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FEBRUARY 2018



YOUNG JAINS OF AMERICA

THE JOURNEY HOME



LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Jai Jinendra,

We'd like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers and supporters a happy and prosperous 2018! After a very productive and successful board meeting in Chicago in mid-January, our Executive Board is excited to continue connecting Jain youth through local and regional events and providing meaningful projects that spread Jain values. Our Convention Committee also met in January to continue planning for the 13th Biennial YJA Convention.

With the start of the new year, many of us look to set goals and challenge ourselves to better the lifestyle we lead and the choices we make. We look to have a positive impact on our environment and strengthen the relationships we have with our communities. However, in order to impact the future, sometimes we must look to the past. In this issue of Young Minds, we challenge you to reflect on your beginnings and the journeys you've taken ever since. Look to your heritage and how that shapes your identity today. Most importantly, take a moment to contemplate on what truly defines you and how that can allow you to make a difference in the upcoming new year.

As an organization, YJA looks forward to making the journey home as we bring the Biennial Convention back to where it all started: Chicago, Illinois. As the Convention theme suggests, we intend to find ways to continue to make a difference in the Jain youth community by reconnecting with our Jain roots. Whether you were born and raised in America or just recently moved here from India, grew up in a large sangh with an established Pathshala or just had small meetups with the few Jain families in the area, have been involved with YJA for a long time or are just now hearing about it, we can all trace back to our roots and find the common values that bring us together. We hope you enjoy this issue of Young Minds. Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to seeing you soon. We'd love to hear your feedback and ideas any time at chairs@yja.org. Happy reading!

With #yjalove,
Siddharth Shah and Dharmi Shah
Co-Chairs, 2017 - 2018



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Young Minds Readers,

As Young Jains in America, we are encouraged to live and share the Jain way of life, whether this be through meditation, recitations or venerations. While each path toward self discovery differs, there are many values, behaviors, and practices that we share.

As the air slows and water freezes into ice, winter may seem to be a passive time of year; yet, in much the same way can Jain values such as nonviolence be perceived. 'Passive' is a way to reflect and gather the strength that can only come from within. Every step of the way counts, even the parts of the journey you feel move slowly. Don't think of it as waiting. Start reflecting and planning. Reflect. Redecorate. Rediscover. Read.

Jainism is not about judgment. It is about support. When we're far apart, it's hard to remember that we're literally family. But there are ways and places where you can remember that - whether it be at regional events, on Forums, or at Convention. We aren't always represented. Jain values and ideals may seem to clash with American counterparts. It was only in 2014 that the Jain community in India was granted minority status, rather than as a denomination of Hinduism.

Finding our voice and affirming our identity is a journey, but it is a journey toward home. We may not know where this home is, but it is a place where we are with each other and our values. Home is where you find yourself and learn more about yourself over and over again.

Over the last 27 years, YJA has evolved into an organization that has built and continues to build a robust network of young Jains. We explore and deepen our understanding of our faith and each other through biennial conventions, regional events, online interactions, and more. But it all began with the dreams and aspirations of one person who worked to ensure that the Jain community wouldn't be forgotten. As the 13th Biennial Convention returns to Chicago this July, we reflect on our journey, both as individuals and as a global community.

This issue focuses on the journey of young Jains in America today. We've interviewed Jain monks, veterans, filmmakers, activists, philanthropists, authors, inventors, curators, professors, and teachers. Young Jains follow the Jain way of life through photography, veganism, spreading positivity, resisting with peace, reading scriptures, reducing greed, volunteering, and through joining, building, and leading communities of young Jains.

Journeys are full of ups and downs. They are winding, but they are also lifelong. As the future leaders of Jainism in America, we pave our paths and build our futures. Every day, whether we are conscious of it or not, we can further Jainism and its values, and in this way, ourselves, through our thoughts and actions. Where have you come from and where do you hope to go? This year, I encourage you to reflect on the journey that you're on and where you want it to take you. Whether this be a journey to a new job or a new restaurant, it is most important that you feel as though you've grown or taken a step that will move you forward. We hope to be privileged enough to be a part of your journey.

With much #yjalove,
Rachna Shah
Director of Publications, 2017-2018



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Being a Jain Activist

Sadhvi Siddhali Shree is the chief disciple of living enlightened master Acharya Shree Yogeesh and the first American Jain monk. Her mission in life is to spread the universal teachings of Acharya Shree Yogeesh and the Tirthankaras, with the hope that truth seekers will transform and awaken just as she has.

I was raised a Catholic. I went to Catholic elementary and high school, I did my confirmation, and I became an altar server. But, I was also a truth seeker. In my senior year, something wasn't sitting quite right with me, and I began to question a lot of things. I felt like I wasn't getting any answers praying to God and I was missing answers I couldn't find in the Church.

After I graduated high school, I left the Catholic Church. I was at a desperate time in my life. I was practicing spirituality, but I was learning so much so fast on my own without guidance that I was getting lost. When I was 20 years old, I met Acharya Shree Yogeesh [one of the first Jain monks in North America].

I was very fortunate to meet him at a young age. A friend of mine was studying at his ashram in Riverside, California, and introduced us. He knew that I was a seeker, that I wanted to learn about spirituality, and that I wanted to help the world be better. I had gone through a lot of pain in my life: my mother had died when I was 13 years old, and I didn't have a good relationship with my dad. When I was younger, my wish had always been to prevent people from experiencing pain. Acharya Shree saw that, and he said to me: to light other candles, you first have to light yourself.

We had an instant connection and a couple days later, I went back. I began to learn more about nonviolence and vegetarianism. I had never liked vegetables growing up, but after studying and learning, I was able to change in that way too. I started getting not only answers, but a newfound ability to question.

The answers I received all made sense, not only logically, but also in my soul. That was when I felt that it was the truth for me. I realized how you know very little until you get on the path.



In high school, before I had been exposed to the Jain system, I enlisted in the U.S. military. I was young and I wanted to pay for school, so I joined the army as a medic. After four months of studying with Acharya Shree, I got called up for war. I went into the war knowing that with my job as a medic, I would get to do what I had wished for: help people. I didn't want to get into the politics of "Is this war right or wrong?" because my job was to save someone's life. While I was deployed, I was living in extreme violence. The violence here in the United States cannot compare to what war is, where you're constantly in fear for your life.

When I came back from Iraq, I told Acharya Shree that I wanted to become a sadhvi. Two and a half years, I took diksha [at the age of 24]. That fully changed my life, because now, I fully accepted a life of nonviolence.

Stopping Traffic at Siddhayatan Tirth

Founded in 2008 by Acharya Shree Yogesh, Siddhayatan Tirth is one of very few Jain pilgrimage sites in North America. It is located on a 250-acre site near Dallas, Texas and is an ashram and spiritual retreat center. Today, Sadhvi Siddhali Shree is its Spiritual Director. Her typical day includes 12 to 14 hours of helping guests on retreats or leading practices in nature. One of her recent projects was directing Stopping Traffic, a documentary on the heroes of the anti-sex-trafficking movement.

The path of nonviolence means that you're supposed to be an activist with anything siding for freedom. Chandana, Tirthankar Mahavir's disciple, went into brothels where the kings held sex slaves, and she taught them that they were more than their bodies. They became so inspired that they took initiation. For Tirthankar Mahavir to initiate even one soul was a huge thing, since even the Buddha did not have the courage to initiate a nun. Tirthankar Mahavir initiated over 30,000 former sex slaves. Today, there are approximately 20 to 30 million slaves. However, since Tirthankar Mahavir's time, it's been too taboo of a subject. We are the first Jains as monks and nuns to raise awareness about human trafficking and fight for humans who don't have a voice.

Our film is the first time Tirthankar Mahavir's teachings appear in AMC commercial theaters. It's a huge milestone for Jains to see others become familiar with these teachings. In the film, we introduce nonviolence and the Jain system as a solution to trafficking. They know I'm a Jain nun, I recite the Navkar mantra in the film, and Acharya Shree talks about Tirthankar Mahavir and Chandana and their efforts to raise awareness about slavery.

Ultimately, the message [of the documentary] is for youth to get involved and lead the movement. Young minds are passionate, energetic, creative, relentless, and they won't give up when they care about an issue. In almost all historical social movements, it comes down to the young people. If we can get people educated and inspired, then we can end trafficking. If nobody knows about it or what to do about it, it will continue.

There's a lot you can do.

One: talk about trafficking. If you don't talk about it, people won't know about it; if you don't know about it, you can't change it. Nobody likes to talk about sex, but if we don't talk about it, that demand and those desires continue.

Two: put pressure on public officials. They're trying to earn your vote, but if you don't give them a cause to represent, they won't care.

Three: don't go to strip clubs or watch porn. When you do that, you normalize commodifying the body.

Four: when you see violence in the world, speak up. Find a

cause that you care about. When you truly understand what the pain and suffering is behind that cause, there will be no way you can stay quiet. This is how you can become an activist and a true Jain.

What is a True Jain?

The Jain system is one of improving and knowing yourself. There are 1400 something minutes a day, and most of those minutes are given to other people. Your energy is constantly going out. You can become stressed or angry because you don't have time to work on yourself and be balanced. We are all busy people, but if you schedule your day, you can set aside 20 to 30 minutes everyday to reflect. Do Pratikaman, write, journal, meditate, yoga; just be with yourself.

You can't grow spiritually unless you focus on yourself. If you work on yourself, then you know yourself, and you know those masks aren't you. When you know yourself, you know other things on the outside don't really matter.

When I was 17 years old, I was the lowest of the low. I was depressed, upset, fearful, nervous; but what I started to do was look in the mirror and tell myself that I am good enough. Your brain is trainable. When you pay attention to something, it becomes stronger. We see nonviolence as applicable to animals or other living beings, but we also need to realize that nonviolence applies to ourselves. When you're fearful or concerned, it's a form of violence inside of you because you're not at peace. All it requires is practice. Most people try to control anger, but when you focus on it, it becomes stronger. Focus on the opposite of anger: ahimsa, or nonviolence.

