

Young Minds



Featured Articles:

Fear, Ignorance, and Trump
by Nikhil Bumb

Jainism & the Army
by Raj Kankaria

&

ONLINE PATHSHALA:
New April Content

YJA-JAINA Long Range
Planning Meeting

May 2017

A YOUNG JAINS of
AMERICA PUBLICATION

YJA Retreats
Photos,
attendee
reflections,
and more!

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

WELCOME!

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If a person's mind is controlled by forces of revenge and jealousy, it cannot express love & sympathy. And even if they show love and sympathy to others it will yield no good result. The thought will not be reflected in love but in hate.

- Virchand Gandhi
Jain Scholar
(1864-1901)

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CO-CHAIRS

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

Jai Jinendra Readers,

As spring is upon us, it's a great time to think about growing and exploring, and we've really enjoyed doing that with many YJA programs over the past few months. With several sets of YJA Pathshala material released, we encourage you to take a look at the videos, podcasts, handouts, and more that cover everything from Jainism basics to more in-depth concepts. YJA Forums has a brand-new, mobile-friendly setup - now you can take discussions with your YJA friends about everything from religion to career to sports with you everywhere! Maybe you made some new friends at one of our six regional retreats, or maybe you'll continue to make them at YJA events over the next few months - either way, we hope you take advantage of every opportunity to stay connected with each other.



We are looking forward to continuing to learn and improve in the next few months. Our Executive Board co-hosted April with the JAINA Long Range Planning Committee in Chicago to discuss the future of Jainism and youth initiatives in the US. The month of May will bring the first ever YJA Walk-A-Thon - we're excited to co-host this event with Young Jains of Singapore and Young Jains UK as we raise money for Akshaya Patra to support school lunch programs in India! Lastly, we will be at the JAINA Convention this summer, and we hope you stop by our table and introduce yourself, chat, and learn more about how you can get involved with YJA.

Yours,
Avish Jain and Hetali Lodaya

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Nemi Mehta - South Retreat Attendee
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Nidhi Mehta - Southeast Retreat Attendee
Pankti Tamboli - Northeast RC
Yash Shah - Northeast Retreat Attendee
Kairavi Mehta - Northeast Retreat Attendee
Rea Savla - West RC
Hiral Shah - West RC Attendee

JAINA

YJA is the youth arm of JAINA.
Ashok Domadia - President
Gunvant Shah - First VP
Shobha Vora - Secretary
Rita Sheth - Treasurer

NAVKAR MANTRA

Ṇamō arihantāṇaṃ

Ṇamō siddhāṇaṃ

Ṇamō āyariyāṇaṃ

Ṇamō uvajjhāyāṇaṃ

Ṇamō lōē savva sāhūṇaṃ

Ēsōpañchaṇamōkkārō,

savvapāvappaṇāsaṇō

Maṅgalā ṇaṃ ca savvēsiṃ,

paḍamama havaī maṅgalam

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 हूं, 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.**



About photo

Rock-carved statues
at Gwalior Fort, an
8th century hill fort in
Madhya Pradesh, India.
The oldest record of
"O" was found here at a
temple towards the top.

May peace rule the
universe, may peace
rule in kingdoms
and empires, may
peace rule in states
and in the lands of
the potentates, may
peace rule in the the
house of friends and
may peace also rule
in the house of my
enemies.

- Virchand Gandhi
Jain Scholar
(1864-1901)

from the EDITOR

Jai Jinendra Readers,

As the school year comes to an end and summer begins, I hope you all have had productive years and have seen progress in your professional lives. YJA has been able to do incredible work this year; since January, the 2016-2017 Executive Board has been working around the clock for you, our reader.

Our love for what we do is showcased throughout Young Minds. As the Editor, I have the privilege of working not only with board members, but also very closely with writers, who have worked very hard to pass their ideas and thoughts on to you through the written word.

In this issue of Young Minds, we bring you updates to many projects YJA has been working on. Earlier this year, we released YJA Pathshala, a way to bring Jainism to you directly through the computer - last month's topic was Karma Theory. There are also updates regarding YJA Fundraising, and our recent JAINA-YJA Long Range Planning (LRP) meeting, in which our board met with members of the JAINA LRP Committee to better understand how YJA can adapt to our members' changing needs over the coming decades.

Perhaps what you will find most intriguing are the stories themselves. This issue of Young Minds is the longest issue ever to be released by YJA. Those of you who are passionate about politics will thoroughly enjoy Nikhil Bumb's *Combating Fear & Ignorance in the Time of Trump*, which showcases the issues minorities face in America. Those who have considered serving in the military

should take a look at Raj Kankaria's *Jainism & the Army*, in which Raj describes the similarities between Jainism and military service and whether both can be reconciled. Dr. Hema Pokharna's *The Wisdom of Forgiveness* shows us how the corrosion of anger hurts us the most. Amit Shah's article, *Mental Health in South Asian & Jain Communities*, highlights a stigma rarely discussed, and Rachna Shah's *Ahimsa: Changing Times, Changing Lives* tell us more about the advantages of a vegetarian diet.

The future of Jainism can be seen not just in Rahul Jain's article, but also by reading the reflections of several Regional Coordinators and attendees from the YJA Retreats which took place all over the country. As someone who didn't have much interaction with Jains when younger, it was so revealing and incredible for me to read the experiences of youth across the country.

Let us know what you'd like to see in Young Minds by emailing youngminds@yja.org - or reach out at yja.org/youngminds and propose an article yourself! As a writer, your experience as a Jain youth will join the voices of your peers from across the country as we work together to build a community - and a family.

Yours,
Salil Ojha
Director of Publications



THANK YOU

from the DIRECTOR OF FUNDRAISING

Jai Jinendra!

Thank you to all who attended the regional retreats! As the battle for best region is still unresolved (or is it?), we sincerely want to thank all of the donors who helped make these events possible:

Mid-Atlantic: Aimee Doshi, Prachi Jain, Sanket Shah, Visum Desai

Mid-West: Nilesh Dagli, Rishi Shah, Riya Shah, Vipul & Reshma Shah

Northeast: Aastha Kodia, Chandra Khasgiwala, Hasmukh & Rita Vora, Hemanshu & Komal Shah, Kanishka Sethi, Kashmira & Premal Vora, Nilesh Dagli, Pradip & Nisha Gosalia, Priya & Brahmdev Jain, Punam & Rahul Mutha, Rishabh Jain, Sanjay & Neelam Shah, Jain Center of Greater Boston

South: Dhanesha Hemani, Raj Kankaria, Sushma Dharja

Southeast: Paakhee Shah, Rohan Vora, Saachi Gandhi, Jain Study Center of North Carolina, Jain Sangh of Greater Atlanta

West: Amit Shah, Anisha Jain, Kunal Jain, Minal Shah, Niel Dalal, Shilpa Daulat, Yash Gandhi, Yesha Shah

For those of you who missed getting one of the YJA Ahimsa Blankets, there are still some available for \$15. E-mail fundraising@yja.org if you're interested in one.

YJA Board Members and representatives will have a table at the JAINA convention in New Jersey this summer. Please stop by to say hello and learn how you can be involved in YJA projects across North America. We would love to hear from you about how to better reach Jains in your local community! And stay tuned for details on a YJA and YJA alum meetup at JAINA!

Our Board Members and Local Representatives have attended Mahavir Jayanti programs across the country and have enjoyed meeting new people and reconnecting with longtime supporters. Partnering with local Jain Centers is a critical part of YJA's mission, and we hope to continue supporting our current and future YJA members by nurturing those relationships.

With much #yjalove,
Sapna Jain
 Director of Fundraising



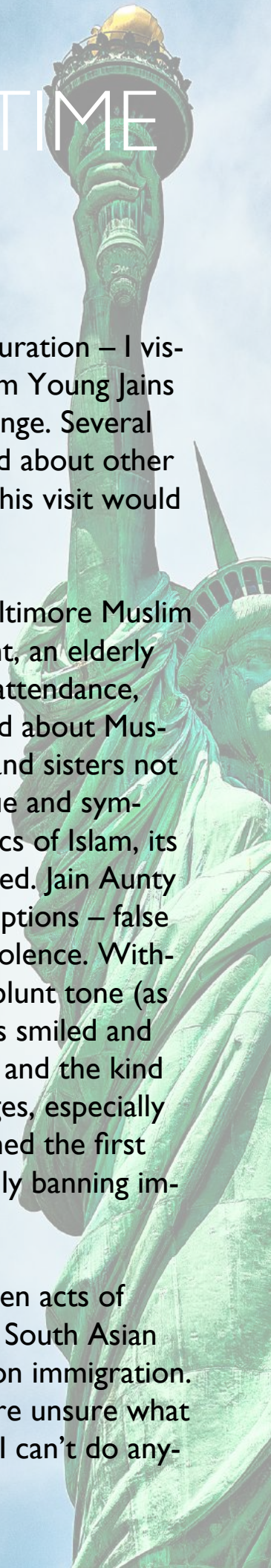
COMBATING FEAR & IGNORANCE IN THE TIME OF TRUMP

BY NIKHIL BUMB

On Sunday, January 22 – two days after President Trump’s inauguration – I visited the Islamic Society of Baltimore* with a group of youths from Young Jains of America, Mid-Atlantic as part of a Jain-Muslim interfaith exchange. Several of my closest friends are Muslim and in an effort to stay informed about other religions, I have visited many mosques in the past. I didn’t think this visit would be any different.

