know each other in icebreaker games.

*Right:* Hypnotized Jains talk into their shoes as if they are cell phones.

*Below:* Chowing down on some Mexican food in the Ballroom.



"The entertainment was better than any of the previous conventions I have been to. And the keynote speakers were amazing."

"It was nice to be able to meet a lot of other Jains and talk about things that I can't usually talk about with my non-Jain friends. The convention really brings us all together."

“The trip to the Museum of Tolerance was a good idea. It gave us a chance to get out of the Westin for a little while, and it was also a worthwhile experience.”

“The hypnotism really works... my friends told me all the things that I did—I don’t remember it at all.”



*Above:* A crowd gathers outside of the Westin for the group photograph.



*Left:* A few attendees engaging in ‘intense bhangra’.

*Below:* Attendees are rapt as Prem Jain discusses Jainism and business skills.

“Shilapiji's presentations were excellent. And also some discussions we had about religion and how it effected our lives in America were interesting. And the Real World was GREAT! I enjoyed people talking about each others problems and others telling them advice. I also heard that yoga and Jain vocals was fun ... but unfortunately I didn't get to experience them. I think they were fun because people actually got up and did things instead of sitting on chairs and listening. But the other sessions were just were boring lectures on boring things.”



## YJA Regional News

### *Mid-Atlantic*

The Mid-Atlantic is enjoying its position as the most densely populated region of Jains in North America and has signed on a large group of enthusiastic volunteers, supporters, and local representatives. They are all working hard to put together a regional conference during Thanksgiving weekend for around 70 college students. In the tri-state area, students are forming Jain clubs at their respective colleges and planning activities for the year. Special thanks are in order for Risha Mehta, Lesha Shah, Neel Shetti, and Mita Sanghavi for all of their effort. For any and all that want to help out call 617-493-7019 or email rahulmepani@mail.com.

**Columbia University** The Jain Forum at Columbia is starting slowly, but will begin coordinating activities with the Hindu Student Organization soon. They are also planning to work with New York University to establish a stronger Jain community in New York.

**Philadelphia/South Jersey** We're working on having a conference or a seminar on Jain Theory vs. Jain Practice. During Paryushan, the youth did not do together as a group, but there were many "tapasvis" doing somewhere around 8 upvas. We're all looking forward to a bright future, doing community service, and also helping out with the Mahavir Jayanti Celebration.

**Satya, the Jain Youth Group of New Jersey**, has continued to have their bi-weekly meetings in addition to other events such as hosting English pujas, cleaning up the local dehraser, and working at health fairs for the Jain community. They recently volunteered during the Paryushan Parva by teaching younger children about Jainism during the nightly adult lectures, helping coordinate temple rituals, managing information tables, and serving food during the Mahavir Jayanti festivities. They are currently anticipating upcoming elections for a new executive board and organizing a big brother/big sister mentorship program to establish liaisons between the younger and graduating members of the youth group.

**New York City** Anita Shah and Kanika Jain are looking for people to organize more activities in the New York City area, like a lecture or a mini-convention for two days, one night. Paryushan was exciting, though they didn't get together as a group. There were many kids doing 8-11 upvases, which was wonderful. They are looking forward to having a youth meeting for everyone involved in New York.

### *Midwest*

The Midwest Region has decided not to hold a conference during this term. However, if there are members in the Midwest who wish to attend a conference in another region, please contact someone in YJA, and they can lead you in the right direction. The cancellation of the Midwest conference is a disappointment, but we will be working on a project in the near future, for which the Midwest will be very much involved. Please address your thoughts on this and any other issues you have regarding the Midwest region or YJA to the Midwest Regional Coordinator Chintan Shah via e-mail at chintan\_shah@mail.com or via telephone at 608-264-4126.