The Future of Jainism

Jainism is becoming more progressive, but it can also go backwards. Saying that you are a Jain is not enough. I see Jains who drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, kill bugs, and are very greedy. Be a proud Jain and practice what you preach.

Tirthankar Mahavir was revolutionary, and we have 23 other Tirthankars too; for instance, Tirthankar Neminath was the first animal rights activist. Our world needs to recognize where all these great movements come from - for example Martin Luther King, or Gandhi who studied under a Jain nun - but very few know about the Jain system. We're beginning to see it being more integrated. Locally, they brought Jain Studies to the University of North Texas, and people are curious. The Jain system is not for just one type of people. If you want to help other people, you have to be open to all and be willing to help all.

Those who are born Jain are so lucky. I wish I was raised Jain, but I didn't know about it. I'm hoping to see more true Jains working on themselves and who they really are and are dedicated to being nonviolent. That is how we can save this system. It's in our hands to keep it alive.

Jainism & Science

By: Sunny Jain

Jain theology is seldom known for its simplicity. As a doctrine that deals with multifaceted subjects such as metaphysics, cosmology, epistemology, and divinity, it's very easy to get lost in the smallest details. As the line between our religion and its real-world applications becomes less distinct, it is important to take a step back and appreciate that while Jainism is an ancient system of beliefs dating back to the 6th century BCE, it also embraces pluralism and is compatible with modern science. Unlike major Abrahamic world religions which have historically clashed with science, even when reason and empirical evidence challenge them, Jainism welcomes an open platform of discussion, learning, and awareness.

Jainism & Microbiology

Mahavir Swami, the 24th Tirthankara, famously

preached that "everything in the world has life... this includes stones, sand, trees, and the other elements of nature." Even a single drop of water contains 1,000 living bodies (Jiva). Although these statements baffled many during his era, it wasn't until the 19th century that we were able to verify how precise these statements were. Today, we know about microorganisms, living organisms invisible to the naked eye. Because of this remarkable discovery, Jainism is credited by the scientific community as being

among the first religions to postulate the existence of unseen microbiological life centuries before the invention of a microscope. Moreover, science can be used to rationalize many Jain practices and rituals. For example, conduct practiced by Jain ascetics such as boiling water before consumption and using Mopatis to cover their mouth while speaking are performed to minimize harm to microorganisms.

The substantiation of Jain beliefs through scientific advancement illustrates

the interdependence and compatibility between Jainism and science, and how they can be used synergistically to better understand the universe we live in.

Jainism & Cosmology

Jainism has explored the colossal structure of the universe in its entirety: its shape, size, origin, purpose, and inner workings. Jain texts have meticulously defined the elements of the universe as existing in 6 Dravyas: space (Akasa), time (Kala), matter (Pudgala), living substances (Jiva),



non-living substances (Ajiva), medium of motion (Dharma-tattva), and medium of rest (Adharma-tattva). Just as modern scientific cosmology maintains that the universe is governed by universal natural laws, Jainism holds the belief that all elements of the universe are constant and have always existed.

Taking a turn from every major religion except Buddhism, Jainism does not support a belief in a creator deity. Instead, it cites the theory of causation, in which a cause and its effect are identical in nature: actions that carry moral

Jainism & Ecology

Jainism recognizes the natural phenomenon of the balance of life and explores the role of humans in their interactions with animals and the environment. In Jainism, the fundamental principle of non-violence (Ahimsa) not only extends to humans, but to all Jiva, including animals, plants, and the environment. As human beings (Manushya) endowed with five senses and the capacity to pursue spiritual liberation from the cycle of birth and death, Jainism maintains that it is a principal duty of humans to offer protection to all living beings, which is practiced through Ahimsa, the Jain diet, and animal welfare (Jiv Daya).

A notable example of the human duty to protect other life is exemplified in one moment during the life of Parshvanath, the 23th Tirthankar, in which he interrupted a Panchaagni (Hindu ritual involving fire), saving two snakes that had been trapped in a log of an ascetic's fire. According to Jain scripture, these snakes were reborn as Dharanendra and Padmavati, the serpent Gods/Goddesses of Jainism, who played a major role in sheltering Parshvanath in a later life. Ahimsa can also be applied to the greater scale of conservation biology and environmentalism, which aims to protect species, their habitats, and their ecosystems from extinction. These declines have been accelerated by invasive human activity such as deforestation, agricultural expansion, and overexploitation. Many believe that the practice of

veganism on a global scale could completely end world hunger and famine, due to the reallocation of natural resources and energy to more sustainable levels. The land, vegetation, and resources used to feed livestock can instead be used to supply the human population directly.

Jainism & Public Health

Though the Jain practice of vegetarianism is spiritually motivated, many studies substantiate the heterogeneous health benefits of vegetarianism. Large scale studies have repeatedly shown decreased overall risks of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic illnesses, and other causes of mortality for both men and women. The verifiable health benefits of vegetarianism and Jain meditation present limitless applications in public health, which aim to prevent disease, prolong life, and promote human health. Yoga, which dates back to pre-Vedic Indian traditions, plays an essential role in Jain spirituality and the observance of the three gems of Jainism (Ratnatraya), which constitute the path to liberation. Jainism heavily discusses the triple gems - right faith (Samyak Darshana), right knowledge (Samyak Gyana), and right conduct (Samyak Charitra) as essential for the soul to move up spiritually. The third gem, Samyak Gyana, emphasizes the exercise of control over one's inner desires, which is achieved through vows (Mahavratas) which include meditation, fasting, and restriction of certain movements. Jain

meditation is practiced in the form of Samayika, Preksha meditation, and fasting, which aims to purify one's emotions, allow one to reflect on the soul and karmic matter (Bhavana), and ultimately realize oneself. Although Jain meditation is also spiritually motivated, its existing and historical meditation techniques present many health benefits, including reducing stress, reducing the risk of illness, and improving mental health. Structured breathing exercises (Pranayama) and specific postures used during meditation are shown to reduce lower back pain, lower the risk of depression, and have positive effects on sleep anxiety, quality of life, and spiritual growth.

Although many argue that religion and science are incompatible, as shown throughout this article, the unique and distinctive characteristics of Jain doctrine allow for a synergistic exchange of ideas and can be used to better understand our universe.

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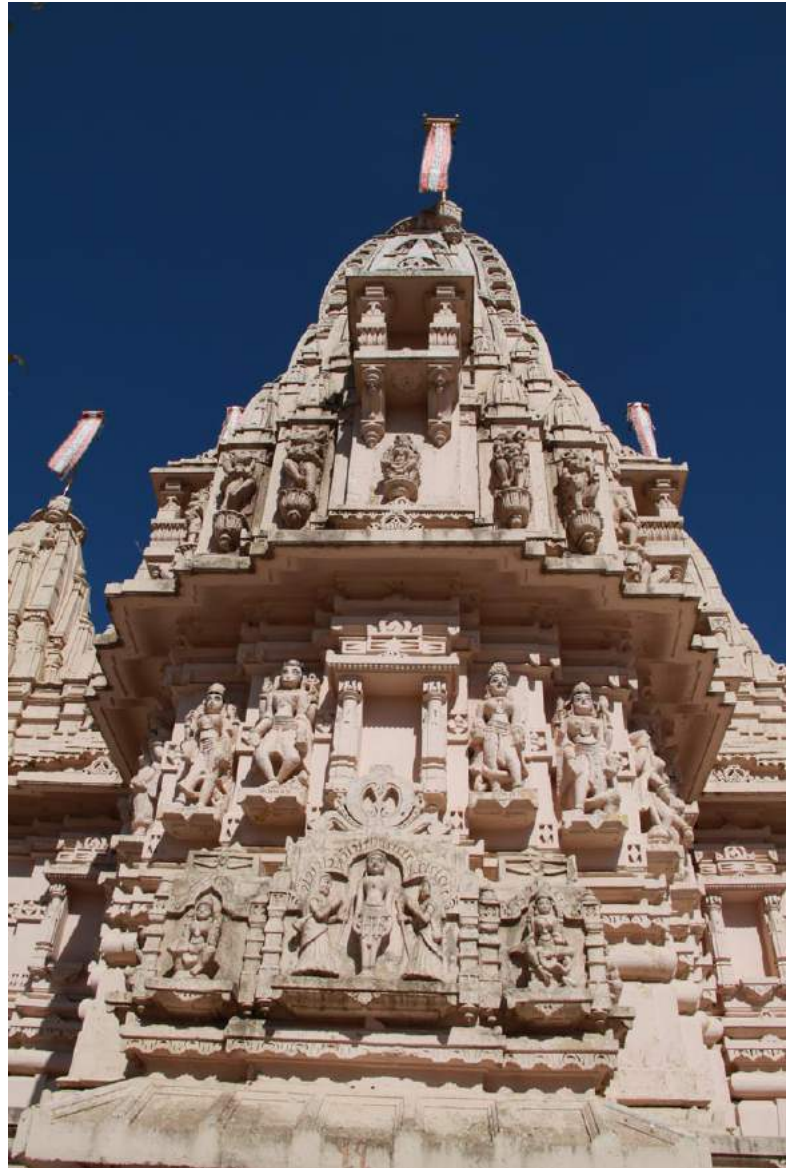


Education Corner

By: Parshva Vakharia

November 30 marked the most auspicious day in the Jain calendar: **Maun Ekadashi**. This day was so important, because 150 Kalyanaks, or auspicious events in a Tirthankar's life, took place on it. To pay respect to these important events, many people kept "maun", or silence, for the whole day or completed a Paushad, where they practiced ascetic life for the day. Due to the holiness of this day, any penance you took part in gave you much more punya than on other days, whether that was an Ekashnu or one hour of maun.