But after touring the center, and talking with members of the Baltimore Muslim community, one exchange stuck with me. At the end of the event, an elderly woman from our group (the mother of one of the Jain youth in attendance, who I’ll call Jain Aunty) shared several negative notions she’d held about Muslims for 50+ years. Throughout the tour, our Muslim brothers and sisters not only told us about the history, design, and meaning of the mosque and symbols within it but also answered several questions about the basics of Islam, its core beliefs, and ways in which the Quran has been misinterpreted. Jain Aunty thanked our hosts for sharing openly and clarifying her misconceptions – false beliefs about their dislike of other religions, jihad, and a call to violence. Without skipping a beat or showing even the slightest offense at her blunt tone (as I thought they would have been, or I might have been), our hosts smiled and thanked her. “This is exactly the kind of response we would like and the kind of awareness we need to build. We need more of these exchanges, especially in today’s political climate.” Five days later, President Trump signed the first executive order on immigration, banning refugees and temporarily banning immigrants from 7 Muslim countries.

Since then, it’s been a whirlwind of court actions, threats and open acts of violence against ethnic and religious minorities (including several South Asian Americans who have been killed), and another executive order on immigration. I hear my friends and colleagues itching to “do something” but are unsure what actions to take. I often find myself thinking that, as an individual, I can’t do anything. The problem is beyond the scope of one person.



I studied engineering, and one of the first things you learn in any Engineering 101 class is that everything – physical and abstract constructs alike, machine or otherwise – is and can be modelled as a system. A system is made up of sub-components. You can't fix a machine without changing at least some or all of its parts. Individual and grassroots efforts, like the Jain-Muslim interfaith exchange, play a much more critical role in altering mindsets and our landscape than we think they might. They combat fear and ignorance at its most basic and core levels, building awareness and compassion from the ground up. Top-down approaches to affect change are important but real systems change occurs when large scale organizational efforts are combined with an emphasis on bottom-up actions and the role of smaller actors and individuals.

Everyone holds implicit biases and makes assumptions about people, cultures, or things that do not look like us. Without trying hard we can all probably think of at least three inherent biases our close friends, family members, or relatives hold – whether about Muslims, African Americans, Latinos, women, LGBTs, disabled persons, Asians, or straight, white men. I grew up in South Carolina, the son of two immigrant South Asian parents, and am no stranger to biases, some relatively harmless and others large and hurtful. I get annoyed when friends make offhand gender remarks about women being soft; irritated when family members make statements in jest about gays being effeminate; and roll my eyes when I see yet another brown guy playing a terrorist, a doctor, or a gas station owner on TV. Growing up, classmates ridiculed me for worshipping cows and riding an elephant to school - neither of which is true or possible in South Carolina. The day after the election, my sister was driving home in Atlanta when a white man, unprovoked, rolled down his window, yelled derogatory remarks at my sister, flicked her off, and sped away.

I see all of these things, yet I'd never hold myself above someone else as being 'not racist.' There is no such thing. Biases, stereotypes, and assumptions stem from a lack of awareness and we all have them. As individuals, the least we can do to combat large scale ignorance and discrimination is to challenge ourselves and those around us to get outside of our comfort zone and learn about the other. As a Jain Indian American – a minority within a minority – it is rare to meet someone who has heard of my religion. People often ask, "Who's Jane?" It's exhausting to always play the role of the informer. Growing up in the Deep South, I had to constantly defend myself from "being saved." When I finally moved North, I had to defend myself from my South Asian, Ivy League educated Hindu peers (who you might think know better) as they made ill-informed statements about Jainism and told me it's "really just a sect of Hinduism."

At the same time, I know how extremely heartwarming and humbling it is when someone expresses genuine interest in learning about my faith. Usually, we have little in common otherwise, but I almost always feel an instant connection and shared humanity with their curiosity.

We are informed by what we hear on the news, read on the internet, and consume through a self-selected community of mostly similar looking and like-minded individuals. In doing so, we limit ourselves to just one side of multidimensional issues, feed off of each other's implicit views, and perpetuate misconceptions. Instead, what if we went directly to the communities and cultures we know the least about or fear the most, and we learned about them from them?

In academics, this research method is called ethnography – the study of people in their own environment, on their terms, and by understanding their local context, often through participant observation or face-to-face interviewing. For Jain Aunty, this meant leaving her community, journeying to a new place, and talking to a group of Muslims not just in a transactional way but as equals.

At our core, most of us are looking for a sense of identity and community with those around us. In an increasingly heterogeneous society, it is impossible for that sense of community to come solely from those that look, dress, eat, love, or worship exactly like we do. *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* - all lives are bound by interdependence.

So get out there. Be an ethnographer. Seek out what causes you fear and get to know someone beyond the transactional. Don't just check the box and refuse to let go of prior notions. Approach these conversations from a place of genuine curiosity, not skepticism. Don't lie to yourself and don't be afraid to admit how little you know. Learning at the source is the best way to dispel false beliefs and build awareness. Much like Jain Aunty, it's likely that several (and maybe all) of your assumptions will be proven false. Build bridges, not walls.

A version of this article was originally published in The Huffington Post.

* *The Islamic Society of Baltimore is famously the mosque that President Obama toured in February 2016 – his first official visit to a U.S. mosque – where he reaffirmed the important role that Muslims play in our nation.*





Mid-West Retreat session.



West Retreat yoga and meditation.

South Retreat in Seguin, TX.




Mid-West Retreat in Alto, MI.



JAINISM & THE ARMY

BY RAJ KANKARIA, CPT
UNITED STATES ARMY



Jai Jinendra! We as Jains mostly associate the Army and Armed Forces with violence, death, and destruction. But, you will be surprised to know that despite many of the negative and violent stereotypes, the Army has taught me how to become more in touch with my own spirituality and the Jain Religion. Hence, a true paradox.

The theme of this article will revolve around how Jainism has allowed to me to become a better leader in my organization and how The Army has allowed me to harness the fundamentals of the Jain Religion and apply them to everyday leadership challenges. From being a cadet at West Point to being second-in-command of a Bridge Company, the fundamental principles of Jainism have allowed me to create a personal ideology to achieve success as a Soldier and as a leader.

The first phase of leadership starts with YOU! In order to become a successful leader, you must look within yourself and constantly analyze, “How can I improve myself?” When new cadets first enter the doors of West Point on “Reception Day”, they are stripped of their possessions, shaved bald, and stripped of their individuality with the goal of full indoctrination. There are very specific rules for eating, walking, and behaving that remind young new cadets that they are no longer individuals, but part of a much larger and greater team, The United States Army. This was the crucible moment where I learned why Jainism preaches Non-attachment (Aparigraha) to living and non-living entities. I quickly realized that my own being as a human is of very little significance in the larger universe, leading me to find my own greater purpose on Earth, which was in the service of the nation. As time went on, I became more and more unattached from material possessions and began to focus on more important aspects of life, like what I could do to become a better, more efficient, and knowledgeable leader for my troops. I also began to introspect; at West Point, first year cadets are forbidden from speaking outside of the classroom or dorm rooms for the entirety of the school year. The result is a developed ability to contemplate and analyze one’s own self and allow the fusion of mind and body.

We Jains practice what is known as *maun-vrat*; a few minutes of internal reflection in silence will allow you to listen to the world. People have a lot to say and there are many problems that need solutions! With self-improvement comes self-discipline or *samyama*. This important Jain principle teaches us to control our urges and exercise the mind and body daily. Once you've taken control of all self-pleasing desires, you can discern needs from wants and begin the process of becoming a true leader.

The next phase of leadership affects those that we come in direct contact with on a daily basis. Once you've realized your own self-being, you can begin to change your surroundings and give back. One of my biggest reasons for attending West Point and joining The Army was my genuine intrinsic desire to serve the nation. I've been granted the privilege of being an American citizen and have enjoyed the fruits and luxuries therein. The people I serve and come in direct contact with on a daily basis are the men and women assigned to my platoon. As a platoon leader, I'm given charge of a sizeable force of 40-50 Soldiers of all races, religions and ethnicities. As their leader, I'm responsible for their welfare before my own. I am accountable for their training, discipline, equipment, and general well-being. This opportunity was given to me at a very early stage in my life and by age 25 I've had to deal with such issues as DUIs, public intoxication, unpaid child support, domestic violence, drug use, marital problems, health problems, and suicide within my unit.