### *South*

Life has been fairly busy for the South Region in the past few months. Of highest priority across the region is that the **Jain Youth Group of North Texas** is pleased to announce that they will host the 2000 South Regional Youth Conference over the Thanksgiving weekend from November 23 – 26, 2000, in Dallas. The program will focus on Jainism: Reflecting on the Self with various discussions and sessions allowing participant interaction. The conference will begin at 6 pm on Thursday, November 23rd with dinner followed by introductions. Programs will continue all day on Friday and Saturday and conclude on Sunday morning. We expect 75-100 youth to participate. All youth between ages 14 and 29 are encouraged to attend, as activities will focus on all ages with learning for everyone. Please visit the YJA website for more information and registration. If you have any questions or would like to help, contact Sudeep Shah (Jain Youth Group President) at tweedersshah@aol.com or (972) 713-7755 or Pavan Zaveri (YJA South Regional Coordinator) at pavanzaveri@mail.com or (713) 797-0217.

In other news in Dallas-Ft. Worth, the Jain Youth Group of North Texas held elections in August 2000 bringing Sudeep Shah to the helm as president. The group's first task was to give a presentation for the Sapna Ceremony. The group presented the sequence of dreams of Queen Trishala in a poem format. The youth group hoped that the poem helped in raising their bids for those dreams in fundraising for the Jain Society. Then, the youth group did their Samvatsari Pratrikraman in English with the help of the Pathshala teachers. Many of the youth fasted and performed ehkasanus over the week of Paryusan.

The youth group plans on having a joint community service with the Houston youth group tentatively around Christmas break and Spring break. The youth group is also busy planning the regional conference, and later will have its annual camping trip in the Spring.

Elsewhere, at The University of Texas at **Austin**, the **University Jain Society** recently participated in the Hindu Students' Council Religious Forum, a discussion on different religions. Ruchi Khara spoke for Jainism on the panel with other religions including Sikhism, Baha'i, Hinduism, Islam and others. The discussion focused on the basic principles, college life and religion, and the Indian culture and religion. They also met for dinner as a start to the new semester of activities.

The group performed the Samvatsari Pratikraman on September 11 with a strong turnout of 12. They used the English Pratikraman books prepared in 1992 by the Jain Society of San Diego and JAINA. They also have regular discussion meetings every other Monday evening.

The **Jain Fellowship of Houston** has had busy times since Paryushan. During the Mahavir Janma Vachan of Paryushan, the youth added an innovative twist by running a separate boli for each dream of Queen Trishala. The youth would auction based on a point system, where the points corresponded to service hours, pathshala classes, conferences, fasting, and other Jain activities. All fourteen dreams received impressive bids with totalling over 1000 service hours for the youth to put in. The youth will complete their bids by Mahavir Jayanti 2001. This was the youth's way to contribute, and definitely showed great interest by the youth as the adults do with their bolis of money. Later that week, the youth gathered to perform the Samvatsari Pratikraman in English led by two of the Pathshala teachers. About 30 youth participated in the Pratikraman. Many youth also did a variety of tapasya ranging from upvaas and ekasanus to chauvihar and other sacrifices.

For Ahimsa Day, the Fellowship went to the Mission of Yahweh home where a woman has adopted about 25 orphaned children and also houses battered and destitute women. The youth prepared a vegetarian meal of salad and pasta and took it to the home and served it to the children there. Around 15 youth and pathshala teachers participated and all remarked about how wonderful they felt for having helped out others in need. More service projects are planned on a quarterly basis. The youth helped the adults provide a "Funday Sunday" on October 15th at the Jain Center, with a variety of carnival games and activities for the younger children of the Jain community in the upcoming weeks. The group is also going to help in planning some activities for the regional conference in Dallas.

The small group in the **New Orleans** area had a modest Paryusan Parva. One youth, only seventeen years old did an Atthai, who was the youngest person from their area that has done one. Also, on Sept. 16-17, the Jain Society of Houston had a Chaitya Paripati (bus trip) to New Orleans with the Samanijis. They brought about 100 people and stayed in New Orleans for 2 days. There were programs on Saturday and Sunday.

**Tulsa** has begun to regroup after its mass exodus of its Jain youth to college. The new Patshala classes are beginning and they have a new teacher. In their continuing efforts to assist in the construction of a new Derasar in Tulsa, at the recent Bhoomi Poojan, the youth created a pamphlet on Jain beliefs and the activities of the Tulsa Jain Sangh. They have taken an active role in helping the Sangh in any way possible with the new Derasar. The youth also hope to rejuvenate their service to the community of Tulsa by visiting the Day Center for the Homeless again. All in all, the small youth group of Tulsa has been very active and is looking forward to another productive year.

