

Practical Jainism – A Workshop at EKTA Centre held on 19 July 2015

On Sunday 19th July, the IoJ Education Team in association with OAUK North West Area jointly held a programme on 'Practical Jainism' at the EKTA Centre, Kingsbury. The 5 hour programme was attended by more than 150 people, ages ranging from 6 years to 60+. The interactive workshops with PowerPoint presentations focussed on the most frequently asked question of the necessity of rituals, in the spiritual quest of liberation. This was followed by a Q&A session that answered any question the participants had on Jain Dharma.



Participants at the workshop



Opening remarks by
Altafbhai Samji

The afternoon opened with a warm welcome and introduction by Altafbhai Samji. After recitation of the auspicious Namaskar Mantra, a minute's silence was observed in remembrance and respect to Kusumben V Shah, a valuable member of the IOJ Education Team, who passed away in April this year. She was the Head of both the South London Gujarati & SCVP Jain Schools. Her tireless energy & dedication were legend. This event was a tribute to her.

The idea for the event had come from Ashwinbhai Shah, a regular and devoted member of the SCVP Adult class and of a Swādhyaya group held on Saturdays in South London. It was met with enthusiasm and whole-heartedly carried to implementation with support from Harshadbhai Sanghrajka (IoJ) and Nirmalbhai Shah, Chairperson of OAUK, North West Area.

Altafbhai Samji said rituals are customary observances or practices used in social or religious ceremonies. When used in religious worship, they allow us to express beliefs and values. The Education Team would look at the rituals of Samayika, Puja, Dhyana and Bhakti. They would explore how these can benefit us.

The workshops were split into 3 groups: Adults, Children ages 6-10 and Children ages 11-15. The parallel sessions were run on the ground, 2nd and 1st floor respectively. The Adult sessions were facilitated by Jyotsnaben Samji, Shrutiben Malde and Harshadbhai Sanghrajka; the younger childrens' group by Vibhutiben Mehta and the older childrens' group by Jyotsnaben Shah. Bhakti was led by Kundanben Shah.



Jyotsnaben Samji
discussing Sāmāyika

Jyotsnaben Samji presented the first 2 sessions. She began with a question: 'When does the spiritual quest begin in earnest?' It begins only when one realises and understands the value and 'need' for the **3 Jewels** of Jainism - **Samyak Darśana, Samyak Jnāna, Samyak Cāritra (right faith, right knowledge, right conduct)**. The 'need' is from the desire to be free from the entrapment of 8 karmas. Rituals are necessary in the initial stages; but are only a means to an end - the purification of the soul.

SĀMĀYIKA is a 48-minute ritual undertaken by householders to subdue passions, restrict activities and to inculcate **equanimity**. It is "**fusion with the true self**". The 48 minutes should be usefully spent learning sūtras, reading religious texts, inspirational stories and introspection. The symbolic and spiritual significance of each implement, '*Upkarana*', was discussed with audience participation. Sāmāyika, regularly practised, builds up physical endurance and mental steadiness. With the right aim, it can give an insight into ascetic life and can change one's outlook and conduct.

PŪJĀ provides the necessary interaction to know, worship and be inspired by **the ideal** - the **Jineśvara (supreme soul)**, under the guidance of **Sat-guru (true teacher)** and **Sat-śāstra (true scriptures)**. All different pūjās can be grouped into 3 categories. Pūjās allow one to reflect on the qualities of the **Jineśvara**, develop humility and renounce certain activities, hopefully forever. A practical activity of **Nav Anga Pūjā** was undertaken by many in the audience. Everyone participated in the recitation of meaningful Gujarati verses as tilaks were placed on the nine places on the body of a Jina image. Amalbhai Samji read out the translation of the verses in English, which explained their significance.



Participating in Nav Anga Pūjā

After a break with refreshments served by OAU North West Team, Shrutiben Malde presented the session on **DHYĀNA - 'food for the soul'**. She explained the uniqueness of Jain meditation - the negative **and** positive types of contemplation and reflection. It is the introspection or 'soul searching' which brings 'home' the realisation of the difference between 'the **self (sva) and non-self (par)**'. Dhyāna is the summum bonum of rituals. Bhagwan Mahavir attained absolute knowledge, Keval Jnana, after spending 12 years in dhyāna, following a vow of 'Sāmāyika Cāritra'. Shrutiben led everyone into a 10 minute meditation, with gentle affirmations to focus on, then listening to chanting, followed by a few minutes of silence. The experience of this reviving, relaxing taster session was enjoyed by all the participants.