At such a young age, I hadn't had the experience to deal with such issues, so I fell back upon what Jainism had taught me. The most important Jain principle that allows us to deal with and solve problems relating to others is that of *Anekantvad*. *Anekantvad* is the theory of multiplicity of views that states, "no single point of view is the complete truth, yet when taken together, they comprise the complete truth". How then, as leaders do we develop the ability to view problems from multiple angles? We take care of others and empathize by understanding and sharing in their feelings. Over time this develops into the ability to see situations from several points of view to make the best decisions. In order to develop a strong sense of *Anekantvad* we must realize that every situation and problem will have many different views and angles, and we must be able to analyze and examine every single one. We must also develop a strong sense of compassion, known as *Daya*, which entails universal friendliness (*Maitri*), universal forgiveness (*Kshama*), and universal fearlessness (*Abhaya*). Applying these fundamental principles to everyday occurrences allows us to make a positive impact in our surroundings and in the lives of the people we work with every day.

Applying these fundamental principles to everyday occurrences allows us to make a positive impact in our surroundings and in the lives of the people we work with every day.

The final phase of my leadership model is the transformation from a leader in the community or the workplace to a global agent of change. My experience in this final phase is limited to my experience as a platoon leader deployed to the Republic of Korea, but the fundamental lessons I've learned are very applicable. To make any sort of difference or change outside of our community and circles we must gain a certain degree of credibility. Credibility is derived from character; develop your character by finding a unique set of values that defines YOU. My values have stemmed from those taught to me as a disciple of Jainism, and as a Soldier and leader in the Army. My unique set of values have allowed me to become a leader, yet maintain a strict adherence to the fundamental principle of Ahimsa or non-violence. This has allowed me to develop credibility. The U.S. Army is successful and sought after for assistance because it has gained a great amount of credibility in the world by adhering to a stringent set of values and ethics. We as Jains have gained credibility by strictly adhering to Ahimsa; we are known as a benevolent group of people that will never seek to harm anyone. Ahimsa is the baseline characteristic of a Jain and it's the underlying value that gives us and our religion credibility. The bottom line is that people who don't know you personally will only trust you once you've developed the right amount of credibility, which stems from character, which further stems from the values, ethics, and morals that define you as a person.

In conclusion, these are the lessons that I've learned and adopted that have allowed me to become a successful person, successful leader in my organization, and to some degree, a global agent of change. This is not an end-all, be-all solution for becoming a successful leader, but rather fundamental truths that guide us. You must do your own personal self-reflection and examine what works best for YOU.



Captain Raj Kankaria is a native of Houston, TX. He attended the United States Military Academy from 2009 to 2013 and graduated with a B.Sc. in Civil Engineering. He then commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Engineer Regiment. CPT Kankaria was then posted to Fort Leonard Wood, MO to attend the Engineer Basic Officer Leadership Course. CPT Kankaria, along with his Army duties, teaches Patshala to 11th and 12th grade students at the Jain Society of Houston, and has given a presentation at YJA 2016 about his experiences as a Jain serving in the U.S. Army.

LONG RANGE PLANNING

THE FUTURE OF JAINISM

The YJA Executive Board had the opportunity to meet with JAINA's Long Range Planning (LRP) Committee in Chicago, IL from April 7-9 to discuss current projects and brainstorm about new initiatives for the Jain community. We left with a brand new perspective on how the next one to five years will look for young Jains in the United States and how YJA can best serve them. We are excited to collaborate on projects in the future!



The 2016-2017 YJA Executive Board with the JAINA Long Range Planning Committee in Chicago, IL.

yjapathshala

APRIL LESSON KARMA THEORY

We're excited to release April's content for YJA Pathshala - this time, we'll be taking a closer look at Karma and the 9 Fundamental Beliefs in Jainism, called the Tattvas.

In the handouts, you'll be able to learn about what Jains believe is the ultimate goal in life and the steps necessary to take to get there. The video will visually explain the process and the podcast clips (a new addition!) will go through a few discussions on the topic. We hope you take the quiz and survey and let us know if you have any feedback at pathshala@yja.org!

April content can be found at yja.org/pathshala - just click on "Karma Theory (April 2017)" under course content.



2018

YJA CONVENTION

APPLICATIONS CLOSED

STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFO

THE WISDOM OF FORGIVENESS

BY DR. HEMA POKHARNA

A few days ago, I was speaking at an interfaith gathering and was introduced to the audience as a follower of Jainism. As I came back to my seat, someone asked me, “Is Jainism that forgiveness religion?” I said yes, a forgiveness religion, because at its core it is a way of life that teaches one to live and let live. I wondered: If I am a Jain, am I a forgiving person? There are so many layers and flavors of forgiveness. I am reminded of the stories of Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and many others who practiced forgiveness and reconciliation. Mahatma Gandhi’s teacher Shrimad Rajchandraji has said that forgiveness is a doorway to liberation. Christ’s last words were, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do”.

It is usually not easy to forgive ourselves or others, because we do not understand what forgiveness is. To forgive someone who has behaved in ways that you did not enjoy or caused you hurt does not mean that you are letting the person off the hook. It doesn’t mean you’re excusing them for their offenses. It doesn’t even mean you’re completely over what they’ve done. It simply means you are letting yourself off of their emotional hook and that you can have full and easy access to your own love, peace, and presence.

Whatever your religion may be, forgiveness is a practice, and like meditation, it needs to be cultivated and practiced regularly. Forgiveness saves your spiritual, physical, emotional well-being, and relationships from the corrosive damage of anger and the high cost of hatred and revenge, as well as the loss of inner peace that can lead to physiological manifestations.

I’d like to share four reasons that I have had quite a bit of trouble with it in my own daily life. I know from my work as a leadership coach that many others do, too, in spite of higher education, income, and many other successes. I’m going to suggest alternative things you can do if you find yourself trapped in one of these destructive mindsets.

1. Pride - “Forgiving someone makes me look weak. I want to be strong and superior”

This one can be quite subtle. You tell yourself you are right and that forgiving would mean you are giving in to the other person and/or are a loser for doing so. You isolate yourself and internally suffer because you love relationships and long to be accepted for who you are and who you want to be.

What to do instead: Make a list of the different people in your life you have trouble forgiving. Make a note of your feelings of hurt and the reasons why you were hurt. Look for a theme of the story you tell yourself about what actually happened. What were your values that were not honored? Awareness is the first step towards healthy ways of being with yourself when you feel hurt and upset with others.

2. Denial - “If I ignore it, it will go away”

Very often we brush away an insult or harsh words by saying, “that’s okay” or, “not a problem.” The hurt just gets buried and resurfaces later in the form of loss of peace and sleep.

What to do instead: Again, awareness of how you feel is crucial. Ignoring how we feel is dismissal of our own feelings. Thank people when they apologize instead of saying that’s okay. Talk it over with someone close; share the inner hurt, and find a healthier perspective on what happened.

3. Revenge - “The person has to pay for it. They need to be punished and learn from it”

How we respond to others can guide how others act towards us. People will attack or harshly criticize you to let off their own steam, because they have had an awful day or week or simply do not like their lives that much. Don’t think it is all about you.

What to do instead: Be aware that you are hurt not because of others’ actions but perhaps because of your need for respect, love, and possibly connection. Release the other from blame and wrongness by focusing on what matters most to you, and give that to yourself. Give yourself the love and care that you wished the other person would give to you. The thought of revenge stems from a deep need for empathy, so give yourself empathy, or ask someone else

for it. If you wish, you can honestly say, “I felt like _____ when you said or did _____.” Just saying this can support a conversation where you can connect with what happened inside you and show the other how they contributed to your pain. This can lead to trust in the relationship.

4. Avoiding Confrontation - Waiting for the other person to come to you first and say sorry

This rarely happens, if ever. You wind up spending much time in your day thinking about what other people should and should not have done to you. Your focus is on the other person and how wrong they were, and you wait, brooding and wishing they would come and say sorry. This is a great recipe for misery and chronic depression.

What to do instead: Focus on you. Bring your attention and energy to you instead of waiting. Appreciate yourself, and design relationships that nurture you and your dreams and goals. Let go of your focus on the person’s wrong actions or words, and re-channel your energies to wishing the other well. See the situation “as-is,” not “what I want it to be.” And ask yourself: What is one small step I can take today to find peace within myself? Maybe meditate, pray, or go exercise.

5. Forgetting divine love and forgiveness

We live in an imperfect world. Here’s an essentially tragic nature to life, one that you have to forgive and accept in a foundational way. The less we forgive, the more we get caught up in small daily dramas.

What to do instead: Whatever your religion, cultivate a daily practice of turning to the divine to release yourself of any hurts big and small. Build awareness that will allow you to live and let others live, and realize that every person has the right to be who he or she is. The more you love yourself, the more you will be able to love others.

YJA-JAINA LRP meeting taking place in Chicago, IL
 Left to right: Salil Ojha (Director of Publications), Pujan Solanki (Director of IT), Chintan Shah (LRP), Bipin Shah (LRP).



University of Pennsylvania & University of Sciences Hindu Jain Association Mahavir Jayanti Celebration 2017.



YJA members discussing religion & art
at the MET in New York City.



LR's serving food at
the JSMC Mahavir
Jayanti celebration in
Schaumburg, IL.

