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Vanik Voice

The National Council Of Vanik Associations



**LIVE AND HELP
TO LIVE**

Special Edition ~ Ahimsa Awards

Issue 12 ~ October 2007

This newsletter has been created especially to celebrate the event which took place on Monday 8th October 2007. the Ahimsa Awards.

The issue begins with an introduction to the event. Thereafter the newsletter features details of the speeches that a few of the guests gave.

Ahimsa Awards

**At the House of Commons -
Portcullis House
LONDON
Monday 8th October 2007**

In the presence of respected Jain Samanijis, the Chief Guest, Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, Members of the House and guests, the Institute of Jainology celebrated the fifth annual Ahimsa Day at the House of Commons. The event this year became much more significant as two months earlier, the United Nations had declared 2nd October, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, as the International Ahimsa Day giving the day a formal recognition.

The event began with a recitation of the most important Jain prayer, the Namokar Mantra. Sung in the original Prakrit with English translations by the Samanijis themselves, this was an auspicious, calming way to commence the evening.

However, before any of the presentations or speeches began, the Institute of Jainology and guests paid their respects to the recently departed, Dr. L. M. Singhvi – erstwhile Indian High Commissioner, and an active participant in the Institute's work.

Mr. Jaysukh Mehta, a Trustee of the Institute and co-ordinator of the programme then formally welcomed all the guests on behalf of the Chairman Mr R P Chandaria. He reiterated how the virtue of Ahimsa had been cast by an eminent Jain, Shrimad Rajchandra on Mahatma Gandhi's mind. He then outlined the Institute's recent activities, especially the strides they are making in not only preserving Jainism (through cataloguing, for example), but also sharing this knowledge through educational programmes.

http://www.jainology.org/viewindex.asp?article_id=News%5FAhimsa2007

The NCVA committee at your service

At the Biannual General meeting of The National Council of Vanik Associations(UK) on 12 August 2007, the following were elected on the Executive Committee.

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Executive Committee Members

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Bharat Parekh
Dr Natubhai Shah
Vijay Sheth
Saroj Varia
Bharat Varia
Jayman Mehta

Groups Established by NCVA

Vanik Professional Group

Vanik Business Group

Are the faiths more similar than they are different?

The oneness of the "human family".

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the law and the prophets. (Christianity Matthew 7:12-jesus Christ)

This is the sum of duty:

Do not do to the others what would cause pain to you. (Hinduism-Mahabharata 15:1517)

Treat not others in way that you yourself would find hurtful. (Buddhism-Udana-Vargha 15.18)

One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated. (Jainism-Sutrakrutanga-Bhagvan Mahavir)

Don't create enmity with any one as god is within everyone. (Sikhism-Guru Arjan Devji 259, Guru Granth Sahib)

Regard your neighbour 's gains as your gain and your neighbour 's loss as your loss. Taoism-T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213-218)

One would which sums up the basis of all good conduct...loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. (Confucianism-analects 15.23-confucius)

What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the whole Torah: all the rest is commentary. (Judaism-Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to your self. (Soroastrianism-Shayast-Na-Shayast 13.29)

Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for others what you wish for your self. (Islam-Hadith-Prophet-Muhammad)

Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would desire for your self. (Bahai-Prophet-Bahauallah)

Any comments- suggestion welcome.

Jyotindra N doshi trustee, inter faith chair (Jain society Chicago) speaker-international
(" ahimsa " "peace" non violence")

Ahimsa Day – a celebration of non-violence, 8th October 2007

I stand before you today, as President and a representative of the Dawoodi Bohra London congregation, in a country that respects freedom of religious beliefs and before a world where we have to live to practice different faiths.

I am deeply honoured and humbled to be asked by the Institute of Jainology to speak at this multi faith event on the philosophy of “Ahimsa” or “non-violence”.

It is a testimony that we are all united in our desire to respect and share the various aspects of “non-violence” as depicted in the various faiths.

The Meaning of Islam – A Message of Peace

The faith of Dawoodi Bohras is ISLAM and the word Islam is derived from the word “Salaam” meaning “Peace”, and therefore the main Islamic doctrine is to establish peace on Planet Earth. That is why in Islam the greeting is “A salaamun Alaykum” meaning “Peace be upon you”. Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) was sent on a mission to deliver the message of Islam. It was his divine duty to preach towards the truth, love for humanity and bring out awareness of forbidden actions in order to establish the best virtues amongst the people.