December 11 to 13 marked the celebration of Parshvanath's Janma and Diksha Kalyanaks. Prior to taking Diksha, Parshvanath undertook Attham Tap, or a three-day fast, so many Jains did the same on these three days in his commemoration. Parshvanath Bhagwan was extremely compassionate and forgiving despite the adversity he faced from the anger of one soul, Kamath, in several lives. By celebrating Parshvanath Bhagwan for these three days, we aim to adopt virtues from him and incorporate them in our daily lives.





Forward Feminism

By: Dr. Mamta Shaha

After conducting sessions related to women at every JAINA Convention since 2005, I observed that the women of the Jain community were not immune to the problems faced by women in other communities. Though the Jain community is highly accomplished and well placed, women's problems are often not acknowledged. There is a tendency to sweep them under the rug with an "everything is okay" attitude. Developing an understanding of one's self and standing up for one's rights is what every woman needs. With the intention of providing that inner strength to each and every Jain woman, the JAINA Women's Committee was established in October 2015. Our goal is to make this committee globally relevant, socially responsible, and locally reachable.

The Mission of the Committee is as follows:

- To provide a platform to all women followers of Jainism to organize
- To promote personal growth, social well-being and spiritual progress of all.
- To promote peace and harmony at

different levels: family, community, national and international, through Ahimsa.

- To collaborate with other women's groups to work towards a common goal of promoting peace.

We have a national committee with local chapters, where community female leaders run activities. This acts as a platform where women gather to discuss everyday issues and problems. They can be involved in creative activities and network and socialize in an intellectual way. As women, we must learn to value ourselves. Our value does not depend on how someone else thinks of us; what we think of ourselves counts the most.

Since the JAINA Women's Committee's establishment, we have formed women's groups at many different centers, like Houston, New York, Washington DC, Atlanta, and Chicago. These groups are active in many activities, such as donating warm clothes to the homeless, providing vegetarian food during Thanksgiving, celebrating days such as Women's Day, and holding seminars on the issues facing

women today.

Our biggest achievement was our half day Women's Conference at the 2017 JAINA Convention. We had excellent speakers, four sessions on women's health issues (with special attention to physical and mental health), women in finance talking about money management, and a presentation on the vegetarian and vegan lifestyle. It continued with an interactive discussion with Acharya Chandanashriji about the importance of spiritual health. The conference ended with a beautiful journey into the self through meditation led by Nirmala Hanke of the Lighthouse Center of Michigan. It was a very successful conference with high attendance, and we hope to achieve an even larger and greater program at the next JAINA convention.

We would like young Jain women to come forward, bringing their newer perspectives and views, and become a part of the Committee. I hope to join teams with YJA to bridge the gap with new and innovative programming in the coming year.

Failure and the Future: Reconnecting with Jainism

By: Mahima Shah

“The mystery of life isn’t a problem to solve, but a reality to experience” (Frank Herbert).

Let’s talk about failure. It’s a word with a negative connotation, and an action most people try their hardest to avoid. For the first 20 years of my life, I was no exception.

My pre-college experience was relatively comfortable largely because teachers and peers regularly defined milestones for me. I complacently, and in hindsight rather indifferently, worked towards them. Fast-forward to my second year of college, and I was still obviously chasing externally set goals that I had no personal investment in. But now, I noticed the quality of my work was lagging further and further behind that of my impact-driven peers. I was finally in a place where apathetic albeit diligent work was no competition in the face of passion and true fulfillment.

This led to a frightening realization. I had no idea what I loved or enjoyed, and I was rapidly advancing on a lackluster road to failure that I hadn’t even known existed. The depth of this shock catalyzed an onslaught of revelations, the first and foremost being that I needed to find what I truly enjoyed. The second was that failure, counterintuitively, could be the key to making this discovery.

In that moment, I decided I would fail at everything I didn’t genuinely find value in. All that remained would be what I truly cared about because I wouldn’t allow myself to fail at those things. Instead of halfheartedly hoping I might gain something from resume-building clubs or mind-numbing social events intended to expand my network, I decisively began capitalizing on satisfactions, dissociating from dissatisfactions, and embracing the inevitable failures that transpired as a result.

This experiment required not only an astounding amount of mental fortitude, but also continual self-awareness and daily introspection to understand my failures and how to approach them. Disciplining my mind in this way helped me use these newfound insights to entice cognitive comprehension, elucidate otherwise indiscernible opportunities, and rebound from “failure” to positions unimaginable to my previously stagnant self.

Failure, which I used to be so afraid of, wasn’t the horrific downwards spiral that I thought it would be. Instead, it was an awe-inspiring gateway to freedom. I let go of society’s ideas of success and was presented with a stark white canvas on which I could create my own definition.

I proceeded to fill this canvas with the furthest reaches of my imagination, painting a future for myself where my actions would stem from genuine desire and every moment would provide near absolute fulfillment.

Along with these thoughts and changes came a closer relationship with Jainism. Before, I had approached the religion in the same way I approached everything else: indifferently. While I passively hoped involving myself in the Jain community would be beneficial, I had no real expectations. With my new and improved outlook on life, I could easily term my relationship with Jainism a failure and move on to other things. However, instead of leaving Jainism behind, I found myself subconsciously pulled closer.

As I was using failure to define my version of success, I began asking deeper questions about what success means and what role it plays in our lives. Large portions of my time were spent solitarily deep in thought reflecting on my trials and triumphs and searching for an ideal, individualistic path to follow. My paradoxical search led me to contemplations as high-level as the meaning of life, the structure of the universe, consciousness and its interrelation to our energies, and the

question of if our existence is real, relative, or something else altogether.

That's when I realized that Jainism, this religion that I had barely cared for before, addressed all of these. Even though Jain education had been a pervasive part of my childhood, I was now for the first time in 20 years learning about Jainism with fresh eyes curious and hungry for comprehension. I was looking to the 12 Bhavanas to understand the universe, reading Atma-Siddhi Shastra to comprehend fundamental philosophical truths, and spending hours on topics as simple as the three jewels (right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct) to structure my future. The core of Jainism turned out to be precisely what I was so fervently looking for: a pathway progressing towards truth.

For a religion with so many layers of complexity, Jainism was starting to openly reveal its secrets to me - secrets that I just now was learning had been hiding in plain sight. These candid discoveries helped me reconfigure my world and embark on a spiritual journey that I previously had no intention of ever venturing towards. By understanding and applying Jainism to the metaphysical questions that accepting failure brought to the surface, I found a way of life that sustains more joy, passion, and potential for progress than living in mundanity ever did.

So now, I challenge you to do the same. Start digging deeper and becoming more self-aware. Try to envision what long-term success looks like for you and ask yourself if it will give you true fulfillment. Have the courage to let go of what detracts from your happiness and prevents you from achieving your full potential. Stop learning about Jainism through a simple lens of memorization and basic understanding. Rather, approach it in a way that deeply relates to your perception of yourself, who you want to be, and where your dreams and aspirations can take you.

Lastly, learn how to utilize failure as a tool for growth. It will undoubtedly lead to your greatest successes and most valuable insights. In doing this, perhaps you'll stumble onto the same questions that I did. And maybe, hopefully, you'll also find the beautiful simplicity and truth in Jainism that I found.



A Journey Through Jain Education

By: Foram Shah



From a young age, I have been fortunate to attend a Jain Pathshala. I still have vivid memories of coloring in pictures of Trishala Mata's dreams and learning the Jain Alphabet. As I grew older and gained more exposure to Jainism, the more I loved it. I credit my mom and my Sunday school teachers, who have taught me everything I know today.

I grew up in a household with my mom as an elementary school teacher, so naturally I had quickly learned about the importance behind being a teacher. Following in my mom's footsteps, after I graduated from my Sunday school, I decided to help other teachers in their classrooms. I was able to work alongside our Pathshala's Director of Education and teach students aged 14-16.

I wish I could say my whole experience was wonderful and perfect, but truth be told, it wasn't. **It is fairly difficult to be an excellent teacher.** The student's education partially depends on you and each student is unique in their own way to which you must cater. Students were tired of the typical lecture, and naturally, they were doubting certain aspects of Jainism. As a religious teacher, you would never want your students to not believe in the material given to them. So, after many discussions with the classroom teacher, I formulated various ideas of how to convey the information besides the traditional lecture to show the students the importance behind the material given to them. From having the students give poster presentations to playing games, we were able to simply have fun in the classroom! I encouraged the students to ask more questions and allowed them to be more comfortable in doubting the material. This way, as teachers, we would better know how to address their doubts. Although it wasn't always the greatest, I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity to be a teacher. The student-teacher relationship that I got to build is something beyond what

any words can describe. I will always cherish and keep it close to me. Having a student come up to you and tell you that they had fun today in class or that they learned something new and interesting is one of the best feelings I've had.

After teaching at Pathshala for two years, I became a JAB (Jain Academic Bowl) Co-coach. Teaching students minute details of a 400-page manual was a difficult task. I have been fortunate enough to have coached a group of very talented students, but just like teaching at Pathshala, there were ups and downs to coaching as well. It is the teacher's job to encourage the students and keep them motivated, but motivation must also come from within the students themselves. In the very beginning, it was difficult to get the students to read the material properly and understand it, but by the middle of the year, their passion and competitive drive allowed them to learn more and to actually enjoy each session.

We have had some really fun times during all-day sessions and Google Hangouts (the younger students maybe had a little too much fun...). Now you can probably imagine the end result of a group of 7-14 years old, who have just had a bunch of sugary snacks and had to remain quiet and serious throughout a two-hour Q&A session. It was complete mayhem. I had students running all over the place and playing with things they shouldn't even be touching by break time. It became slightly difficult for me to keep the buzzer system away from them. Imagine hearing a beeping noise every five seconds! But through it all, I can easily say that some of my best laugh out loud stories and life-long memories have come from JAB.

Even though I still have a lot to learn myself about Jainism, I hope to continue to continue in my mother's footsteps and pass down the Jain knowledge that I have.