MENTAL HEALTH IN SOUTH ASIAN & JAIN COMMUNITIES

BY AMIT SHAH

Have you ever been sad? Have you ever been disappointed? Have you ever felt left out, or felt like you were alone? All these questions have one thing in common - depression!

Depression is a very strong word, a word that often is very loosely used, and sometimes it is very shameful to mention. Being from South Asian backgrounds, talking about depression or even suicide is frowned upon, unspoken, or unheard of until it's too late. Let us unmask the truth behind it today. Findings from the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum show that a higher percentage of those between the ages of 15 - 24 have depressive symptoms, and the article from India West even points out a higher rate of suicide among youth South Asian American women than the general U.S. population.

So what are some contributing factors that cause us to feel depressed, or even lead to thoughts of suicide? Family conflicts at home, social/family/community pressures, self identity, and body image are just a few situations which lead us to feel this way. So why do we hide it so much? Many of our elders and their generation believe in the idea that, "Therapy is meant for those who are crazy, and you are not crazy" and, "What happens in life, will make you stronger". In other situations, the unspoken belief is, "Don't ask, Don't tell, and Don't Share" because this brings shame on us.

Shame is a powerful five letter word that can cause us to hide everything going on in our lives, and we don't speak up about our own problems as a result. Subjects about abuse, addiction, body image, and LGBTQ issues are all within our community. Despite this, some of our elders will comment that this doesn't happen within the "Jain Community". In reality, it has nothing to do with religion but is rather influenced by culture. In a BBC News article, Professor Dinesh Bhugra, an expert in mental health at King's College London, said that, "Many in the community do not consider it a medical issue, but instead put mental illness down to other factors such as a superstitious belief that there is something they did in their previous life and they're being punished" (Raj Kaur Bikhu, BBC News Broadcast Journalist).

When it comes to getting help in such situations, we ourselves are discouraged. I have personally struggled with mental health myself. During my youth, my parents moved for their business. It was hard for me to adapt and make friends. I was already the new kid, and being Jain, vegetarian, and Indian wasn't helping. We moved from a very diverse area with people of different backgrounds to an area where the majority were Caucasian. Growing up, I had become a target of bullying, and as a result, I kept to myself. I would look forward to the days of my parents taking us to the derasar, attending family parties, or any Indian related events. This kept me strong on the inside, but it didn't stop other kids from picking on me. Finally once I had graduated high school I felt a little better but was still struggling on the inside.

Many of the friends that I had made thought that when I would speak my feelings and emotions, I was just being over dramatic or seeking attention. The reality was that my typical Indian male ego and the fear of what the community or my parents would say if I wanted to seek professional help was trapping me inside. At one point it was so bad I had to take antidepressants to manage the pain. Years passed by, and things did not get better until something inside me sparked, all because of what someone said to me. This caused me to go backwards. My two best friends, one being a doctor, and the other a therapist, sat me down and helped me find a therapist who I now see once a week.

Truth be told, I've always felt abandoned, alone, and outcasted. It wasn't until I found YJA in 2003 where I learned a lot and made friends. I joined the YJA Executive Board, and that's actually where those two friends who helped came from. YJA actually has helped me a lot in my life it has helped me find friends that now support me, guide me, and understand who I really am. I hope this helps you open your eyes, and if you need to seek help, please don't fear it, because it will honestly help you in the end. Just know that you are not alone on this battle within yourself. Admitting to all this, I haven't ever felt weaker during this entire process but at the same time, it has actually made me stronger and feel better about myself. I'm glad that I myself admitted that I needed additional support, and doing it alone isn't always possible. Just as Shah Rukh Khan, and Alia Bhatt say in *Dear Zindagi*, "Love your Zindagi!"

Findings from the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum show that a higher percentage of those between the ages of 15 - 24 have depressive symptoms.

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.

Ayush Jain

MID-ATLANTIC (WOODSTOCK, MD)

YJA is special to me because it allows me to connect with young adults just like me across the U.S. I enjoy being an LR because it allows me to be more active with YJA. It gives me opportunities to work on various projects that fit in my interests. I envision a future YJA reaching out to more young Jains in the future, such as those who do not have access to a temple or Jain community where they live. It would create a stronger organization across the continent.



Bansari Shah

MID-WEST (HOFFMAN ESTATES, IL)

I became involved in YJA 4 years ago and after numerous retreats (#MidBestOverTheRest) and conventions, it has given me a new outlook on Jainism, endless leadership roles, and, most importantly, another family. I enjoy working to keep Jain youth in my area and region active year-round through dinners, bowling tournaments, and almost anything else that will give us an excuse to meet up. In the future, I envision YJA growing in numbers and branching out in various communities and college campuses. I think it's important we adapt to more modern times while also remaining intact with our spiritual roots, and YJA is the perfect combination.



Mihir Shah

SOUTHEAST (CHAPEL HILL, NC)

To me, YJA is a family I know I can always count on. Being an LR has allowed me to actively involve Jainism in my daily life, in my local community, and throughout the Southeast region. I am so thankful for the friends I've made through YJA, and I look forward to making more. I can see YJA empowering our generation to make a difference in the world using Jain principles and values we have come to embrace, and I'm excited to witness it happen!



Yash Shah

NORTHEAST (BOSTON, MA)

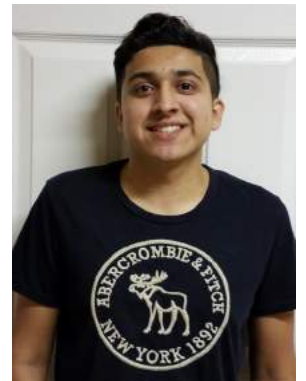
YJA to me is an exciting and informative group for the young generation to learn, discuss and participate in activities related to our Jain culture. I would describe it as the fun Pathshala, where we take a creative route to explore Jainism. Being an LR for the Northeast region, I enjoy working with people belonging to different age groups and educational backgrounds who share the same goal – to spread Jainism in a fun and innovative way. I love the weekly group discussions and the involvement of each member to plan and execute events year-round. I am sure that Young Jains of America will never get old, as I envision new, creative minds becoming a part of this exciting group and continuing to spread Jainism beyond boundaries.



Rohin Kapadia

SOUTH (HOUSTON, TX)

For me, YJA represents an opportunity for young people with similar values and beliefs to come together. We can all hang out and take interesting sessions. YJA allows people to build true long lasting relationships with people from across the country and I am grateful for all of the people I have met throughout my time in YJA.



I have enjoyed working with everyone and seeing everyone at our events. It brings me great joy to see these plans being made and seeing everyone in our region meet up for a good time and to have fun. It also brings me joy to see all of my older friends from college come out and have fun. I hope in the future YJA can focus more on the impact in the community. This is something the LRs can really work on - we should really move towards combining the social aspect for YJA with the community service aspect.

Pranay Patni

WEST (MILPITAS, CA)

YJA has taught me how to be Jain in this country. As a child, I would often find myself hard-pressed to believe in many of the Jain teachings that seemed hard to follow strictly here. YJA allows the youth of this country to come together and discuss why these beliefs exist, and what we can do to best abide by them given our environment. As an LR, I am able to be a driving factor in bringing my local YJA community closer. As a kid, the youth at JCNC didn't interact as much outside of the temple as we could have. Being an LR put me in the unique position to help change that. As the YJA community grows, I see it helping us forge bonds not only internally as Jains, but also externally with youth of other religious communities.



THE NEXT GENERATION: JAINISM 2.0?

BY RAHUL JAIN

Having spent 3/4th of my life in a country where I was among family, friends and relatives on a daily basis, I never realized how important my religion was to me. I never questioned or had any conflicting beliefs. In India, finding vegetarian food of my liking was not an issue. Being a teetotaler was the only option and everyone around me knew at least the basic ideas of my beliefs as a Jain. The biggest conflict I had with myself was selecting my favorite superhero!

It has been well over half a decade since I set foot on an international plane with a one way ticket and little did I know that my endeavor would also result in me questioning the very fundamentals of my beliefs that I had so blindly followed for almost all my life. I wasn't oblivious to the changes that I would be facing but I didn't sit down to think about how these changes would affect me as a person and start a chain reaction of thoughts and actions that would redefine Rahul - jiska tumne naam suna hai!

Within my first few days, I started to realize how doomed my life was! No one had ever questioned my love for vegetarian food. No one had ever been shocked at the fact that I had a very sociable and fun life without alcohol. I was overwhelmed by the fact the people around me had no idea what Jainism was! I couldn't discuss this with my parents because, "they wouldn't understand". I didn't know any Jain friends who expressed the same feelings of disbelief and dismay at changes that surrounded me.

One day, my uncle (who was born and brought up here) called me and said that I should join the Jain Center and YJA community to "make some Jain friends". I wasn't sure at that time if I really wanted to meet these "Jain friends" because they wouldn't know or understand who I was. They grew up here and wouldn't have a clue about how I felt and thought. But after repeated phone calls and a few interrogation session, I decided to give it a shot.

At first I was surprised to see the number of Jain people who existed in areas around me. Though few, they were definitely more than just me, myself and I. What amazed me was seeing kids attending Pathshalas and spewing out words that didn't exist in my copy of Jainism's dictionary! I didn't want to accept that kids and Jains of my age group in America knew more about Jainism than I did.