Islam and Loyalty

Ironically, the Prophet first established the message of Islam in the neighbouring country Ethiopia, ruled by a Christian King Hamid Najashi who had a benevolent outlook towards humanity, because when the Prophet first conveyed the message of Islam to the people of Mecca, they all stood against him and issued death threats.

Mecca at the time was a thriving and a prosperous commercial centre of great significance where elite nomadic clans gathered annually. It was used as a playground to celebrate with pompous displays and pageantry ceremonies. The stance adopted by the community of Mecca was obvious because the message of the Prophet had conflicting interest against the life style and social evils, where hatred was rife.

It also posed a great dilemma for the Prophet because at the time he was living in Mecca. In order to overcome the resistance to Islam, it meant acting against one of the momentous teachings of Islam “Hubbul Watan – e – Minal Emaan” – that love for your land of domicile is an important part of the faith.

The Prophet, therefore left Mecca and set-up domicile in the neighbouring town of Medina from where he led the mission to spread Islam, thus making a clear distinction of identifying the enemy.

Islam and the Individual

Once when returning from a major victory, the Prophet said to his people “that there is still a bigger battle to win”. When asked with whom, he replied, “That with oneself. The evil in you, which leads you to sinful acts and deeds”. In other words, the message Islam gives is to fight one’s own self (*jihad*), the self who tempts him towards the bad and evil conducts.

For a Dawoodi Bohra, faith is the essence of life as it gives so many attributes that build both character and soul. Life is full of good and bad temptations, and faith gives the discipline, guidance and directions to lead a balanced and purposeful life.

Islam and Respect towards all creation

The love and respect for nature is also strongly manifested within the Islamic doctrines.

A true Muslim is he who can assure the security and peace NOT only to the people, but also to entire creation of God, which is embodied in the following simple far reaching examples: -

1. A thirsty dog approached a woman passing a watering-well. She tied a slipper to her scarf and drew water from the well to quench its thirst. The Prophet on observing the good act blessed the woman and said, “She will go to Paradise”. On the other hand, a cat was kept unfed and denied freedom to hunt for food by the owner, and died. The Prophet said, “It was worthy of going to Hell”.

Islam also prohibits causing or inflicting undue killing or suffering. For example, a Horse if used for transport or to carry a load, should be subjected to the duty for the least possible time.

Wasting time talking unnecessarily whilst mounted or loaded, would be considered a sinful act as it would prolong the job,

and hence the suffering.

A Need for Humanity to Concentrate Less on Divisions

Finally, I strongly believe that in our quest for peace all faiths are united, not only in our desire to respect each other but equally important in our need to do so in a multi faith world of today.

We need to reinforce it further with unequivocal code of acceptance for communities to co-exist with less emphasis on who belonged to what race, creed or religion.

We should move away from the practices whereby, in whatever field or areas of co-existence, right from birth one is subjected or made blatantly aware of what class, creed, religion or race they belong to.

Such constant highlighting of differences between communities has at times been brought about deliberately for a political agenda or individual motives. In the process it has helped create an environment to weaken the bond for a peaceful co-existence.

Our vision and aims have to go far beyond and we need to understand, address and resist such subtle daily pressures before it takes a deeper stranglehold and divides communities further.

Thank you.

Dr Idris Zainuddin,
President

Bringing the issue home: Ahimsa from a youth perspective

Jainism as an ancient wisdom has enormous potential to heal our ailing world. A world where materialism, racism, violence and terrorism threaten to divide us all. This is where principles like ahimsa, the idea of non-violence and reverence for all living beings, becomes so relevant. At the heart of jainism lies tolerance, acceptance and appreciation. And this includes recognising and respecting differences. This is increasingly important in our world as glaring differences threaten to divide our society and create destruction through the use of violence.

Globally we could talk about the crisis in Burma; the ongoing conflict of Israel and Palestine; I could go on, but let me tell you about a disturbing truth a little closer to home.

In the first six months of 2007, 15 teenagers died from stabbings and shootings in the capital. Many simply a case of kids being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Newspapers carried stories about gangs of armed youths, some barely into their teens, who dealt drugs, and wore their ASBOs with pride. When they weren't terrorising commuters, they were busy waging war on one another with knives, guns and CS gas. This is a grim picture, but sadly tells a very real story that is facing our youth in London today.

The media is very quick to cordon off this group of society as a bunch of "hoodies set out to terrorise people", presenting them with nothing but bleak futures. Sadly, this generation is likely to believe them. In response, they turn to groups where they feel they belong, spiralling them further into gang crime and situations, that eventually they see very little way out of. Instead, the media should use its power responsibly to seek ways to inspire these children; presenting a way out, that is accessible - EVEN to them.