The youth out in **West Texas** recently held their English Pratikraman with all the seven Jain youth that live in Lubbock. They plan on resuming their Pathshala classes shortly with the help of the Gada family.

All in all, each center's youth are keeping quite busy, but moreover, youth across the South Region are looking forward to the conference over Thanksgiving weekend in North Texas.

## ***Southeast***

The Southeast Region is enthusiastic to start another productive year. At present, various community activities, projects and social events are being planned for members of the region. An Email Distribution Group has been formed for the region at [www.egroups.com/groups/yja-southeast](http://www.egroups.com/groups/yja-southeast). The eGroup will provide a forum for discussion on Jain issues as they relate to Jainism, Jain societies, Jain youth groups and Jain events. Members have been encouraged to share Jain links, articles, and recipes. It has served as a valuable resource as well as an easy way to stay in touch with Jain youth in the region. Local Representatives along with other volunteers are working together for a 100-person regional conference over this Thanksgiving long weekend to be held in Washington, D.C. For more information on the conference, or for anyone wanting to help out please contact Harriti Shah at [hjshah@mcdonogh.org](mailto:hjshah@mcdonogh.org) or Rina Laxmi Shah at [rinashah@mail.com](mailto:rinashah@mail.com). For anyone interested in joining the eGroup or for further information on the Southeast Region and its activities please contact Southeast Regional Coordinator Rina Laxmi Shah at 304-255-1641 or [rinashah@mail.com](mailto:rinashah@mail.com).

## ***West***

**Jain Center of Southern California** Once again another Paryusion passes, and the crowd grows. The programs were very well organized and many youth from the area came out and helped organize and carry out tasks. Many youth also participated in a children's program which ranged from skits to dances to singing. Also during the program the members of the Los Angeles Convention Committee, which hosted the YJA Convention, were awarded with plaques commemorating the hard work that produced a very successful

(continued on page 9)



## Three Young Jains Named SEED Scholars

The Supporting Excellence in Education (SEED) Foundation would like to recognize Neel Kapasi (San Jose, CA), Beeneet Kothari (Long Island, NY) and Neil Vakharia (Cleveland, OH) as SEED Scholars for the year 2000. These three students were chosen because they have demonstrated (a) strong academic performance, (b) outstanding leadership potential and (c) an unwavering commitment to their communities.

A Royal Canadian Army Cadet, Neel truly embodies the meaning of being well-rounded. A certified black belt in Tae Kwon Do and a state qualifier in Cross Country, Neel still finds enough energy to volunteer at the Stanford Medical School Blood Center as well as tutor English and Math students. A strong believer in helping his community, he has helped edit and distribute his cultural newsletter and also worked on organizing a national religious and cultural convention.

Beeneet is the student host of a weekly, live, cable TV show and was recently recognized as a Finalist for the Intel Science Talent Search for his groundbreaking research in science and technology. This National Honor Society president is an accomplished webmaster who volunteers his services to the community. His dedication to the community was evident when he organized computer classes at the local geriatrics center.

Recently named one of the top 10 Model UN delegates in North America, Neil is an outstanding student. This National Merit Finalist is the president of the Junior Council of World Affairs and the editor-in-chief of the high school literacy magazine. Amidst all of his other activities, Neil still finds enough time to serve his religious community by being president of his youth group. This webmaster is also responsible for creating a counseling program at a local hospital.

The SEED Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt, national organization providing broader educational opportunities through community service. Started in 1998, the SEED Foundation encourages today's Asian-Indian youth to understand both the Indian and American communities that we are a part of and our responsibilities to them. The Foundation also recognizes outstanding youth that have made a significant contribution to their community through a scholarship program. This program has already awarded \$15,000 in scholarships. The SEED Leadership Awards are made possible through the generous contributions of several community individuals and corporate sponsors nationwide.