After a couple of trips to the Jain Center and having made a few acquaintances, I decided to go to the South Retreat to see how they functioned outside of the boundaries of Derasars. To watch them in their state of true self and listen to them during sessions and discussions to understand their take on Jainism. It was during my first retreat that I had come to realize that the conflicts about that I had were not mine alone. Most, if not all of us had had the same questions in mind. Why shouldn't we drink? Why shouldn't we eat eggs though it is technically vegetarian? Should we consume dairy products? And if not, why not? Everyone wanted to share their encounters and wanted someone to talk to. That was exactly the purpose of those sessions and open ended conversations. It was the Jain community's way of providing a platform to discuss and address the curiosity minds of the 21st century Jain youths.

Though many of us don't find the answers that we seek, almost all of us can take comfort in the fact that we are not alone. We all feel proud to follow core Jain principles, but at the same time question the uncertainty and reasoning behind many other practices. Why do we offer milk, grains, fruits and flowers in the name of pooja? Is it really necessary to follow all the rituals? Did our Devis and Devtas really want us to do all this? Is still applicable in today's world? Does eating potatoes, onions and being a social drinker make us a bad Jain? What is the point in following paryushan for 8 -10 days and then give into our Taco Bell cravings every other weekend? If we have to reach a state of Aparigraha, then why are we leading a materialistic life? Why is career more important than knowledge and meaning experiences? These are just a few of the many reverberating questions that we, Young Jains of America have.

We live in a world where science defines, science governs and science dictates what we'll be doing next. One thing that science and history teach us is that evolution is only way we can grow and only the strong will survive. And just like science, it's time for us, for Jainism as a religion, to evolve with the changing times. It is time for us to dive deeper and find out what Jainism was, before it got split into different categories. What was the reasoning behind its principles and how can we help others and ourselves become better everyday? My YJA involvement has shown me that this generation and the generations to come are ready; ready to change and take a new perspective of what it means to be a Jain, while staying true to its base principles and philosophies.

I hope that the YJA community continues to work towards this goal and hopefully someday we, Jains will have an answer to all worldly problems and make this Earth a better place for all kind.

RETREAT REFLECTIONS

SNAPSHOTS INTO THE THOUGHTS OF YOUR REGIONAL COORDINATORS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

In addition to our six amazing retreats for the past few months, YJA also had other diverse events in many cities around the nation. We had over 15 local interfaith events, participated in over 25 Mahavir Jayanti events at the derasars, enjoyed over 15 social events, contributed to 4 community service activities, and more! Those in attendance were able to have discussions on Jain topics and connect with other Jains in the area. YJA was also able to attract non-Jains to our events which allowed us to have better discussions, and it gave us the opportunity to inform and educate them about Jainism. We are eager to host more events in the next few months! The following pieces are from your Regional Coordinators and some retreat attendees, who share their experiences from the 2017 YJA Retreats held across our nation.

Dipal Savla MID-ATLANTIC RC

In our day-to-day lives, Jainism is often a personal experience; a majority of the people we go to school or work with are not Jain, and there are few opportunities to talk about how Jainism shapes our lives with other youths like us.

In planning retreat, I wanted to create an experience that would be both fun and educational, a chance to explore what it truly means to be Jain while having a blast with new friends and old. From skiing and snowboarding down the slopes of Shawnee Mountain to eating delicious Jain food to learning about how Jainism relates to social media and the meanings of Jain prayers, our schedule was action-packed. Equally special were the moments we hadn't planned: the impromptu snowball fights and dance parties, the midnight google hangout with our friends at the Midwest retreat, the deep conversations on the ethics of gene therapy and synthetic 'meat,' and the hilarious memes of each other we kept sending long after the weekend was over.

At this year's retreat, attendees ranged from 14 to 29 years of age and many



Mid-Atlantic Retreat attendees enjoying dinner in East Stroudsburg, PA.

did not know each other beforehand. While we came in from different walks of lives, over the course of the weekend, we created close friendships that transcended the boundaries of age. We found that we had much in common with and much to learn from each of the 39 incredible people around us, and easily bonded over our shared experiences and core beliefs (and, of course, over how we were so much more fun than Midwest!)

It's no surprise that we all slept so little during retreat, how could we not want to make the most of every hour with our new family?

Nidhi Shah

MID-ATLANTIC ATTENDEE

Coming from a small, rural town in Upstate New York, where I was one of three Indians in my school, my brother and I grew up in the comfort of three Jain families in our town: my aunt, my uncle, and our family. While we never experienced a structured Pathshala, our parents made every effort to teach us about the rich religion we practiced. On car rides, we would learn new sutras and as kids, before we could read, my mom would record the Diwakar Chitra Katha comic books for us to listen to as we would follow along with our fingers imagining the stories as we looked at the pictures. As we grew older and became curious about the rituals we practiced, our parents worked to explain to us the meaning behind the rituals, preaching Jainism as much more than simply a religion and explaining it as a way of life. We were truly blessed to have

been born into a family where Jainism was imbibed in us at a very young age through our aunt who was a Jain sadhvi and our dad who was the JAINA president of our local chapter.

However, despite the knowledge we gained, we missed out on the communal aspect. Meeting like-minded individuals at the YJA retreat was one of the most rewarding parts of the retreat. Spending the weekend with kids who enjoyed playing games as much as we did on a Friday night was incredible. Discussing ideas and learning about each other's perspectives, I was forced to think about ideas I had never really considered. Beyond the Jain tacos, hours of "Exploding Kittens" and Mafia, doing garba in the ski lodge, and having snowball fights between photo shoots, the friendships YJA allowed me to build are invaluable.

For the first time, I met kids who were just like me. I found a family away from home with people who had the same questions and were experiencing the same issues that I was (like the issue of having suitemates who eat meat while you are a vegetarian, not drinking alcohol, etc.)

This retreat gave me the chance to not only meet new people, but learn from others and truly reflect on what Jainism meant to me, something I often forget to do in the craziness of my daily life. I feel truly blessed to have met such wonderful individuals and cannot wait to be a part of future events.

#locoforpoco



Snowball fights at the Mid-Atlantic Retreat.

Anand Shah

MID-WEST RC

Weeks before this year's Mid-West retreat began, we knew it was going to be a special one. After selling out in a record amount of time (six days!), our team of Local Representatives and Board Members started creating PowerPoints and Scavenger Hunt riddles on weekly Google Hangout calls in anticipation of the retreat. Every great retreat has behind it an awesome team, and I can say that the Local Representatives that helped prepare this year's sessions and activities certainly fit that bill.

The result of all the hard work? A retreat weekend chock full of amazing food (a special thank you here goes to my fearless mother, Reshma Shah, for helping prepare dinners), interfaith education, Jain philosophy, and laughter (if you haven't watched the TED Talk on laughter, we recommend it). The memories and friendships forged in this year's retreat brought all of us closer, and made one thing very clear: the Mid-West is undeniably the #MidBest.



Mid-West lake time in Alto, MI.

Aashtha Shah

MID-WEST ATTENDEE

Growing up in a rather culturally homogenous and Christian dominated village an hour and half away from the nearest temple, a trip there was a rare occurrence. Not only that, but I was rather isolated from the rest of the Jain community up until I was given the chance to attend the retreat. My understanding of Jainism was based on everything my parents taught me and Wikipedia. The best thing about this retreat was being able to get a different perspective on how teens like myself practice the religion in the 21st century while having numerous influences around them. It was interesting to see that Jainism can be practiced even in the scene we live in, and to finally have the chance to bond with kids that understand what managing this lifestyle is like. It gave me an outlet to talk about things that I haven't been able to ask my parents about during group discussions.

The Deconstructing Norms session in particular was eye opening because it was fascinating to see people adhering to Jain values in many different ways even with the limitations we have in this country. Overall, it builds on my appreciation for the religion, makes me more open minded about the philosophy involved with not just Jainism, but other cultures, and makes me appreciate the community built around it - those that have the same reasoning and rationale that I have for my thoughts and actions. It's seriously inspiring to practice certain things I have never taken on and so impressive to see people my age adapt to them. Can't wait for next year!



Jain Bbhing at the Mid-West Retreat in Alto, MI.



MID-WEST ATTENDEE

There's something truly beautiful that occurs when a room full of strangers can become a room full of family in just two short days. There's something truly beautiful that occurs when a group that may just seem like kids can come together and converse about intellectual topics and ideas. And there's something truly beautiful that occurs when a friendly game of capture the flag between the Shah's and Non-Shah's can prove who the real winners are (obviously the non-shahs). Walking into my first retreat, I honestly did not know what to expect. The only person attending from Wisconsin, I entered the looming blue cabin with trepidation, feeling like a freshman entering high school for the first time.