It's society's collective responsibility to provide realistic role models instead of drug dealers. We need to provide examples of people who have moved forward successfully and happily without violence, showing respect for those around them. It's become much easier for kids to live in a world of sensation, for them to think you're a big man if you run round with a gun, rather than actually do the hard work to function as an adult.

Absent parents can also play a significant role here, without parents to look up to, often these kids have no one to admire, seek guidance from, and trust. This is when kids become most susceptible to what they are surrounded by and exposed to.

Interestingly, periodic waves of teenage violence are not exactly new. A recent study showed that during WWI and WWII, Britain experienced surges in juvenile delinquency. The author of this study claimed that - "People forget we are at war because it's so far away. But it makes a difference. If the top people in the society are saying using force

to get what you want is right, the message trickles down. Teenagers pick up very strongly on the messages society is giving them. The message today is that you sort problems out by steaming in using maximum firepower." This is perhaps where our country can follow the example of ahimsa advocates Mahatma Gandhi, Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela.

On a positive note, our government has launched a series of initiatives to tackle the causes of teenage crime, including self esteem-building initiatives, as well as the focused police activity like Operation Trident and Operation Curb.

Nevertheless it is clear that the Government can't solve this problem alone.

It is OUR collective responsibility.

We need to work in unison to start being role models ourselves; parents should set a positive example for their children and present this generation with the prospect of an exciting future that does not centre around violence.

As a voice for the younger generation, I think i can say collectively that we want to be optimistic about our future and the future of our children and our children's children. To me, the principle of ahimsa is instrumental in this, regardless of whether you are from a Jain background or not. Ahimsa is fundamentally a call to action to make the world a more peaceful place; and where better place to begin, than at home?

Heta Shah

Ahimsa Awards

Hinduism is the answer to a question. That question is how can mankind attain the happiness it seeks?

Take a moment to analyse your actions: is it not true to say that every action we partake in is either in the pursuit of happiness or the rejection of sorrow? Every duty, every desire, every belief, every relationship is cultivated for this one goal – we all want to be happy.

Hinduism is an integrated system of living designed to provide every human being with the happiness they seek. And it is underpinned by 3 fundamental values: the 3 pillars of Hinduism. These are:

Sattvam: Truth

Brahmacharya: Curbing excessive indulgences

Ahimsa: doing the least amount of harm possible in any given situation

Ahimsa, within the context of Hinduism, has this very specific meaning. Let's explore this a little. Why would the practice of Ahimsa (doing the least amount of harm in any given situation), make us happy?

Well let's look at the nature of happiness. When are we most happy? When do we, if even for a brief moment, feel completely fulfilled and content?

It is when we love.

Think about a time in your life when you were the most happy, when you feel a sense of peace. Is it not when you felt an overwhelming sense of love for another.

But what it is to love someone? It is to feel a connection with them. To feel one with them. Think about the love a mother has for her child. Is there any personal gain that she would place over the benefit of her child? The child's joy is her joy. The child's pain is her pain. Her love is an expression of her sense of oneness with her child.

So our entire lives are spent in the pursuit of happiness and the greatest sense of happiness is felt when we feel a sense of oneness with another. In its highest form, we call this love – but this sense of oneness can be cultivated with all things.

And if we cultivate this feeling of connection to all living creatures, not just our friends and family but with our neighbours, our fellow citizens, even the earth itself and her creatures, we open ourselves up to greater realms of happiness.

How can we cultivate this connection with all living things? It is through the practice of Ahimsa.

Ahimsa does not state 'do no harm' – this is not possible. Every decision we take will cause harm to someone or something. Every step that I take I kill microscopic bacteria. Every political decision disenfranchises one group at the expense of another

So Ahimsa cannot accurately be described as non-injury or non-violence. Ahimsa is doing the least amount of harm possible.

If before I make a decision, I should ask myself, is this the path of least harm? Is this negative thought necessary? Is this harsh word essential? Is this destructive action required? Sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes our words have to be strong. Sometimes our actions have to be violent.

But if we ask ourselves: do I have to throw this piece of litter on the floor? Do I have to step on this insect? Do I have to lose my temper at my co-worker? Do I have to gossip about my neighbour? Do I, or does my country have to resort to violent means to resolve conflict? Is this decision doing the least amount of harm possible in this situation? If it is, then the decision will connect me with others. If it is not, then it will divide us. And happiness is to be found when we connect with each other.