YJA18: Bringing It Back to Where It Began

By: Satej Shah

It was early February 2017, and the New England Patriots had just pulled off the greatest Super Bowl comeback in the NFL's history. I was fully embracing the second semester senior year lifestyle when the 2018 YJA Convention Bid Packet was released. There was a great deal of excitement around which city would host the convention, and ever since I walked out of the Los Angeles hotel in 2016, I knew I wanted to bring the convention back home to Chicago. My YJA16 experience was so memorable, and I wanted every other young Jain to have an experience of a lifetime in my city and with our Sangh. This was the perfect opportunity.

I began by looking into what the bid packet required and started talking with other young Jains in my Sangh and around the country. We joined forces and formed a talented and determined team. I also reached out to YJA's co-founder, Seema Jain, who had nothing but advice and encouragement, speaking from her background of organizing the first YJA Convention in Chicago 25 years ago.

Our team of 20 reached out to hotels around the Chicagoland area and worked with the Jain Society of Metropolitan of Chicago (JSMC) Sangh to complete the packet. Our group's vision—hosting the best YJA Convention yet—became our city's vision.

Growing up in a powerhouse Jain Sangh like JSMC, my Jain friends, family, and I had embraced every opportunity to support our temple and its members over the years through Pathshala, Sutra competitions, Ahimsa Walks, declamation contests, cultural programs, Melas, health fairs, lock-ins, ski trips, bowling, and Paryushan and Das Lakshana Parva volunteering. Now that the time had come when we needed our Sangh's support this year, they had our backs.

Nearly three months after we'd first received the bid packet, we sent it in with

confidence. We were incredibly excited when it was released that Chicago would be the host city of YJA18!

As the summer went on, the YJA Executive Board reached out to me and a few select individuals to be on a YJA18 Interim Committee. I was very eager to dive into this process, as it would enable me to grow professionally and contribute toward the Jain community. The team included 2016-2017 YJA Board members Avish Jain, Hetali Lodaya, and Chintav Shah and Chicago youth members Bansari Shah, Krish Kamdar, Miten Shah, and myself. Our purpose was to execute a hotel contract and set up the foundation for the convention.

Without all of these individuals, we would not have had a foundation for this year's convention. We all gained something valuable from being a part of the YJA18 Interim Committee. As a result of our hard work, it was the earliest the Convention hotel contract had ever been signed, and we were excited to start working on the next logistics.

Throughout the summer, we continued to brand #YJAchitown18 around the nation, especially in JSMC. We started at the Mahavir Janma Kalyanak celebration in April when the YJA Executive Board was in town, built upon our brand during the annual JSMC Temple Anniversary Program in June, and continued during the Paryushan and Das Lakshana Parva celebrations in the fall.

We printed out banners, made business cards, approached potential donors and volunteers, and developed the most prominent JSMC youth presence ever during Paryushan & Das Lakshana Parva in the Shri Gautam Swami Poojan, Mahavir Janma Vanchan, and Paushad. On Samvatsari, a memorable experience occurred that kept the motivation of our goal in mind.

One JSMC member told me that "the

youth is the focus for the future and you showed us that you are the future of Jainism and this temple. Keep up the good work; we're counting on you."

At the age of 18, YJA has already helped me to grow professionally. I worked on a small-scale project that involved financial management, communication, leadership, and technical skills. With a Jain mindset, we set up a platform for a successful large-scale product: Young Jains of America Convention 2018. We managed budgets for each of the hotel contracts by negotiating to meet our financial needs and wants. We strived to understand the perspectives of multiple generations, and groups with patience, and respect.

If you invest your time and effort in YJA, it will pay off. YJA isn't only a spiritual and social platform, but it's also one for professional development.

The many opportunities within YJA where individuals can grow professionally include becoming a Local Representative, applying to be on Convention Committee or Convention SubCommittees, volunteering at Convention, and becoming a board member.

YJA prepares you to become a leader of tomorrow. Embrace being a young Jain and grasp opportunities to learn and grow within YJA. I hope to see you in July at YJA18!



UIUC JSA: COLLEGE CHAPTER FEATURE

By: Juhi Shah and Hemali Shah

UIUC is a place where many people from the suburbs flock to. Every month, I waited for the text that would remind me to come to the Student Union for our Jain Students Association (JSA) meeting. It was easy to bond with the JSA members, because they were the same friends you saw in temple for Pathshala. We talked about living a Jain lifestyle while growing up in the US and how it would change now that we were in college; we hosted game nights to get to know each other better, and we even had a booth on Quad Day. Our membership may not have been as large as that of the Indian Students Association (ISA), but we definitely had more fun.

Over time, the dynamic of our JSA changed. More and more Jains came to UIUC, and our meetings grew ten-fold. We hosted Samvatsari Pratikraman at a member's apartment, reading from the English Pratikraman book. We hosted potlucks and tried all the vegan restaurants on campus.

Being a part of such a tight knit group of people definitely helped while I was in college, especially freshman year, when homesickness started to really sink in. They were a reminder of home that I needed. JSA brought people together, and you can see its effects remain over time. We hung out with each other outside of our normal meetings and we still hang out to this day.



The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) is one of the largest universities in the US. With students from around the world, it is also one of the most diverse: not only ethnically, but also religiously. As Jainism is one of the smallest religions in the world, I didn't expect there to be many Jains on campus.

However, I soon found that there were more than a handful of Jain students on campus, and there was even a Jain Students Association (JSA). They weren't very active at the time, but that's when Young Jains of America (YJA) stepped in. By using a national organization as a partner, JSA was able to take a fresh start. We created a new logo, got the group chat to be more active, and reignited JSA with social media and promotions. We hosted a National Dinner in November at a local Noodles and Company, where more than twice of previous events' students showed up. Surprisingly, most of the students weren't just friends we had from JSMC; most were friends we had made here or people who decided to come just to see what YJA and JSA were. We talked about continuing JSA and began planning future events. As people start connecting more often, the events become more and more social. This past December, we had another event: a study break, as finals were coming right around the corner.

As more people learn about JSA, we will begin to host events equipped for larger groups. We might have monthly prayer sessions or workshops on how to be vegan or vegetarian in a dorm or apartment. As of right now, we're working to become a registered student organization and continuing to spread the word. The possibilities are endless.

LR Spotlights

Suraj Shah Northeast

Whenever I describe YJA to someone else, words like community, innovative, and insightful always come up. As an LR, I strive to continue building upon these characteristics of YJA by connecting young professionals and graduate students with each other through local events. My hope is that these connections will help expand the Jain community in the professional world and offer a variety of perspectives of navigating the post-college life as a Jain. By far, my favorite part of YJA is meeting so many people and making meaningful friendships in such a short period of time. Learning about everyone's passions as well as being able to share my passion for dance at the Talent Competition last summer in LA have created some of my favorite memories from YJA. I'm looking forward to meeting more people in Chicago this summer! #IsItJulyYet



Sunny Jain South

Building a sense of community is the string that unites Jains of different ages, interests, and backgrounds towards a common goal, the Jain community. It wasn't until many years later when I realized that even someone like myself could make a difference, through something as little as supporting our local YJA social events and encouraging others to get involved. My goals for the coming year as a LR is to continue to help build and establish a long lasting legacy for my city's chapter.

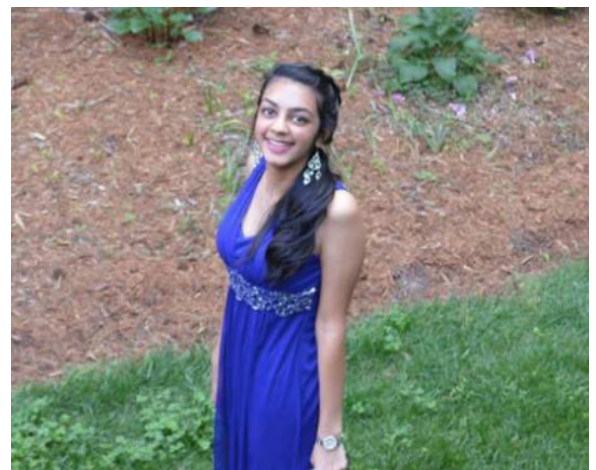
I can't stress how important YJA is as a platform to connect Jains across the nation, both for our community and religion, and I can tell you so many stories and example of how much good YJA has done for so many people. It has helped people find everlasting friendships, empowered the Jain youth to get more involved at our temples, and introduced religion to many people that didn't have it in their lives. When I think of YJA, the three words that comes to mind are Community, Compassion, and Friendship.



Salauni Shah Southeast

My favorite memories all include being with my southeast friends. The first convention I went to (2014), I knew absolutely no one besides my sister and she introduced me to the Southeast people and they welcomed me in and I felt as though I had known them forever.

Going to my first retreat and staying up all night talking and having fun has also been one of my favorite moments. My goals as an LR are to get more kids in my area participating in events. I know that there are plenty of kids here that still don't know about YJA and the dinners that we have. YJA is a loving, and nonjudgmental family that I'm so proud to be a part of. I'm really excited for what's to come this year!



LR Spotlights

Neel Parakh

Mid-West

My favorite YJA memory is actually the last day of Mid-West retreat. It was at that moment before leaving everyone that I had realized that the people I spent 3 days with were more than just friends. They were family. That experience we all shared at that Mid- West Retreat was something that would bond us over time. We would all be able to look back on that weekend and smile, and that feeling alone makes it one of the most memorable YJA memory for me. With that said my goal for being an LR this year is to provide that same experience that I had and give it to a new set of young Jains. Through events and socials I think I can help younger Jains experience that same joy. The three words I would describe YJA with would have to be faith, joy, and family.



Ankith Desai

West

YJA is a doorway to so many experiences that are unforgettable. One of these unforgettable memories is my first YJA Convention, 2016 convention in LA. That was eye-opening, from a religious aspect but also a social aspect, seeing the Jain Youth community in America & Canada all together. As an LR, I want to stay involved and grow this community, as I believe we are seeing a new change in the way we know Jainism, due to factors like social media and technology. When people ask me what YJA is, adjectives to describe YJA would be fun, spiritual, and educational. YJA is a really great way to grow our tightly-knit community.

