

Ahimsa Award - IOJ

By Jasvant Modi

Jai Jinendra! Your honored Baroness Scott of Bybrook, Minister of Faith, Board of Trustees, Members of the Institute of Jainology and all my Spiritual Friends,

I am deeply honored today to receive this International Ahimsa Award. I feel humbled and seriously moved that you should give this significant award to someone like me to be measured up to your list of previous recipients. But, I believe this distinction is a recognition of the true values of altruism for *Dharma Prabhavna* - by which to inspire compassion, universal friendship to all living beings with amity and appreciation in the pursuit of knowledge to evolve our inner qualities to promote Peace which is a true paragon of this award.

I accept this award with heartfelt gratitude on behalf of my family who are all present today, of whom I'm so proud (which they don't know) as they have consistently helped me to stay vigilant of true Jain Values. I undertake this award as a tribute to my Alma Mater Shri Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya (SMJV in short) and its founder Acharya Shri Vijay Vallabhsurishwerji Maharajsaheb, who worked relentlessly for the welfare and education of the Jain Community to eradicate poverty during India's post independence years by building boarding hostels for need based Jains for higher education. Yes! If it hadn't been for SMJV, I wouldn't have had the means to complete my medical school for which

I'm truly grateful. I've just realized now that as an alumni from SMJV, we were the organic seed bank raised with stringent Jain Principles so that we could uphold the pious flag across the oceans, untrodden by Jain Sadhus and Sadhvis to help spread Jain Values around the globe.

Now, I'm just paying it forward by endowing it into *Gyan Mandirs* or temples of knowledge. People have asked me why I give to the Universities? I say, "That's where the current leaders are nurtured. Wars don't start with weapons right away, according to our omniscient *Tirthankars* it starts with a continuous thought process caused by anger, ego, deceit and greed due to our attachment and aversion. If we can nourish true Jain values into the roots and handover the key to the wealth of wisdom on metaphysics for which India was invaded several times, then World Peace Prevails".

Fifty years ago, it was an unsettling thought to know that Jain Dharma was a lesser known religion within the mainstream of religions, especially when we know that Mahavir and Buddha were around during the same era and region in India while one is illustrious and the other unknown. Most of us get conceited with the thought that Jain Dharma is so regressive therefore it stays stagnant. But in true reality our Omniscient Tirthankars were such progressive thinkers that, when they established the *Sangha* or the congregation, they laid down the foundation with the four pillars of equal responsibilities for Jain *Sadhu*, *Sadhvi*, *Shravak* (or layman) and *Shravika* (or laywoman) YES! YES! Women Empowerment in recent times but Mahavir called it Equanimity to all living beings and laid it down 2600 years ago. Now just think! How

egalitarian is that? What I've been doing over the years, is my duty as a Jain *Shravak* (or Disciple); and to be starlighted for that service really touches my heart.

I've been bestowed with Blessings from my parents, our *Dev Gurus, Acharyas and Tirthankars*, for their teachings of *Ahimsa* (or non-violence), *Anekantvad* (or multiplicity of viewpoints) and *Aparigraha* (or Non-Possessiveness). These principles are also core values of democracy and have remained my guiding light and therefore I want our *Tirthankars'* names to be highlighted on the University Jain Chairs to further propel Universal Peace through Jain principles of Tolerance and Love for all Living beings.

The Current list of Jain Education programs made available:

11 Endowed Department Chairs

10 Endowed Professorships

3 Jain Studies Program at University of Birmingham, U.K.

8 Post - Doctoral Fellowships

8 Lectureships, Adjunct Professorships and annual lectures

12 Scholars doing Ph.Ds now in USA alone, 5 are financially supported

15 More Universities are offering regular classes in Jainism funded by Jain Community in the USA and Canada (Class sizes vary according to the universities, curriculum subjects majors and minors etc)