To learn more about the SEED Foundation and its activities, please visit [www.seedfoundation.org](http://www.seedfoundation.org) or contact Samir Mehta, Director of Public Relations, at [samir@seedfoundation.org](mailto:samir@seedfoundation.org). **Information about the 2000-2001 SEED Scholarship program (\$12,000 in available scholarships!) can be found on the SEED website after November 1, 2000.**

## Letter from Ingrid Newkirk

On October 2, India will celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. Despite PETA's best efforts, however, Gandhi's beloved Indian cattle are treated today with appalling inhumanity. They are marched to slaughter for days without food or water and packed roughly into trucks. Many cows collapse from exhaustion or injury; to keep them moving, handlers stick hot peppers and tobacco into their eyes and repeatedly break their tailbones. The trip is lethal for many, especially the very young and old; others arrive so weakened that they must be dragged off the vehicles. In the thousands of illegal slaughterhouses, some of which have been operation for more than 100 years old, many animals have their legs hacked off while still conscious or are skinned alive. Please remember Gandhi's words of affection for both animal and human victims of callousness by urging Indian officials to act to end these intolerable and illegal practices. Despite efforts made by the Indian Council for Leather Exports, satisfactory progress is not evident. If necessary, we will offer retailers renewed encouragement to cancel their contracts with Indian suppliers, and we are prepared to launch a potentially devastating campaign against Indian tourism. We hope that such measures never become necessary. The Indian government must be compelled to address animal suffering in Gandhi's land. To join us in calling for action, please write the Indian ambassador, Shri Naresh Chandra, at: Embassy of India, 2107 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20008; fax: 202-265-4351; e-mail: [amb-washington@indiagov.org](mailto:amb-washington@indiagov.org) today, and ask neighbors, friends, coworkers, and family to write, too. A nation truly can be judged by the way it treats its animals. For updates, go to **[www.peta-online.org](http://www.peta-online.org)**.

Very truly yours,  
Ingrid E. Newkirk

*Ingrid Newkirk is the President of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). She was a keynote speaker at the recent YJA Convention. Visit **[www.peta-online.org](http://www.peta-online.org)**, or call/write: 501 Front St. Norfolk, VA 23510, 757-622-7382.*



## Vegan Action's 'Vegan Certification Program' gets Federal Approval

The number of vegans in the United States is currently estimated to be between 500,000 and 2 million people, and the number of vegetarians is more than 6 million. Both groups are growing at an extraordinary pace, yet the term "vegan" continues to be unfamiliar to most food, cosmetics, and clothing producers.

But this week marks an important step toward increasing the familiarity of veganism among commercial producers. Vegan Action's Certified Vegan seal was just approved by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and will soon be appearing on vegan products near you! Now & Zen, Veg Essentials, McDougall's Right Foods, Road's End Organics, and Dakota Gourmet are among the first producers to incorporate the seal on their vegan products.



For the past year, Vegan Action has been working actively to develop a seal that identifies foods, cosmetics, and clothing that contain no animal ingredients and are not tested on animals. Continuing the work begun by the Vegan Standards and Certification Project in 1997, Vegan Action's seal will help vegans identify products, and alert food producers to the presence of a strong and growing vegan market. Moreover, since most people eat vegan products without knowing it, the seal will also help to spread the word about vegan lifestyles to potential vegans.

With the seal, Vegan Action hopes to do for the vegan movement what the organic certification agencies have done for organic foods -- by certifying products that meet strictly defined third-party vegan standards. The Certified Vegan seal is displayed on the product label, letting consumers know that the product ingredients are completely vegan.

Vegan Action's standards are straightforward. In a nutshell, products to be certified must not contain any animal ingredients. This includes animal meat, milks and milk products and ova, as well as insect ingredients such as honey, bee pollen, beeswax, royal jelly and cochineal. All ingredients of ambiguous origin such as lecithin, squalene, stearate and many others, must be of non-animal origin. Other prohibited ingredients include animal skins, human-derived ingredients such as keratin, and marine animal products such as coral, fish scales, and pearl. Products to be certified must also meet Vegan Action's no-animal-testing requirement the development of the product must not involve testing of any sort on animals conducted at the initiative of the manufacturer or on its behalf or by parties over whom the manufacturer has effective control.