Achal Shah

Mid-Atlantic

My favorite YJA memory consists of the late-night mafia and paranoia games with local members as well as those from other Jain sanghs. This really gave me a chance bond with and form deeper connections with new people as well as my friends. As an LR, my goal is to expand YJA's member base and give back to the community by hosting more service events. Three words I would use to describe YJA are community, values and knowledge.



REFLECTIONS FROM A 2016 BOARDIE

By: Mitesh Bhalani

As preparations for YJA 2018 in Chicago are getting underway, I wanted to share my experiences as Southeast Regional Coordinator and Social Committee Co-Lead during the 2015-2016 year. Although it was challenging and sometimes frustrating, I'm thankful for the opportunities it brought me and more importantly, the friends I made.

After settling into my freshman year of college, I received a call from the current Southeast RC, Poojan, who told me I was unfortunately elected at the new RC.

"Hey man, just wanted to call you and let you know that unfortunately, you've been elected as this year's Southeast RC."

I did a mental double take, laughed at his joke, and thanked him for the call. Shortly afterwards, I began planning my trip to LA for the first Board meeting. While I reached our hotel late, I quickly joined in with the rest of what would become my team and family over the next year. We discussed ideas for the coming year, the big-picture plans and small-scale events that would help us accomplish them, and after a few hours, we concluded our meeting. That's when the real fun began. Mishi, our Director of Project Development, brought out Avalon. Even though

most of us were still getting to know each other, by the third game, we were working together like we'd been friends for years, trying to figure out who the evil wizard was. In typical YJA fashion, we played late into the night and then went to sleep to be ready for an early morning. The next day was full of meetings, a board photoshoot, and a fun outing to Santa Monica Pier to close the weekend.

After getting home late on Sunday night, I was exhausted yet energized with ideas for the year. I began planning our upcoming national dinners, working with a new team of Local Representatives, and navigating bringing new cities and members into YJA. Before long, I began the Convention committee selection process with Monica Vora, who was Social Co-lead and Northeast RC. I remember feeling strange that I was interviewing candidates when I had sat in their shoes only a few months prior. It was daunting to choose the best candidate from a pool of highly qualified candidates, but we finally chose our 3rd committee member, Monica, Rea, and I were ready. met again in LA for our Convention Committee Board meeting. With more than 30 Convention committee members, this meeting had a

very different feel: it was more like a family reunion as compared to our fall meeting, which felt like a small family dinner. We spent a lot of time with our respective committees, laying the groundwork for the next months of work leading up to the 4th of July weekend. We still made time for fun after we had finished our work for the day and I was sad to see everyone go, knowing that we wouldn't all meet again in person until Convention.

In between all the Convention planning, I was also getting ready for the signature event as RC: the Southeast retreat. Months of venue selection, food planning, advertising, and sessions preparation came down to one weekend. In the last couple of days leading up to the retreat, we received a few cancellations, and I was beginning to feel disheartened. All the work that I had put in would be for nothing if we didn't have enough people there for it to be fun. Despite my initial reservations, the attendees proved me wrong. Over the course of the weekend, our small group became extremely close, and I was glad that I had the opportunity to make a meaningful connection with each person at the retreat. Despite going into the retreat with a negative perspective, I was able to leave with a sense of accomplishment, knowing that the efforts I had made would form relationships for years to come. The next few months went by quickly, with biweekly YJA meetings. Amidst planning the decorations for Convention formal and organizing bowling events, I finished my first year of college, and with the beginning of summer, my schedule opened up for me to spend more time on

and with YJA.

Before I knew it, Convention weekend was upon us. I could write a whole article about just that whirlwind week, but for this piece, I'll save the highlights. The days before the attendees arrived were the calm before the storm, as we carefully planned the remaining details and got everything in order. Once Friday rolled around, the rush began and didn't stop until the end of the weekend. Attending YJA 2014 was a busy but enjoyable experience. Running YJA 2016 was a fast-paced flurry, trying to get naps in between being on call and putting out fires in any way we could. The best part of every day for me was the social events, the events my committee had helped put together. To see months of hard work come together into an unforgettable experience for over 650 attendees was incredibly fulfilling. When everyone finally left by Monday afternoon, I took a second to sit down and hold on to the moment. I thought about the hard work we had put in and how no matter what happened, this moment, this success would be something to cherish and celebrate. The end of my board term was in late September 2016, as I called the next Southeast RC to congratulate him and pass on the torch.

Though the experience had not been easy, I was glad I had taken a chance a year ago to apply. I still keep in touch with my fellow boardies, and we'll meet up whenever we're in town. I'm immensely grateful to have learned and grown so much through the experience and I would do it again in a heartbeat.



YJA Travels



the World



MANTRA FOR SAFE TRAVELS

*Om Phum Shvīm Kshvīm Hrim Aim Namah Thah Thah Thah Svaha
(Om Foom Shreem Hreem Im Nah-ma Ta-ha Ta-ha Ta-ha Swah-haa)*

How Jainism Helped Me Find a Home in Houston

By: Raj Dalal



During the summer after my freshman year of high school, I began packing. My parents had just given me the news that we were moving to Texas, but I didn't truly begin to comprehend the magnitude of the news until I saw the "Now Leaving Illinois" sign fade into the horizon as we drove down. I began having difficulty coping with the idea of leaving behind everything that was familiar to me. I realized that I would be surrounded by an unfamiliar world and the moment my family reached Houston, my friends would be gone, the neighborhood would be different, and I wouldn't know anyone at my new school. I spent my last two months of summer break with little to do except shoot around on basketball courts by myself and watch Netflix. As school started, things did not improve. I vividly remember walking into my homeroom and sitting in the corner as strangers around me were deep in conversation about their summer breaks. I felt immensely alone without the comfort of a single familiar face.

Moving to Houston challenged me spiritually. As a 14-year-old with everything in my life changing, I felt lost and confused. After I moved, I began to look introspectively because without the comfort of being in Chicago, I realized that I was aimlessly wading through my daily routine. I had lost a sense of identity and as a result I began to question the purpose behind my actions and my role in the community and the world. I quickly realized that I did not have a strong understanding of the purpose of life, and my faith was misplaced as a result. Seeking guidance and moral philosophy, I looked towards Jainism. Although born as a Jain, I wasn't active in the Jain community in Chicago. Once I moved to Houston, however, I began embracing the philosophy. I joined the Jain Fellowship of Houston, a youth group in the Jain Society of Houston, and started attending Pathshala. Although I was far behind all the other students in my knowledge of Jainism, I genuinely

enjoyed the lectures and lessons that I attended. Jainism provided me stability when I felt unstable. It helped me mold and refine my moral foundations, and it changed my outlook on life. Prior to attending Pathshala, I had a rudimentary understanding of reincarnation and the philosophy behind karma.

I vaguely remember times where my mom would tell me that if I didn't behave properly, I would be born as a plant or an insect in my next life. I knew that I should value being born as a human, but this appreciation was misdirected as it had developed from a fear of being born as another form of life. However, once I started



attending Pathshala, I began to truly appreciate being born as a human instead of appreciating not being born as something else. I learned how cognition and consciousness distinguish humans from other forms of life in gifting us with the potential to control our impulses. Intelligence and logic allow us to examine the repercussions of decisions and make reasoned choices instead of acting on instinct.

After I gained this deep appreciation and value for the opportunities I have as a human, I became more conscious about my feelings towards my circumstances. In Pathshala, I learned about a powerful Jain principle called Anekantvad, which states that there are multiple perspectives to any situation. Anekantvad was what assisted me in coming to terms with my move to Houston.

When I first moved, I was shocked, resentful, and gloomy, because all I could think about were my friends and family whom I had moved away from. But after a couple of months, and with the help of Anekantvad, I found a different perspective to my situation. I started acknowledging the benefits that came out of moving: I received a much stronger education, made a plethora of new friends, became much more confident and outgoing, developed a stronger connection to my cultural roots, and learned more about Jain philosophy. I began to view my circumstances as moving to Houston rather than moving

It's been over four years since I moved to Houston. I find it ironic that after spending months resisting the city, I later voluntarily opted to spend another four years here by attending Rice University.

Looking back on my time in this city, I truly believe that joining the Jain Fellowship of Houston was one of the best decisions I've made in my life. Embracing Jain philosophy was the turning point in not only accepting Houston as a home, but also in helping me find purpose, stability, and self-confidence.

Jain philosophy has redefined my outlook toward life and provided me with direction in finding myself. I actively strive to practice Jainism, motivated by the fact that I can always do more to become a better person.

Now, the appreciation I have for Jainism grows with every choice I make.



away from Chicago. A close friend of mine recently mentioned his high school yearbook quote: "Don't let the orchard you come from determine the apples you pick."

When I heard this, it immediately resonated within me. The sentiment of this quote strongly reflects a central ideology in Jainism: though we may not always have a say in the circumstances we are dealt, we do have significant control in what we make out of our situations. I find this ideology empowering because it reminds us of the control we have over our lives and our ability to make the most out of them.



Journey to Palitana

By: Parshva Vakharia

Ever since I was little, my parents would take me to Palitana whenever we visited India. Despite the fact that the journey to the top of the Tirth was so long, I always remembered enjoying my trips to Palitana. However, I never really understood the importance of such a visit until last winter.

That January, I really, really didn't want to go to Palitana. I hadn't been to India in six years and had already fallen sick within a week of reaching: the thought of climbing 3,745 steps for hours wasn't the most appealing. Still, I decided to push through my concerns to help fulfill my parents' wishes to see Palitana thrice in their lifetime. It is said that if you see Palitana three times in your life, you will definitely go to Moksh in some lifetime.