9 Trained scholars in Prakrit

9 Year-long fully paid scholarships to study Prakrit in India in last 4 years

- Patrick Klugers's book translation has started from German to English is due in 6 months
- Arihant Institute; an online Jain University in making
- Ghent University in Belgium
- Jain Studies in Brazil are being offered right now
- University of Turin, Italy - Research Program to start in January 2024
- Lectureship program at University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, SA
- Currently in negotiations with University of Nairobi
- More Universities are under consideration in the East African countries, Ethiopia, USA, Korea, Berlin and India
- Jain Study Center and Chairs established at Banaras Hindu University and Deccan College in Pune started first of its kind in Jain Archaeology
- Good progress in Jain Studies in Pakistan (@ 2 Universities) and in Philippines
- A High tech Conference and Research Center Complex with the Library for Ancient manuscripts and literature is being built in Gujarat with a complete housing facility for separate living quarters for Jain Sadhus, Sadhvis and scholars.

Over the years of my medical practice as a gastroenterologist and in health business, I've seen many young and terminal patients due to their non-vegetarian diet and unhealthy food habits. But recently, we have noticed the rise of untimely deaths amongst Jains, especially teenagers suffering from cardiac arrests, IBD which includes

Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn's disease. It makes you really wonder, especially if they are on a vegetarian diet then what's their trigger factor?

So in 2014 I started doing some research on health issues and universal food habit changes. I realized dairy consumption has increased tremendously and so has the cruelty in the dairy industry to meet those current demands. So out of compassion I experimented becoming a Vegan myself by adding a few exercise regimen, and trust me I lost 42 pounds in less than 4 years and felt totally energized. Not only that I got rid of most of my allergies, I never knew until then that dairy products never suited my body type.

Allopathy is now recently admitting that "we are what we eat" while Ayurveda had propagated it a long time ago. It takes it even further, as per how our instincts are aroused with *Tamas* and *Rajas* foods, which leads our mind to behave accordingly.

Have you ever thought that Peace can be served on the table? So in 2018 when I became the President of Jain Center of Southern California the first priority on my agenda was to make our Center the first Jain Vegan Center especially if **Ahimsa** is the foremost Jain tenet; which was accepted by the majority of the committee members.

Maitribhav or universal love towards **all living beings** should be now Ahimsa in Action. We cannot turn a blind eye to the cruelty involved in dairy farming anymore. Instead we at the institutional level, should be proactively involved in changing our own harmful habits by serving only plant based meals. We should start from top down by uniting all

vegetarian centers including Jain Centers, Hindu temples and even Gurudwaras in taking this first step in becoming plant based and in due course set an example of overturning the current environmental issues. Gandhiji once said “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

We as Jains are raised to practice and contribute to **Jivdaya** for the protection of the voiceless. Jains have always been proactive about **Abhay Daan** or animal protection. That's the most compassionate philanthropy which can be scaled down by simply not consuming dairy, but the Karma rewards are exponential because you become the protector of not just the animals but also the environment and this whole Universe.

I personally came over here not just to accept the award and showcase it on my mantle, but to convince you all and the members of the Jain Centers to promote their centers to become plant-based centers otherwise my trip here is futile. By accepting this Award I can now say with conviction, let's shed light on compassion which doesn't require any monetary funds but this **mindful act of awareness is our Ahimsa**, to leave this world a better place than what we found by making mindful healthy changes which will help the flora and fauna find its balance and Covid and wildfires will take rest as our Tirthanakars had propagated परस्परपग्रहो जीवनाम् - *parasparopagraho jivanam*, meaning All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence.

Now the seeds of education are being sown in the Temples of Education and as the trees of knowledge are growing, let's make that an orchard of fruit trees by investing in more educational institutions and let the world taste the ambrosia from the trees of Compassion, Equanimity and universal Friendship which are truly Jain Moral values practiced by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and several others proven triumphant even in these modern times.

This is truly a Lifetime Achievement Award for Non-Violence which I'd never expected in my wildest dreams. I'm truly Thankful to the Institute of Jainology to consider me worthy of it and let me share this platform for issues which are dear to me. So let's proclaim the UK's Jain centers to be Plant based Centers. Do you Agree?

Thank you! Jai Jinendra!