

Ahimsa Award 2023 IOJ Citation: Dr JASVANT N MODI

Jai Jinendra

My Lords, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ahimsa Award is presented annually by the Institute of Jainology to honour individuals dedicated to living and advocating the principles of non-violence and compassion.

With great honour, we announce the esteemed recipient of the

Ahimsa Award 2023 is Dr. Jasvant Modi.

Jaswantbhai is a compassionate humanitarian, community leader, philanthropist and visionary.

Born in Godhra, Gujarat, he grew up in a large family with modest means, struggling with the challenges that brings.

Determined to rise from his adversity and supported by family, friends, and the generosity of others, he was fortunate to obtain a scholarship to study medicine.

Jainism has always been central to his beliefs and way of life.

Through his parents, his early family life was steeped in the traditions and practices of Jainism.

During his college years, he found food and boarding at the Shri Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya- a charitable hostel run along Jain principles.

These experiences shaped his outlook on life.

As a young doctor in 1975, he found his way to the United States to further his medical education.

In 1983, he embarked on an illustrious career as a gastroenterologist in Los Angeles, helping countless people with health issues.

Later, alongside his wife Meeraben, who is also a physician, they established their own hospital, and in 2004, the couple acquired and developed a group of nursing homes.

He retired from practising medicine in 2014 to devote more time to philanthropy and charitable work through his Charitable Foundation.

His myriad of achievements and contributions include service to the Jain community, supporting charities in the US and India, and promoting Jain studies in higher education.

He was instrumental in helping to build the first Jain temple in Los Angeles. He served as President of the Jain Centre of Southern California and is a board member today.

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Driven by a deep compassion for all animals, he played a pivotal role in helping the Jain Centre go vegan in 2018.

During the COVID pandemic, he worked with JAINA to raise over \$2m to provide financial support to those who needed it and purchase oxygen plants for several hospitals in rural India.

He has served as a director of JAINA for over eight years.

He has supported many other charitable trusts, including Pratham, an education charity and AkshayPatra - where he was the LA Chapter chairman and helped set up kitchens in Gujarat, serving over 5,000 meals daily to school children.

In connection with his personal journey, he has supported a number of Jain charitable hostels in Gujarat - providing funds, land and buildings, serving hundreds of young people.

There are many more examples of his excellent work in India and the US.

One of the unique and remarkable aspects of Jasvantbhai's philanthropy is his unprecedented push to establish Jain studies at leading Universities in the US and worldwide.

Jasvantbhai strongly advocates for the principles of non-violence, open-mindedness, and non-possessiveness, three revered tenets at the core of Jain thought and practice.

He regards these principles not just as philosophical ideals but as foundational pillars that underpin a democratic society characterised by peace, tolerance, and harmony.

His vision is to bring the profound depths of Jain philosophy to the wider world through academia.

He sees two significant outcomes:

Firstly, a better appreciation of the universal messages in all major religions, resulting in greater respect and tolerance of diverse belief systems.

Secondly, the scholars and students nurtured through this initiative will be able to integrate these principles not only into their personal lives but also into their professional work to solve real problems in the world.

Driven by this vision, Jasvantbhai and Meeraben, together with their coalition of like-minded friends, have orchestrated the endowment of over 30 chairs in various esteemed academic institutions in the US and globally. He has committed over \$13m to this cause.

This includes the Dharmanath Endowed Chair in Jain Studies at the University of Birmingham in the UK, which launched this September.

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The programme covers various topics, including Jainism, peace and conflict resolution, environmental ethics, ecology and animal rights.

Jasvantbhai is a role model for living a life of meaning and purpose. He exemplifies the spirit of hard work, ethical living, and the joy of giving.

He finds his happiness in the progress of others. He feels compassion and acts to alleviate suffering in the present and has the vision and capacity to create long-term and long-lasting change for a better world.

Andrew Carnegie, in his essay on wealth, writes:

“...the best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.”

Jasvantbhai not only climbed these ladders but has dedicated his life to extending them to countless others.

The directors of the Institute of Jainology are honoured to present the Ahimsa Award to Dr Jasvant Modi, in London, at the Houses of Parliament.

By Kumar Mehta – IOJ Director