Quickly, I realized this fear was for nothing. I was immediately greeted by a big hug from Anand and what seemed like a thousand smiling faces of people who would soon become some of my closest friends. Aside from meeting all these wonderful people, each session was creatively inspiring and helped us all be-

come closer in various ways. For us Desis, food is obviously one of the most important parts of any trip, and the first activity was cooking a full Jain Mexican meal for 40 people. We also had a baking contest to learn the alternatives to baking with egg. I have never had so much fun cooking and eating in my life. Other sessions included a deconstructing norms activity where I got to learn and appreciate everyone's unique perspective and a debate activity where I got to learn how Jain issues affect the world around us. Each session helped me grow as a young Jain in a new way. Between the friendly people, good food, a great sessions, the retreat proved to be one of the most memorable experiences of my life and I can't wait for next year!

Siddharth Shah

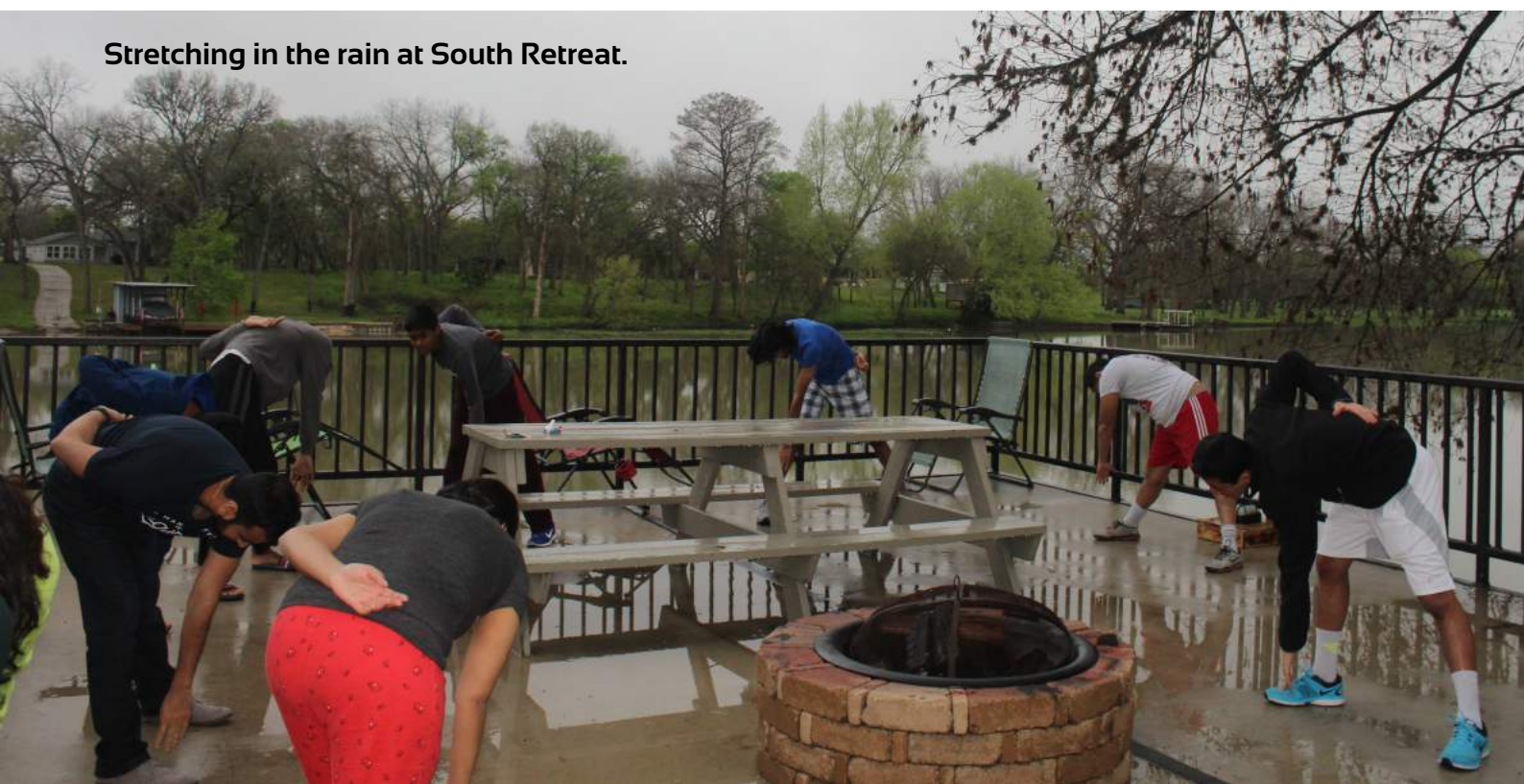
SOUTH RC

I had never been to a South Retreat before, so I was in for a new experience myself. Planning the sessions, menus, and activities for the weekend by the lake, I constantly wondered if I'd be able to successfully engage the YJA attendees. The days leading up to retreat were a blur of packing, emails, calls, checklists, calls about checklists, session outlines, and a bunch of other things I can't remember. Last minute groceries, shirts, and finally a seemingly short 3 hour drive from Houston brought me to Seguin.

Initiate Retreat.

Car by car, the attendees arrived. Good food was followed by great sessions.

Stretching in the rain at South Retreat.



Long nights followed by early-morning lake yoga. Spontaneous dancing and... well more spontaneous dancing. It was truly eye-opening, my expectations were far surpassed! Everyone got along from the start as if they had all known each other for a long time. We all bonded so quickly and easily with little to no effort. Whether it was cooking vegan falafels or running away from the “scary dolls” in the lake house, everyone was so willing to talk to one another. The session leaders did an amazing job with keeping everyone engaged and bringing new ideas to different discussions. Shoutout to the awesome Local Representatives for being so helpful throughout the entire weekend! Of course, there were tons of inside jokes like “Things to Think About” and Interregional Mafia. Retreat brought together YJA members of different ages and backgrounds from all around the region. Watching everyone come together to share their experiences with Jainism reminded me of why I wanted to be the South Regional Coordinator in the first place. Seeing everyone speak so passionately about their religion and interact with their fellow Jains made all the calls and planning so worth the time. I am so grateful to have had the chance to meet so many new people. I know everyone I met from that weekend will forever be a part of my YJA family, and I can’t wait to go to the next retreat, wherever that may take me!

Nemi Mehta

SOUTH ATTENDEE

This year was the very first Jain retreat that I got to attend, and I could not have been happier with the people that I met and the amazing memories I got to experience. Everyone from the South region is so passionate and welcoming; this retreat could not have tured out any better. (Go South!!) I went in thinking that people who already knew each other would just socialize amongst themselves, but to my surprise everyone was so keen on introducing themselves to somebody they weren’t completely comfortable with. This amazed me and created an even better experience for me.

The first night that we were there I remember eating tacos with everybody for dinner and it was so strange how all us of bonded over our love for the Taco Bell mild sauce. It was as though we were all a family and had known each other for ages. Even people who were decently older/younger than me were so easy to connect with because of Jainism and the values that we shared. All the laughs and dance parties we shared is something I will never forget (mainly because I embarrassed myself completely, but it was worth it). Besides all the



Rahul Jain's session on Jainism in the US at the South Retreat.

fun and shenanigans, we all also got to share our love and respect for Jainism. I never would have imagined that the people at retreat related to the problems I was dealing with. However, I came to realize that every single person there not only understood my dilemmas, but they themselves had dealt with similar issues. Whether it be following Jain principles at work and school or not falling into peer pressure, everyone had stories to share and advice to give.

Additionally, the sessions conducted by our amazing fellow Jains helped me gain insight into different perspectives and create a deeper connection with Jainism. Avni Nandu's session on controversial topics such as the presidential election and gun control were crucial in creating an environment for all of us to bring in the Jain perspective as well as our own point of view on these essential matters. Rahul Jain's session on the philosophy of Jainism helped establish where our beliefs come from and why we do what we do. Other sessions covered the history of Jainism and following principles of Jainism in a social setting, which were extremely helpful in further understanding how to live as a Jain in this century. YJA South retreat was honestly such a blast and it was so sad to see everyone leave. I was so grateful that I got to meet such amazing souls, and shout out to Sidd for being the absolute best for being able to handle such intricate responsibilities and making this retreat so special!

Neehaar Gandhi

SOUTHEAST RC

Growing up in a predominantly Christian community, it has always been hard for me to relate to my peers on a religious basis. My understanding of Jainism was limited to that which my parents had taught me and the information gleaned from the few pathshala classes I was able to attend.

So when introduced to YJA in 2014, I immediately jumped at the opportunity to interact with thousands of individuals that shared my faith. I found that Young Jains of America consists of a population with a melting pot of views, with each individual maintaining the core principles of Jainism, yet differing in practices. Interaction with such a community effectively broadened my horizons, allowing me to develop a deeper, more intimate understanding of my religion. Creating a personal interpretation of Jainism was not only gratifying, but it inspired me to do the same for generations to come.