Shrutiben Malde leading the Dhyāna session

CHILDREN in the parallel sessions learnt about the same topics suitably adapted for their age groups. This was to encourage family discussion and ritual performance regularly in their homes. The 11-15 age group led by Jyotsnaben Shah, assisted by Shrikeshbhai Malde and Harshaben Malde also used PowerPoint presentations interspersed with stories, discussions and activities.

The 6-10 age group was led by Vibhutiben Mehta and Geetaben Shah and assisted by Neeraben Patalia and Anokhiben Samji. This age group did their "learning" through practical demonstrations, recitations, stories, craft work and games.

Children from both age groups took the opportunity to present their 'learnings' to the Adults before joining them for Bhakti. Every child proudly announced to the adults the ritual they had committed to do regularly.



Age Group 11-15 involved in Nav Anga Pūjā and asking interesting questions



Age Group 6-10 intrigued by Faith



Deciding which ritual to commit to for daily practice

BHAKTI stavans were led by Kundanben Shah and chorus by all members of SCVP South London and IoJ Education Team. The audience joined in the joyous singing as lyrics were displayed in English transliteration and Gujarati fonts. The 4 stavans selected were:

- **'Bhāve Bhajo'** - Worship with devotion; in praise of the 24 Tirthankars
- **'Jagmagtā Tārlānu Derāsar'**- A star-studded place of worship of my Prabhuji
- **'Bhāvanā Dina Raat Meri'** - A composition by Upādhyāya Amar Muni; His sincere wish for happiness in the lives of all and for honesty, equanimity and good conduct to prevail time and time again.
- **'Arihant Jaya Jaya'** - Victory to the only true 4 refuges - Arihant, Siddha, Sādhu and Jin dharma



Enjoying Bhakti

Q & A SESSION: The audience had been given a free reign to come prepared with any question on Jainism and to submit it on arrival. Harshadbhai Sanghrajka answered over a dozen challenging questions in half an hour, including:

- Are eggs vegetarian?
- What kind of clothes should be worn when performing puja?
- Death should be celebrated. Why do we feel so sad?
- Do you need to be reaching Moksha to be called a Jain?
- When you do Pratikraman in English, is it as fruitful as doing it in Gujarati?
- Is there a website where Harshadbhai and Mehoobhai have put Jain teachings?

The answers were insightful, logical, referred to Jain tenets and gave clarification using illustrations. This was a rare opportunity for many to listen to Harshadbhai's lucid style of explanation. He bridged the gap of 2,500 year old Jain teachings and showed their relevance in the 21st Century.



Harshadbhai Sanghrajka responding to questions



Mehoolbhai Sanghrajka summing up

CLOSING REMARKS

Mehoolbhai summed up the afternoon's activities in his unique style. He brought home the fact that one's action had a much wider impact today than in Bhagwan Mahavir's times, with the advances in science, technology and travel. If one is binding karma at every moment of one's life, how frequently should one be practising religion? **Jain dharma was more important today than ever before.**

He thanked the large number of attendees and their participation in all the activities when they could have been outside in the sun! He thanked the OAUK NW and Ekta Centre committee for providing the use of the venue and their great team effort. The catering team which had not surfaced from the

kitchen since 9.30 am, providing food for all volunteers and light refreshments for the participants, deserved a huge applause.

He briefly mentioned that the vision of the recently formed ONE JAIN GROUP (over 30 Jain organisations) to provide a unified voice in the UK to promote the cause of Jainism. He also mentioned upcoming events for the diary which can be found on the IoJ website.

Nirmalbhai Shah, Chairperson of OAUK NW Area, concluded the afternoon. He said one can only remember and learn with continual attendance at these types of programmes. If every attendee could become an advocate of such learning, our children would have a good legacy. It was important to learn our mother tongue which is linked to our culture and faith. He finally reminded all - "not to miss NW Area Paryushan as Harshadbhai Sanghrajka will be there for 8 days"!

To celebrate the 25th year since it was established, and as a memento of the day's events, IoJ presented each family with a set of children's Jain study books; Discover Jainism and Jain Tales.



Nirmalbhai urging for legacy of Jain Dharma