We anticipate that the use and proliferation of the Certified Vegan seal will benefit not only vegans and vegetarians but also manufacturers that wish to notify consumers that their product is vegan. In this manner, we hope to encourage manufacturers to recognize vegans and vegetarians as a viable and crucial market niche, one that will only grow larger as the health effects of meat consumption and awareness of animal suffering inherent in the production of so many products become more widely revealed.

**Vegan Action**  
**P.O. Box 4353**  
**Berkeley, CA 94704**  
**[www.vegan.org](http://www.vegan.org)**  
**[certification@vegan.org](mailto:certification@vegan.org)**

### YJA Regional News (from page 7)

convention. The eight days were wrapped up with an English Pratikraman which was attended and led by many youth in the area.

**West Regional Conference** The conference will be held at the Jain Center of Northern California with 50-80 people. For more information please see the YJA web site and navigate to the West region page. Spots are limited, so please get the registration forms in as soon as you can.

Please update your addresses.

If you do not do so by January 31, 2001 then you will be dropped from the records and will no longer receive *Young Minds*.

## Chitrabhanu: 'God shows the light, but you have to find the way yourself'

MUMBAI: "Rocks fascinate me," he exclaims with a glint in his eye, and quickly opens a wooden cabinet. Rummaging its contents, he retrieves a green and a brown piece of rock, and with child-like enthusiasm coaxes, "See them closely. How uneven and unattractive they are".

The green one has a crack and he opens it from there into two uneven halves, revealing hundreds of tiny little pink crystals embedded on the inner wall of the stone. "That is how I describe divinity within human beings," he smiles. "Whatever you are from outside --ugly or good looking, your inner self is beautiful --the 'parmatma' dwells there."

Shree Chitrabhanu, or 'gurudev' as his followers call him, the founder and spiritual advisor to the Jain International Meditation Centre in New York, is based in the U.S. and spends five months in India. Speaking to this newspaper at the end of his stay in the city, the 78-year-old monk said that he did not talk about religion, rather his sessions were discussions on ahimsa, compassion and 'anekantavada' (understanding others' opinion).

He holds the distinction for being the first Jain monk to have travelled by vehicle when he was invited to address the second and third spiritual summit conference at Geneva in 1970.

Referred to as Pope John of Jainism by the New York Times, he exhorts people to believe in themselves and their actions. "I always tell people that God shows the light but you have to find your way yourself," he observes adding, that destiny is never a matter of chance, but choice.

Shree Chitrabhanu, who has always adopted a modern and a realistic view of Jainism notes, "While religions separate one person from the other, their teachings always bind." His following comprises people from faiths like Roman Catholics, Jews and Parsis and his sessions are attended by people from diverse age groups and backgrounds. He has also founded an association-- Young Jains of America for the youth.

"Though his philosophies are based on the teachings of Lord Mahavira, he has developed his own faith --one that is comprehensible to the international community today," says a follower.

A visiting lecturer to institutions of learning like Princeton, Harvard and State University of New York, he lucidly explains the philosophies of life. For instance, he says, "Like a tree is hidden in a seed so is the parmatma hidden in the soul. As a plant blossoms from a seed, so does the divinity within an individual when the soul is nourished as layers of ego, hatred, jealousy are shed."

But hailing from a business family what prodded him into the path of spirituality? Following the death of three dear ones, questions like "Where do people go after their death," and "If death is the ultimate reality what is the purpose of life," always confounded him and he set out to seek answers.

In his quest for these answers he became a monk in 1942. It was then he started realising the beauty of life. "I could then see beauty in death also." He notes, "What disappears appears somewhere else and every end leads to a new beginning. Beauty lies in this change from one form to the other."