When we reached the first steps of the mountain, I had already started feeling sick. As I sat on the side of the temple at the base of the mountain, a Sadhviji approached my family and me to make sure that I was okay. She was genuinely concerned for my well-being, and seeing how selfless these Sadhus and Sadhvis are despite living lifestyles without comfort made me realize that my problems were petty. This motivated me to keep going.

As we climbed further and further up the mountain, a pattern began to emerge: I would run up about 300 steps, wait 10 minutes for my parents to catch up, climb 300 steps, and so on. But despite my parents' lack of physical fitness, I was shocked to see how they pushed through and continued climbing without any complaints. I genuinely was concerned about whether they'd be able to make it to the top, and it was almost like a miracle to see them climbing happily.

At the top of the mountain, we did Darshan and Puja on the idols. While the fruits of worshipping at the temple were important, I felt that seeing how happy my parents were for completing the journey was the most important part. By the time we reached the bottom, I had completely forgotten that I was even sick in the first place!



The Future is Bright: Engineering & Jainism

By: Simmi Nandu

Looking back, I cannot exactly pinpoint where it was along the journey of my life that I decided I wanted to pursue engineering. What I do remember is that growing up as the child of two software engineers, I didn't want to play the stereotype and follow their same path. I always thought I'd do something different, something I could be passionate about. Engineering was out of the question for a long time.

My interests varied depending on what phase of my life I was going through, and the list of potential careers I've considered, from childhood until now, is endless. But, a little over four years ago, I ended up submitting a handful of applications to engineering schools across the country. I don't really recall what led me to that decision but it seemed logical, safe, and challenging enough to keep me sharp.

So here I am, in my fourth and final year of chemical engineering at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. It's been quite the journey over these last few years as I've tried to shape my career path for the future. One of the more interesting things I had to do during this process was bring in my Jain principles to help me make some of these important decisions. We all talk about how we use Jainism as a way to help guide us throughout our daily life, but I never really envisioned myself making big decisions about the future in this way.

Pursuing a degree in chemical engineering in the state of Texas almost completely

restricts you into careers in the oil and gas industry. Texas's natural and geographical resources make it a traditional energy leader. Needless to say, being the US's top energy producing state is something we take a lot of pride in. Going to an engineering school where nearly our entire focus is on advancing Texas's energy industry inadvertently forces students down those careers paths, because it's all we know.

During my first two years at UT, I learned more about the oil, gas, and specialty chemicals industries than anything I'd learned during grade-school. Around this time is also when I joined YJA Executive Board for the first time, and the influences of Jainism became ever present in my day-to-day life.

I began to learn more about the environmental philosophies circulated within Jainism. In an increasingly clear environmental crisis, I began to shift focus to where I wanted my chemical engineering education to lead me. The oil and gas industries began to look less and less appealing, and the money just wasn't worth it if perpetuated these problems. I started to look around for research opportunities in the realm of alternative energies.

I stumbled upon a photovoltaic lab research group, which was a member of the Center for Next Generation Photovoltaic and led by an absolutely brilliant professor. Here I got the opportunity to explore a completely

different side of chemical engineering that I had never even envisioned for myself. As an undergraduate researcher, I synthesized multi-component nanocrystals that go into the thin-film solar cells the lab created. I was a part of a group that created spray-able solar inks for flexible design. The best part about this experience is that I've been able to contribute to an industry that supports clean, renewable energy.

Solar energy is one of many paths towards a more sustainable future, and I highly encourage any engineering students looking for something to be passionate about to explore research labs at your universities that do work in alternative energies, like photovoltaics, and carbon capture technology.

My research experience has fundamentally changed the way I see my future in engineering, and I look forward to contributing to an industry in which we change the world.



A Conversation with Masum Momaya

It's difficult to encapsulate Masum Momaya or her journey. As a Doctor of Education with 20 years of diverse experience working around the world, Masum Momaya has charted her own path. Her professional experiences include working as a researcher, curator, writer, educator, grantmaker, and nonprofit organization director. We recently spoke with Momaya about her journey so far, what she's learned from her travels, and why it's okay not to know where your journey is going to take you.



Growing up, how did your parents influence you?

My parents were always there for me but as far as Indian parents go, they were also somewhat hands-off. They gave me the freedom to study what I was interested in, to travel, to chart my own path, and to make mistakes. This was very influential in me finding my way into the world.

My high school focused on discovery-based learning. We were encouraged to be curious, and teachers nurtured that by helping us learn about what we were interested in exploring. This way of approaching knowledge through inquiry was instilled early on. I went to college not knowing what I was going to major in, but I landed on two contrasting subjects: public policy (conservative) and feminist studies (progressive).

I had two study abroad experiences, both of which were as intense as they were influential. The first was at the University of Oxford, which was the first time I had traveled on my own. In Europe, you can travel from one country to another in hours, which allowed me to see much more of the world. I also studied in India for a summer to do research on domestic violence. At times, I had no idea what I was doing, and I encountered a lot of obstacles I didn't anticipate. Through this summer, I learned more about myself and how to navigate unfamiliar terrain.

After college, I knew I wanted to go to grad school, but I didn't know what I wanted to study. So, I joined the Coro Fellowship in Public Affairs, rotating through monthly internships in a variety of sectors, from unions to foundations. This was an intense experience, a common thread in my journey; a lot of days, we didn't know exactly what we were doing, but we figured it out as we went along. The Fellowship gave me more insight into what I enjoyed working in. Afterwards, I went to graduate school to pursue studies in human development. But I was only in

school half the time; I was also teaching, engaging in activism, and serving on organization boards, roles which allowed me to explore more careers. When I finished graduate school, I didn't know what I wanted to do next. That's a theme in my journey. I don't have a set five-year or 20-year plan; I discover the next thing while doing the thing before it. I stumbled into the world of museums and eventually got a job as a curator at the Smithsonian, which is something I had known very little about. Curators piece together exhibitions from stories they learn about through research and travels. I recently curated an exhibition on the history of Indian immigration to the US. During this process, people from across the US would call me, sharing significant stories and objects and pointing me to important sites. For instance, I traveled to the Stockton Gurdwara (Sikh temple), the first gurdwara in the US, in California, to learn about the history of Sikhism. I took many trips like that around the country to collect and share stories, things, and ideas. I also traveled throughout the US (New Jersey, Indiana, Minnesota, Illinois, Florida, Georgia, California) and India (Bombay, Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi) to open the traveling exhibition, talk about the process of making it, and answer questions about the history of Indian immigration.

My travels also involve exchanging knowledge in conferences. I've gone to places as diverse as Morocco, Mexico, Russia, the UK, France, Spain, and Singapore to meet with colleagues who are my counterparts in other parts of the world. We exchange ideas about how we can solve problems, face challenges, and work together.

What has been your favorite journey?

South Africa is fascinating on so many levels: intellectually, culturally, and socially. Its history of anti-apartheid struggles and the Indian diaspora in the region as indentured laborers is interesting and personal.

My other favorite journey would be to Russia. I grew up during the Cold War in the 1980s, when there were strong stereotypes of Russia in the American imagination as the enemy. When I went to Russia in 2014, I saw it through my own eyes. I saw its complex and difficult history, the beauty of its art forms, and great geographic diversity.

What kind of impact can traveling have in today's world?

Real people debunk stereotypes. In traveling, you learn that on a basic level, people struggle with the same things. Everybody wants a life that has some sort of meaning, though meaning can be defined in different ways. There's a lot of tragedy and suffering in the world, but also a tremendous amount of beauty in different cultures, languages, landscapes, ecosystems, and histories. We are interconnected, not only because of technology but also because of common challenges. Travel reinforces that knowledge, wisdom, and solutions are everywhere. It will take us coming together across many lines of difference - cultural, political, social, geographic - to tackle these challenges. Travel also teaches you about yourself, as you're faced with uncertainty. I've been in many places where I didn't speak the language, a very humbling and disorienting way of being in the world. You learn about yourself, what you value, and what brings meaning to your life.

Which principles of Jainism have been most influential in your journey?

Ahimsa affects how I communicate with others, treat myself, and my choice of work. I've always sought out contrasting viewpoints (Anekantavad) and sought to bring them together. Aparigraha is also really influential. I've been learning a lot about climate change. Can I live with less? What do I want my life to be in the future? I'm proud to have these principles as pillars in my life.

Disconnect(ed)

By: Kriti Shah

As a devoted YJA member, I recently took upon a task, even though I knew it would be one of the hardest things I would do in a while. Yes, that's right, as the title suggests, I disconnected. Allow me to explain: for three days, I refrained from using my phone or laptop, all in the interest of making your Young Minds reading experience even more delightful than it already is.

Three days may not seem like a tremendous task, but let me assure you that even half a day without my phone or laptop is torture. Not because I have a selfie addiction, or a Candy Crush problem, but because my entire life is basically embedded into these technological devices. Knowing the current climate, perhaps you may think this isn't the best idea, as the dangers of hackers, stalkers, or just plain mockers lurk everywhere. Fortunately, I do not have anything worth stealing on any of devices, other than my amazing progress on the 8 Ball Pool app. However, I do have contacts, schedules, emails, and access to almost all data needed for all the organizations and committees I am in at the moment (approximately 10). I usually don't have enough hours in the day to complete all the tasks I do just for these things, and add in trying to maintain a 4.0 GPA in the enhanced psychology program, and basically you get my life in a nutshell. I reply to texts and emails in a matter of minutes, at the most a couple of hours. I am the type of person who needs to have control of her life, needs to know what is happening at every minute of the day, and will feel very guilty if I put something off for even a day. So you see, three days without my phone or laptop actually was a painful path to consider embarking upon. But, like I said, for YJA, I decided to tackle any task that comes my way!

So there I was sitting by the dining table surrounded by my family on Disconnect Eve. I told them what I was going to do, and they just laughed. My dad said he didn't think it'll be possible, my sister said if I were to pull this off it would be a

miracle, and my mom just kind of stared at me like I was crazy--which from their reactions, I started to think I was. It was close to my finals, and I had so much to do! How would I survive? When I take a break, what would I do? What would happen if I didn't answer my e-mails or miss my TV shows? How, oh how would I know what was going in the world without my five news applications?