When elected RC for this board term I sought to give back to the community that had completely shaped my life for the better. My goal for retreat was to provide individuals with a welcoming environment to share their religious views and assist one another in developing their own interpretations of what Jainism means to them. It was immensely gratifying to see a room full of strangers transform into a family as they discussed Jainism, played games, and shared delicious food. I can say without a doubt that the 2016 YJA Southeast retreat was one of the happiest weekends of my life, and my heart had never felt so

Southeast Retreat House,
Pigeon Forge, TN.



full. As I witnessed first time retreat attendees form lifelong friendships and help one another understand Jainism to a deeper extent, I could not help but remember when I too was in their shoes. It really made me reflect on how impactful of an organization YJA has become and how proud I am to help preserve the traditions we have set forth.

Our retreat in Pigeon Forge was truly magical. From the wonderful sessions to the gorgeous hike through the Smoky Mountains, each individual was able to grow, connect, and have an absolute blast. Though the time we spent together was limited, the memories made, smiles shared, and friendships created were eternal. I love my YJA family, and I cannot thank them enough for all they do for me, each and every day.

Chintan Sheth

SOUTHEAST ATTENDEE

Time seems to slow down before you get to a retreat. You take the day off of school because you have to pick up people from the airport, and you think it would be smart to sleep early the night before... but you don't sleep. You feel the nervous energy course through your veins, the excitement compelling your eyes to stay open... and you just cannot sleep. You are ready to go to this magical place for the rest of weekend.

But it is not the physical place that makes it magical (though the lack of cell reception was certainly mystifying). It is the people you are with and what you learn about. New faces and old faces greet you as you enter the cabin, suitcase in hand after a long drive up to the mountains. You are surrounded by people that are all different: different noses, different smiles, different heights, different personalities, different voices. But they are all similar in one way: You are all Jain.

Seeing 45 Young Jains in one room? No, you must be hallucinating. But you are not. You are surrounded by your YJA Retreat Fam, your brothers and sisters for the weekend as you delve not only into the wee hours of the night playing Mafia or Psychiatrist, but also as you explore the depth of your religion. You learn about the various principles of Jainism in a new light because they are now taught by your peers. You understand how Aparigraha applies to your life as you go to college and pursue the best education possible for yourself as you leave your lifelong friends behind.

And now you also have a sounding board, people to bounce your ideas and thoughts about your religion off of without any prejudice, any stereotypes, any limitations. You feel the more strength in your Jain heritage surrounded by other individual between the ages of 13 and 29 than surrounded by aunties and uncles reciting Jain sutras. Funny how that works.

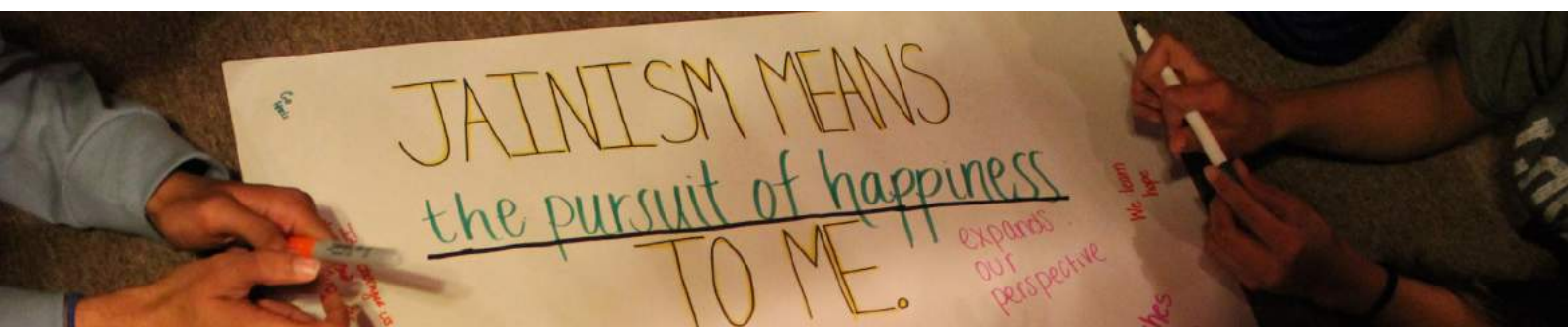
Because your experience at a Southeast Retreat is not made up of just the food, just the cabin, just the learning, just the Mafia or just the people. It is all of those things, intricately woven together so that when you are walking down those steps of that log cabin, you feel as if you are being dragged out.
SOUTHEAST IS BEAST!

Nidhi Mehta

SOUTHEAST ATTENDEE

As my first YJA event ever, the Southeast Retreat was a weekend I'll never forget. It was incredible to see so many young people eager to come together in faith. Growing up, there never was a large Jain community in my area so this was a pleasant change. From the moment I stepped foot into the cabin, I felt like part of a family. I am so excited for the friendships I made here to grow and prosper in the future. Also, thank you to the leaders who worked hard to foster a comfortable and welcoming environment for all of us to not only appreciate our heritage, but also discuss challenges we may face as young Jains. Not once did I feel hesitant to speak my mind.

This weekend really emphasized how powerful Jainism can be and how much it means to me. I didn't realize there are so many young Jains in the exact same boat as me, so having a weekend to connect with some of them made me feel refreshed and empowered. Moreover, I never thought I could have so much fun with 40 people I had never met before. From the seemingly endless mafia games to impromptu dance battles to a gorgeous hike in the Great Smoky Mountains, the retreat was nothing short of fun-filled weekend. After those 2 days, all I can say is **SOUTHEAST IS BEAST!**

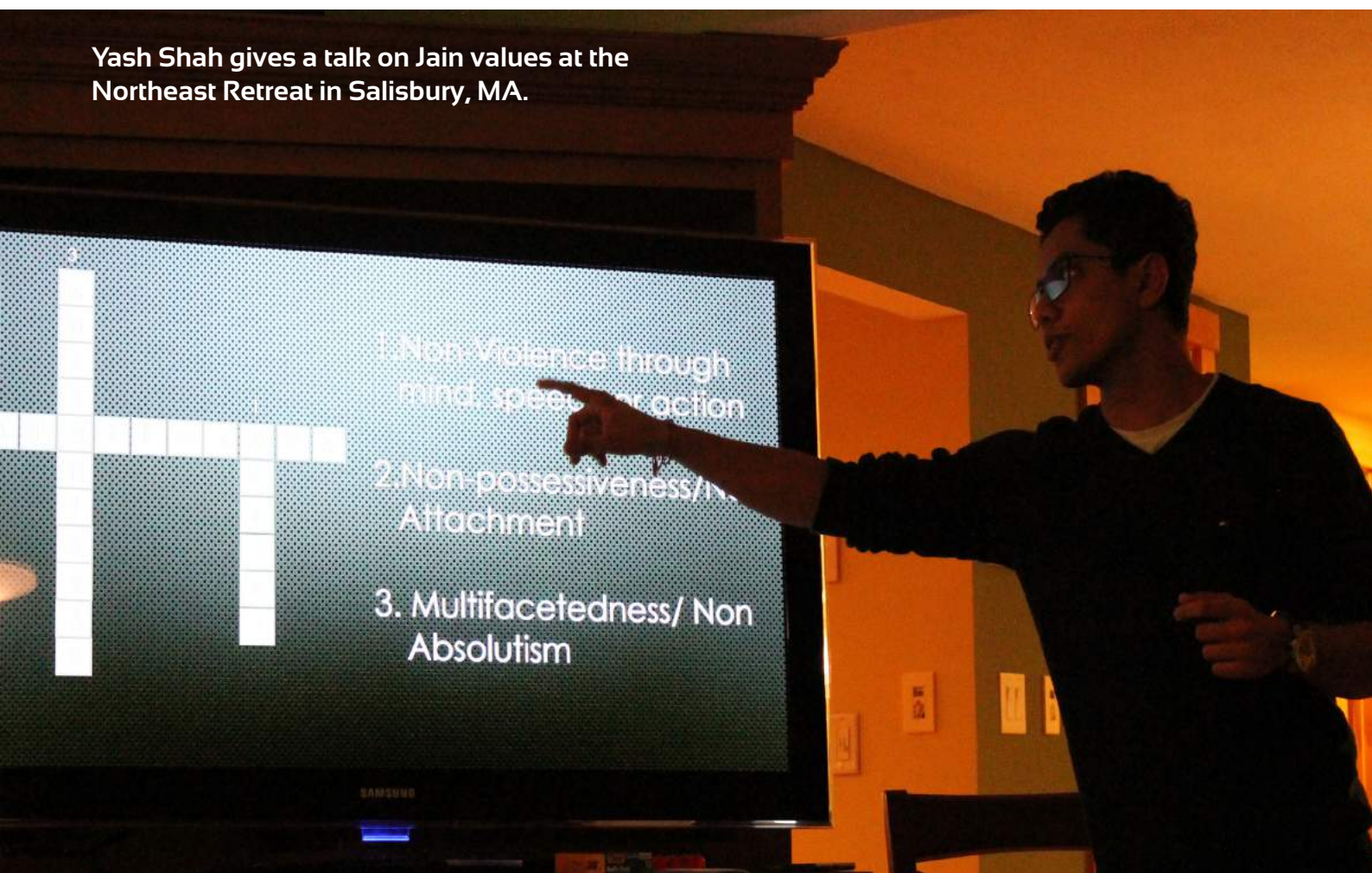


Pankti Tamboli

NORTHEAST RC

Regional retreats have always been my favorite YJA events. There is something so special about connecting, learning and growing together as a community under one roof throughout a weekend. As a former local representative and past attendee of several retreats, I knew I had to live up to the initial impression these events had left on me, and made me fall in love with being an active part of YJA. As the second ever Northeast retreat, I am proud to say we had attendees from almost every age from fourteen to twenty-nine! With over half of the attendees being first timers, this was an exclusive experience where we could reconnect with old Jain friends, but also make so many more new ones. From the storytelling icebreakers, silly pictures from the scavenger hunt, thought provoking session, vegan cinnamon rolls, early morning guided-meditation, and playing Kho on the beach, the weekend passed by too quickly for me! None of this would have been possible without the hard work in planning and leading sessions by my LRs, and I cannot thank them enough for making this weekend a successful one. YJA has become so much more than an organization to me; and I cannot wait for more sand, sunshine and sessions in the future with my Northeast family :)

Yash Shah gives a talk on Jain values at the Northeast Retreat in Salisbury, MA.