—Roli Srivastava

write for *Young Minds*

think independently

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***"I took part in Samavastri Pratikraman held at the Jain Vishwa Bharati Center in Orlando, FL. Approximately 50 Jains gathered for the auspicious occasion. It was the very first time I had ever sat in. Afterwards, Jain books were handed to those that fasted. I did 3 Upvas in all. The Center had lectures during Paryushan in the morning and evening. On the first day, there was a continuous 24 hour Namokar Mantra Jaap. Five adults performed 'Athai'. Overall, I was surprised by the ease of which I maintained Paryushan. I believe that if there are others around you committed to Paryushan then it is easy to do it."***

**Binoy Shah, on the Paryushan experience**

## Non-violence is way to world peace

*The following is the speech delivered by Mrs Indu Jain, Chairman, The Times Group, at the ongoing Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual leaders at the United Nations, as appeared in the Times of India on August 31, 2000.*

Bhagwan Mahavir was deep in meditation. His closed eyes emanated an extraordinary peace and serenity. A bird flew in and sat close to him. When he opened his eyes, the bird got frightened and flew away. Lord Mahavir thought of the violence inherent in the very opening of the human eye. Non-violence, or a-himsa is not only the absence of violence but it is the lack of fear and the presence of an all-embracing love for humanity.

Non-violence is reaching out to others while transcending the barriers of caste, creed, religion, sex, faction and even species. It is an independent state of consciousness. Our physical, emotional and intellectual states of being limit and confine us; they choke us, degrade us and make us unhappy. The absence of fetters or chains is non-violence.

***It is fashionable in the West to think of non-violence as a powerless tool. This is a misunderstanding. Non-violence is a way of life and a theory of an ideal society.***

Removing ignorance is the first step towards building a world movement for non-violence. True knowledge consists of self-understanding and self-control. Non-violence is the highest form of knowledge since it harmonises one's relations with others. Ahimsa, like moksha or nirvana, is freedom from the endless drama of opposites: pleasure-pain, happiness-sorrow, attraction-aversion, love-hate, gain-loss, success-failure, wealth-poverty, fear-courage, strength-weakness, victory-defeat, praise-denigration, honour-insult, conflict-harmony, gentleness-aggression, virtue-vice, good-evil, freedom-bondage.

In short, non-violence is freedom from the past, from history, from memory. It is freedom from all that which suffocates, chokes, distresses and disturbs. Therefore, whatever can be subdued by opposites is not free; whatever is not free cannot be non-violent; I cannot be sensitive to other people's plight if I remain a prisoner of the human drama being played out by these opposites.

How can I be sensitive to other people and their pain? The Jain philosophy of anekantvad has an answer to this. It argues that there are no absolute theories or theorems or formulas that are capable of describing reality in absolute terms. Nirvana lies in right faith (samyagadarshana), right knowledge (samyagnana) and right conduct (samyakcharitra). Simply put, my way is not the final one, my version is not the only version, and my truth is not the ultimate truth. There are many ways, several versions and diverse paths to reach the truth. Each in its own right is legitimate.

How is this perfect state of peace and universal love to be obtained? Desire and its satisfaction cannot be the foundation of relationship with my self and the other. In relation to myself, desire will only drive me restless, anxious in seeking satisfaction and in wanting to retain what I have. I will reach a point where I can hardly ever enjoy what I desired and obtained. In relation to the other, I turn the other into a means of my satisfaction, into an object, to be grasped and retained, and then manipulated. This is why Jainism places such great emphasis on a-parigraha, roughly translated as non-possession. But this non-possession is not one of objects alone, but non-possession of desires and control of the lower senses.

It is fashionable in the West to think of non-violence as a powerless tool. This is a misunderstanding. Non-violence is a way of life and a theory of an ideal society. One who believes in non-violence resists and counters violence by being uninfluenced by it. Non-violence absorbs the recurrence of violence. It is an expansive, all-embracing love and concern for all living and non-living beings. Remorse and bitterness are not part of the agenda of non-violence.

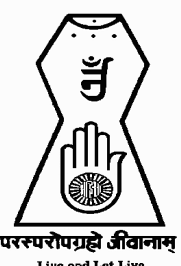
Who would understand the language of love and concern better than the youth of today? If non-violence has to become a world movement, the young will have to assume the leadership of this movement. They have shown tremendous initiative in taking up the cause of environmental protection, furthering peace and rising above the narrow confines of nationality, ethnicity and parochialism. Today's youth is a global citizen. He or she understands the only language that is universal: love. And love is possible through non-violence alone. I salute the youth of today. I salute non-violence. I believe in universal love and dedicate myself to furthering it.

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