Consumed with these thoughts, I eventually made it to bed and set my alarm like usual. That's when I just realized that this was technically cheating, and so in the interest of honouring Satya, or truthfulness, I must tell you, readers, that I made a decision that might jeopardize this challenge, but it had to be done. I decided I would use my phone or laptop for 30 minutes a day and no more. That way, my anxiety wouldn't damage me, yet I would still get to experience most of these three days without my beloved devices.

Day 1 was brutal. My fingers felt lost, and my hands felt empty. I woke up, and I didn't know what to do without my daily Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Whatsapp, and Snapchat check. So, I lay there in bed feeling lost. I thought I might as well get ready and start the day. So I got up, and for the first time I wasn't answering e-mails during breakfast. Instead, I talked to my mom. The conversation felt comfortable and peaceful, and I realized something: maybe, just maybe, I could pull this off. I went downstairs to my room feeling confident and opened my textbooks to study. I usually have a TV show like "Friends", or "The Office", or just something I've watched before in the background while I study. This time I had no music or shows on, and incredibly I found that I could actually understand my formulas, and I was being so much more productive. Who knew that without the distraction of constant notifications, I would be able to finish writing my notes, study more chapters than I have before, and actually finish planning my essay (I couldn't type it up just yet without my laptop). That evening, I had a tutoring

session, so I decided to use my phone 5 minutes before the session to contact my tutee. After the session, and after going home and eating dinner, it was time for bed. I still had 25 minutes of phone time left. I could see the blinking notification light on my phone so I thought I should answer it, but I also thought why use my phone if I don't have to? Today, I would sleep earlier without wasting time on my phone. Turns out, I couldn't sleep. I was so used to falling asleep while browsing my phone, I felt uneasy. So, I caved in and checked my phone. A lot of people had messaged me, I had about 20 emails, and more notifications than I can count. Suddenly, I felt more burdened than I had all day. Some people were upset I didn't reply all day, and there were notifications for more meetings. I was angry at myself for not being able to refrain from my phone, so I messaged my friends about this challenge, and messaged others to postpone meetings. I was starting to feel a bit more relaxed until I got a reply from a disheartened friend. She said I barely talk to her because I am always busy, and now this challenge would just mean more ignoring for her. Dismayed and feeling guilty, I put my phone away and tried to sleep. I didn't want to think about the truth behind her message.

Day 2, I woke up late in the afternoon and was feeling restless. This task was almost like a withdrawal from a drug for me, and I was beginning to experience symptoms. I got up grumpy, chowed down my breakfast, and went downstairs to just sit in my bed. I was getting bored and agitated. Was this challenge really worth it? Then, I thought back to my friend's message. I really had been so busy with everything that I forgot to really live and enjoy the things I used to love. So for the second half of the day, I started doing things that I hadn't in awhile. Those adult coloring books always seem to relax me, but I hadn't had the chance to use them in a while. I also have a bit of an obsession with stationary, so I have about 1,000 colouring utensils. I took them all out and started colouring. I focused on

strokes of colours emerging from these markers. When I finished about two pages, I realized time had passed so quickly. I put my book away, and decided to pamper myself and take a bath instead of my usual hasty showers. The phrase "I felt all my worries wash away" is cliché, but it rang true. I felt all my tensions being released from my shoulders, and my mind felt lighter. Now I was sad that there was only one day left in my Disconnect Challenge.

Day 3 started out great! As soon as I woke up, I just laid there in bed for no reason. I had no responsibilities, and I didn't have a hectic schedule that I had to agonize over. My whole day was free to do what I wanted. Of course that is why I chose... drum roll, please...to study. For once, I was enjoying studying. I am pursuing a degree in something I have always been passionate about, but lately it had simply become another task on my to-do list. Focusing with a new perspective on the literature, and the knowledge that I was being provided, I was suddenly taken back. I was enveloped in the information that I had desired for so long. When I sat down to dinner, I was able to eat with my entire family; this is something I haven't done in months. I talked to them about a variety of things, and learned what was going on in everyone's lives. We talked about everything. I could see that they were so grateful that I was there for more than 10 minutes with them. Their love made me feel so elated. I felt grateful and in a bubble of serenity. That night when I went to bed, instead of worrying about what was going on in the world or which celebrity did something scandalous today, I had the chance to do some yoga. I emptied my mind, and I felt lighter than I had in a very long time. Usually falling asleep takes hours, but this night I fell asleep in a matter of minutes.

Day 4: I know this challenge was only for three days but after day 3, I actually forgot about that. Basically, the first half of this day felt like a dream. I swayed through the day in tranquility. That's when it happened. My eyes fell upon my

phone. I felt this itch, and I needed to use my phone. I had to reply. My brain went into overdrive. There was a battle inside my head between choosing to stay in my peaceful bubble, and going back to the way things were. Succumbing to the need to check my phone, I picked it up. It unravelled from there.

There was so many built up emails, texts, and other messages. It took me about three hours to address all of them, and by the end I thought I could see smoke coming out of my phone, laptop, and fingers. Feeling myself about to fall back into my old routine, I decided I needed to make a change. These three days without my phone made me realize something. The world will not stop if I don't answer a few emails or messages. I do not always have to be there, and taking some time for myself to release my pressure valve will not cause a disaster.

Through doing this challenge, I am reminded of some of our basic Jain principles. Whilst wasting so much time on my phone and laptop, I was breaking all of my vows. I was causing harm to myself by constantly being in a state of frenzy, and I was causing pain to my friends and family by neglecting them. I was forgetting aparigraha. Rather, I was consumed by these devices in lieu of choosing simplicity in my life. I was not being truthful (satya) to myself or to others. I was taking away my exuberant personality to do so many things to keep up a facade of being lively. Circumstances in my life required me to keep busy in the past, but I forgot that I am at a point where I need to balance the responsibilities of all my extracurricular positions and my well-being. That is why I have decided to reduce my time on technology, and remember to take time for myself.

So YJA'ers, this question is for you: can you challenge yourself to go without your devices for a couple of days? Share your experience on YJA Forums and let's see how our experiences differ and what you learned!



Jainism and Mental Health: How My Renewed Faith Made Me Stronger

By: Dhvani Mehta, VP Design of [MannMukti](#)

"I don't know if I am Jain anymore," I tearfully confided to a close friend. It was late 2016 when I explained to him how my depression and anxiety had gradually eroded any semblance of faith that I had left in my religion. Over the past few months, I had stopped reciting the Namokar Mantra at night, lied to my parents about praying, and truly began to believe that my spirituality was no longer a part of my existence. I'm not sure if I thought I had failed Jainism or if I believed Jainism had failed me, but I felt lost and abandoned, not knowing if I would be able to overpower my inner demons without my faith keeping me strong. The road ahead now seemed impossible to navigate without the divine light that had been present my entire life.

Unfortunately, I had to hit rock bottom to finally realize that Jainism hadn't abandoned me; my mental health issues had just blinded me to its presence in my life. Once I made up my mind to work towards regaining inner peace and happiness, I focused on actively applying Jain principles to my life whenever possible to help accelerate my progress. Within Jainism, I discovered the three traits I desperately needed to cope with my mental health issues – serenity, discipline, and knowledge. With these tools, I now feel empowered by my faith to tackle any worldly challenges that may lay ahead of me.

Serenity: Whenever I find myself lost in a moment of extreme uncertainty and stress, I close my eyes and slowly recite the Namokar Mantra, taking deep breaths until I find myself calming down. Not only does this recital give me the clarity I need to accomplish my task, it also rekindles my faith in the Panch Parmeshti and serves as a reminder that all my problems are ultimately infinitesimal and transitory. Doing Kayotsarg (meditation) every night before sleeping further aids the mind in concentrating on the soul instead of losing itself in worldly attachments and anxieties.

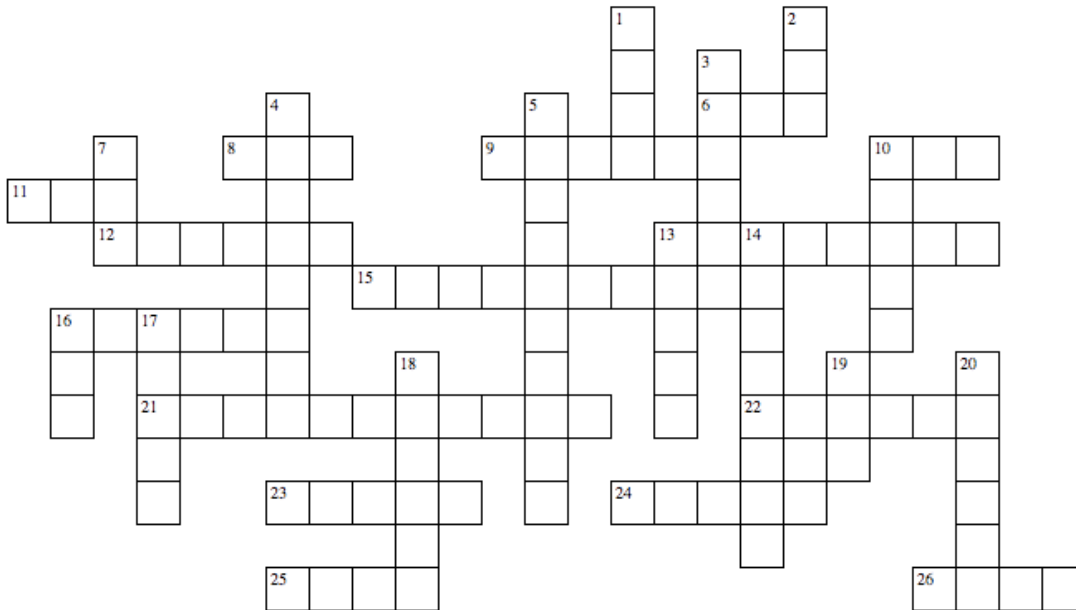
Discipline: Practicing the Jain lifestyle gave me the willpower I needed to combat my lethargic behavior when I was depressed. During my darkest days, I found it hard to get out of bed to shower or even drink water regularly, and I would eat unhealthy snacks as meals at irregular times. Since Jainism is a practical religion centered around determination and self-control, its disciples can avoid unhealthy indulgences by practicing it as faithfully as possible. By following common Jain practices such as observing a healthy vegetarian diet, doing Samayik regularly, and practicing Chauvihar (no food or water after sunset) when possible, one can ensure a continual exertion of self-discipline in their daily lives.