Vegan cinnamon rolls at the Northeast Retreat.

Yash Shah

NORTHEAST ATTENDEE

I joined YJA as an LR for the Northeast Region a couple of months back, and attended my first YJA event at the Northeast Regional Retreat 2017 in Salisbury, MA. YJA to me, is an exciting and informative group for the young generation to learn, discuss and participate in activities related to our Jain Culture. I would describe it as the fun Pathshala, where we all take a creative route to explore Jainism. The Northeast Retreat completely justified my description above. A perfect blend of religious and recreational activities, the retreat was a great experience. For me, the main motive was to meet new people belonging to different age groups, who share the same goal – to spread Jainism in a fun and innovative way. The sessions on Jainism were a great opportunity for everyone to voice out their opinions and it helped many of us to develop a new perspective for different Jain philosophies. Cooking and Baking the ‘Jain Way,’ was fun activity too. As I mentioned earlier, the retreat was very well balanced with recreational activities which gave us some funny and exciting memories. From board games to games on the beach, it was quite awesome how we were

able to do all of this in two days. Kudos to Pankti (RC) and Megha (Director of PR) for planning and executing this event so well. It was fun to work in teams on various activities over these two days and I enjoyed making new friends. I thought I'll keep the best for the last - the retreat location and the house!! I think everyone at the retreat definitely loved the location and all of us were sad to leave the house at the end of day 2.

I would definitely encourage all the readers to participate in various YJA activities and would surely recommend to attend the YJA Regional Retreats and Conventions. I am sure that Young Jains of America will never get old, as I envision new, creative minds to become a part of this exciting group and continue to spread Jainism beyond boundaries.

Kairavi Mehta
NORTHEAST ATTENDEE

*Attending the retreat, for me, was truly an eye opener.
It gave me a new perspective towards Jainism.*

- Kairavi Mehta

“Jainism teaches us that the way to liberation and bliss is to live a life of harmlessness and renunciation. The aim of Jain life is to achieve liberation of the soul.” I have lost count of the number of times I have heard these words but I didn't really understand it's true meaning. Being non-Jains, my parents couldn't answer my questions and I gave up eventually. I used to attend Jain pathshalas as a kid (thanks to my best friend who refused to do anything or learn anything unless I did I too), fasted, attended events and pretty much know more about Jainism than I know about my religion. But I didn't really bother to understand the virtues of Jainism. Attending the retreat, for me, was truly an eye opener. It gave me a new perspective towards Jainism. The presentations given by the LRs and the discussions that happened around the presentations helped me understand the scientific reasons behind the principles of Jainism. The interesting part was how they managed to make all the presentations and activities fun. I never thought I'd have that much fun with 25 people I had never met in my life. It was great to see people follow their religion and know so much about it even though they're not in India.

This was my first YJA retreat and I can confidently say that I will be going for the ones that follow as well. Everything from playing Psychiatrist to the Jain version of Cards Against Humanity to baking cinnamon rolls to prepping lunch and dinner to beach games was a lot of fun. A big kudos to the regional coordinator for having so wonderfully arranged everything. She truly did an amazing job.

Rea Savla

WEST RC

Here's a social experiment: What happens when you put a group of 38 Jains in their twenties, mostly strangers, in a room together for forty hours?

On the eve of March 24th, in the midst of checking the carpool and grocery lists one last time, I was bracing myself to find out. Having never attended a YJA retreat before, let alone organized one, I was anxious but excited to see the magic that would actually precipitate when months of excel spreadsheets and Google documents were brought to life.

I had a nervous start to retreat. Due to traffic and poor weather, my car was one of the last to arrive, and I was worried what attendees would do without food, directions to their rooms, or ice breakers. I was shocked when I finally arrived at 10 pm - everyone was already playing games! Several individuals had taken the initiative to set up games and work with the property owners to get everyone settled into their rooms. Everyone who brought food had already unloaded it from their cars and organized it in the kitchen. In that moment, I realized the proactivity of the attendees and genuine commitment to having a productive and fun experience would in itself ensure a successful retreat.

The next morning began a wonderfully creative and constructive day. We centered ourselves with yoga and meditation, pondered the intersections of physics and aatma (the soul), brainstormed the ways in which we could collect data to understand the impact of a Jain way of life, trekked in the hills of Sequoia National Park, made a mannequin challenge video, discussed how to feasibly go vegan, shared our thoughts on the role of gender in Jainism, and collaborated to produce tangible plans for community change in a social impact hackathon.

The hackathon was my personal favorite activity. In just a few hours, we built such creative projects, ranging from a host family program for new international Jain students to a speaker series to get more girls engaged in STEM. I truly believe there is a vast untapped potential for social change within the young Jain community, and I am excited we got a glimpse of it at retreat!

We wrapped up West Retreat with a night of games and full-on garba. I would say our social experiment was a success. In those 40 forty hours, I know we created meaningful relationships. I still talk to friends I met at retreat almost



Hiking in Sequoia National Park at the West Retreat.

every day. Attendees from all over the West region have been meeting up more frequently and continuing the conversations we started in Badger, CA.

I am thankful for the group of brilliant, proactive, responsible, funny, and thoughtful people who came to retreat, and I can't wait until next year!

Hiral Shah

WEST ATTENDEE

The second I lost cell phone service on the drive up the mountains towards Sequoia National Park, I knew I was in for a relaxing, stress-free, fun-filled weekend. This year I joined a record number of YJAers for the 2016 YJA West Retreat in Badger, CA. Located at the Seven Circles Retreat Center just outside the scenic Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, the retreat was the perfect getaway to meet old friends and make new ones, all of whom came from different backgrounds but shared the same enthusiasm for Jainism. The weekend started off with causal ice breakers that eventually turned into riveting discussions on Jain values, their impact on today's society, and what we can do as young Jains to share these values. Sessions covered a wide range of topics from science to gender to veganism and even included a Social Impact Hackathon where attendees pitched project ideas they planned to pursue post-retreat. Of course, we also made time for fun and games. From trekking through the wilderness to the mannequin challenge to an impromptu dance-off and garba in the tent at 3am, this year's YJA West Retreat was an unforgettable experience and I can't wait for the next one!

AHIMSA:

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING LIVES

BY RACHNA SHAH

Without a doubt, the foundation of Jainism is ahimsa (non-violence). This principle not only extends to limiting violent thoughts, but also to reducing one's aggressive actions. For Jains, ahimsa's primary manifestation is in a lacto-vegetarian diet. While many of our parents and grandparents have followed this lifestyle, youth currently make up the largest vegetarian population in America. After all, with online recipes and more accommodating restaurants, it is more effortless than ever to be vegetarian today.

Vegetarianism and veganism are on the rise in the United States, a trend easily visible in college dining halls and high school cafeterias alike. While many prospective vegetarians are concerned about maintaining one's health, one can still receive all of the essential nutrients. While it may seem more difficult to be vegetarian as an athlete, a plant-based diet - from tofu to beans to nuts - can provide adequate protein. Moreover, legumes and dairy products are staples in Indian foods.

Time can also cause prospective vegetarians to be anxious, but the lifestyle is rarely time consuming. Keeping in mind the growing culture of eating out, many restaurants have become more accommodating to vegetarians. In casual restaurants such as Chipotle and Subway, workers will change their gloves and use clean knives. In more formal settings, simply confirm that the waiter understands what a lacto-vegetarian diet entails - no meat, no fish, and no eggs. One should also proceed with caution regarding soups (which may be made with chicken or beef broth), salad dressings, and certain cheeses. It isn't all avoidance, however. In dishes that have meat, one can substitute vegetables or a source of protein (e.g. tofu). Even meat-friendly regions, such as Texas and Colorado, have begun to incorporate compatible options in their menus. Websites such as HappyCow locate vegetarian and vegan friendly restaurants in major cities as well.

In addition to its spiritual advantages, adopting a vegetarian diet is more environmentally sustainable. Meat presents a large burden upon Earth's limited energy resources. Producing soy rather than animal protein consumes fewer



YJA

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