Knowledge: When dealing with mental health issues, it is easy to lose faith in your beliefs and to fall prey to negative/self-harming thoughts and actions as a result. To avoid succumbing to such undesirable behaviors, it is important to keep reminding yourself that you are much more than the chatter in your brain—you are a powerful and pure soul. Simple tasks such as watching satsangs online, going to the derasar regularly, and attending local religious gatherings can reawaken your spirituality and give you the strength and wisdom needed to overcome your mental obstacles. Today, although I continue to struggle with my mental health at times, I no longer lose sight of the everlasting hope and faith that the Jain way of life provides me. My religion even served as the source of my inspiration for naming the mental health organization on behalf of which I wrote this article: MannMukti, which translates to "liberation of the mind and soul". Our mission is to encourage healthy, open dialogue of South Asian mental health to remove stigma, improve awareness, and promote self-care. And as someone who strongly believes in what this organization stands for, I feel honored to be able to share my story on this platform to let other young Jains know that they are not alone in their battle against mental illness.



Crossword

By: Parth Boricha

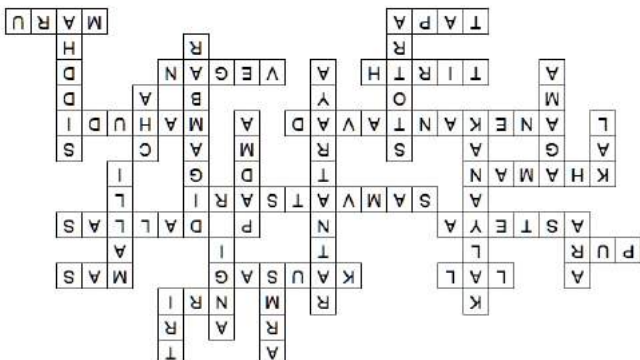


ACROSS

- 1 Multiplicity of viewpoints
- 6 ___ CHAKRA - cosmic wheel of time
- 7 Jain tirth in Gujarat
- 8 Only female Tirthankar
- 10 Containing no animal products
- 14 Texts on Jainism based on the discourses of Tirthankars
- 15 Jain Society of North Texas is located in this city
- 18 Penance by fasting
- 21 Pilgrimage sites are called..
- 23 ___ DEVI - Rishabhdev's mother
- 24 Evening decoration at Derasar
- 25 Rani Susimadevi conceived this tirthankar on a bed of lotus petals thus naming him _____
- 26 Three jewels of Jainism - Samyak Darshan, Samyak Gyan and Samyak Charitra are collectively called _____

DOWN

- 2 'Standing Posture' meditation
- 3 People of Indian descent who live outside India
- 4 Non-stealing
- 5 The 4 ___ of swastika symbolise the four realms of existence i.e humans, heavenly beings, hellish beings and non-humans (plants and animals) in which rebirth occurs
- 6 Panch _____ - 5 auspicious events that occur in the life of a Tirthankar
- 7 ___ KHAMAN/ ___ AKSHAMAN : Jain fasting for a month
- 9 Popular Gujarati snack
- 11 According to Jain cosmology, time is divided into 12 _____
- 12 Day of 'Forgiveness'.
- 13 Indian Tea
- 15 A sect of Jainism
- 16 Oldest and most popular derasar in Delhi - ___ Mandir
- 17 Bhaktamar _____
- 19 Liberated Soul who has attained salvation and truth. This panch-parameshthi is represented in the Jain flag by color 'red'
- 20 Suffix used after Indian town names (hint : Jaipur)
- 22 Alternative word for 'Across Clue no. 25' : ___ RATNA





Winter Wellness Drinks

A RECIPE BY PINKI'S PALATE

A RECIPE BY VEGAN RICHA

Winter 'Bu Smoothie

- 1 cup natural coconut water
- 1/2 cup frozen blueberries
- 1/2 ripe banana
- 1/2 cup frozen mango chunks
- 1 cup baby spinach
- 2 fresh/frozen slices of pineapple
- 1 tbsp chia seeds
- wedge of lime
- mint to garnish
- ice

Blend until smooth. Sip to soothe.



Mexican Hot Chocolate

- 1.5 oz dark chocolate
- 1/4 cup raw sugar
- 3 tbsp cocoa powder
- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 1/8 tsp cayenne (optional for plain)
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon (optional for plain)
- a pinch of salt
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract (or peppermint)
- **Make the Hot Chocolate Mix:** Chop dark chocolate into small chunks. Add to blender with sugar, cocoa, starch, cayenne, cinnamon, and salt; blend until chocolate powders. Add vanilla and blend until well combined. Store in an airtight container.
- **Make Hot Chocolate:** Add 2-3 tbsp of mix to 1 cup milk. Heat milk and mix vigorously for 30 seconds. Serve with whipped coconut cream or vegan marshmallows. (right)

FOR MORE RECIPES, VISIT YJA.ORG/RECIPES.

A Conversation with Arun Gandhi

The fifth grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, Arun Manilal Gandhi is an Indian-American socio-political activist. He uses the lessons he learned from his grandfather to heal communities in a fractured world through nonprofit engagement and leadership, speaking events, and novels.

Arun Gandhi grew up in his grandfather's Phoenix ashram in Durham, South Africa, amongst much poverty. "As a child, my greatest influence were my parents. [They] exposed me to compassion, because they practiced it, dedicating their lives the poor around them. When my two sisters and I were old enough to help with their work, we did."

"At that time, there was much prejudice against people of color. I was filled with a lot of anger, and I wanted to get revenge. My parents left me with my grandfather at his Sevagram Ashram, hoping I would learn something from him.

I lived with babuji for two years between the ages of 12 and 14. One of the most important lessons he taught me were about anger and how to deal with it. "Anger is like electricity - it is powerful, but only if we use it intelligently," he said. "If we abuse it, it can be deadly and destructive." Just as we use electricity for the good of humanity, we must learn to channel anger.

When we talk about nonviolence, we generally talk only in terms of physical violence. As long as we are not fighting or at war, we are peaceful. My grandfather made me draw a genealogical tree of violence, like a family tree, with violence as the grandparent and physical and passive violence as the two branches. Every day before I went to bed, I reflected on what I had experienced throughout the day and put the experiences on their appropriate places on the tree. Passive violence is where we don't use any physical force, but we still hurt people indirectly or directly, consciously or unconsciously; for instance,

discrimination and wasting resources. In the United States alone, according to the New York Times, every year, 160 billion dollars worth of food goes into the garbage. The memory of staying two years with my grandfather and learning all these very important things is something that I will cherish always.

A Journey of Peace

I didn't think I was going to be anything growing up, really speaking. In many ways, my parents were disappointed because I wasn't interested in school or learning. I dropped out of high school, so they were very worried of what was going to happen to me. But things happened and life changed and I am here. I didn't plan anything - it just happened.

When I started a family in India at 22 years old, my wife and I decided that one person would work and earn money for the family and the other person would do social work. My wife was a nurse and she decided that she would use her expertise in helping the poor, and that's what we did for nearly 30 years. We created programs to enable people to stand on their own feet, changing the lives of nearly half a million. In addition, we discovered that many newborn babies were discarded on the roadside. In 10 years, we found 128 babies and we found homes for them. Now, they're all very well settled and happy and grown up.

Right now, I'm also taking care of nearly a thousand poor children in India with the help of AVANI, a charity organization in Kolhapur, India. We give these children food, clothing, and education in the hope that this will change their lives and allow

them to get out of poverty. The money that comes from my speeches and books helps support these children. These are little things that I do on my own that give me satisfaction and happiness, knowing that I can bring some pleasure to people where no hope exists.

Creating a Culture of Compassion

If we don't develop compassion in our early years, it's very difficult to become compassionate when we're older. My parents built a foundation by exposing my sisters and I to poverty and created the need to do something about it in us. Tragically, in modern society, we try to protect children from this kind of exposure instead of getting them involved.

I don't have high expectations. We get disappointed when we build up high expectations and want to change the whole world, and we don't have the capacity to do that, so we burn out and lose hope. Set expectations that you can achieve and once you achieve that goal, set another goal and so on.

One of the most difficult things that I've faced is growing poverty. We're becoming so desensitized that we take it for granted and live our own lives, not caring about those who don't have anything. It's tragic and dehumanizing.

There are many ways to get involved. We don't need to have big programs and we don't need to set a goal of changing the whole world, but we need to help in a little way. Help one or two people, depending on your capacity and ability. Each person has to look at themselves.



If we rebuild self-respect and self-confidence and show people that they can stand on their own feet and achieve things for themselves, we can get them started.

We often want to find a quick solution to our problems, such as through violence. Human beings have decided that by killing somebody, we can think we have solved the problem. It doesn't. Killing people or acting in violent ways only increases our problems. There are no bad people or good people and the whole idea that we can eliminate all the bad people from society to become good is a myth. All of us have the capacity to do good or to do bad depending on what buttons are pressed. If the wrong buttons are pressed, we react badly and do bad things. We must transform people, not kill them.

You have to evaluate your beliefs first. What do you believe in? What kind of world do you want to create? Then, work towards creating that kind of world. This world is a very diverse place where no culture, language, or religion can or should dominate. We don't need to tolerate diversity - we need to respect diversity. We have to work together and respect each other's culture and religion and beliefs.



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