Ahimsa is a fundamental value of Hinduism because it guides our decision-making process.

What currently guides our decisions? Short-term gain, immediate pleasure, short-term-profit. I make my decisions based on what feels good; on what I want to do; on what I feel like doing.

This way of living divides us. I want it one way, you want it another – and we conflict.

What we are seeking is happiness. We feel happiest when we feel that connected with each other, the ultimate of expression of which is unconditional love. But we live our life separating ourselves from one another.

I don't like you because I disagree with your beliefs. You are wrong, I am right

We believe happiness lies in imposing our likes and dislikes on others. But it is not. Our happiness is revealed when we see the connection that exists between all of us. When we stop seeing difference and instead see Oneness.

So let my thoughts, words and deeds be an expression of Ahimsa.

If something is weaker than me, let me protect it. If someone needs my help, let me help them.

If I live a life, then I increase my feeling of connectedness to all things.

By harming those around us, be it by thought word or deed, we are reaffirming that they are separate to us, that we don't care about them.

If instead we show love and kindness to all things, if I care for my fellow man, care for this Earth and her creatures, I feel connected to them.

And the truest definition of love is when you feel one with another: their pain is your pain and their joy is your joy.

The practice of Ahimsa is love made visible: and whether we are Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or any of the above, it is love that unites us all.

Milan Samani, Chinmaya Mission UK

Ahimsa wards

The below is the Ahimsa Award acceptance Message from His Holiness the Dalai Lama read by his London Office of Tibet-based Representative Tsering Tashi on 8 October 2007 at the IOJ Ahimsa Day function that took place in the House of Commons. The Chief Guest Rt Hon Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, presented the award received on behalf of His Holiness by Mr. Tashi:

Trustees of the Institute of Jainology, Honorable Members of Parliament, leaders of inter-faith organizations, brothers and sisters;

I would like you to know that I feel honoured by the Institute of Jainology's decision to present me their Ahimsa award today. I am also pleased to learn that this day is being marked in the House of Commons in London as a day of non-violence or *ahimsa*. Many of you know that the ancient idea of *ahimsa*, propounded by many great Indian teachers in the past, was most effectively put into practice in modern times by my mentor Mahatma Gandhi when India was struggling for freedom and independence.

I believe that more and more people around the world, including many Chinese, are coming to a better understanding of and support for the just cause of Tibet because we too have placed our faith in the practice of *ahimsa* or non-violence. This strong moral support is a source of hope not only for us Tibetans, but also for all oppressed peoples. When I meet people in different parts of the world, I am always reminded that as human beings we are all basically the same. The fact that we wear different clothes, have different coloured skin, or speak different languages only differentiates us on the surface. Our basic humanity is what binds us to each other and is what makes it possible for us to understand each other and develop feelings of closeness and friendship.

The realization that we are all basically the same human beings, who seek happiness and do not want suffering, is very helpful in developing a sense of a warm feeling of love and compassion for others. It is also essential if we are to survive in this ever-shrinking world we live in. Otherwise, if we each selfishly pursue only what we believe to be in our own interest, without caring about the needs of others, we may end up not only harming others, but also ourselves. For example, if we continue to damage the earth or pollute the air and oceans in order to achieve some short-term benefit, we will destroy the very basis for our own lives.

Taking a non-violent, peaceful stance is to put compassion and love into action. What is important, if we are to encourage such an approach, is that right from the beginning we should bring our children up in the certainty that non-violence and dialogue are the best ways to solve any problem - be they in our family or our community, or of a national or international concern. Usually, when faced with conflict or disagreement, our first instinct is to use force. I think that is a mistake. Whenever we face disagreement or conflict ourselves, or observe such tension between others, we should try to find a solution that depends on dialogue and non-violence. This is the only appropriate way to ensure lasting solutions to our problems. If we resort to violence, we are bound to set in train events that will ultimately lead to more violence. On the other hand, problems resolved through non-violence and dialogue have no negative side effects, but instead ensure global peace, harmony and the survival of our human race.

In this context, religion and faith can indeed make a valuable contribution. I am convinced that every major religion or faith in the world is intent on helping its followers become better human beings by putting non-violence, love and compassion into practice. It is therefore much more helpful if relations between communities of one faith and another, or even none, focus on the precepts we share that give rise to goodness rather than argue about minor differences or approach. Therefore, wherever efforts are being made to foster better understanding among religions, they have my enthusiastic support.

I may be a Buddhist monk, for example, but as a simple human being I am more concerned about how my Buddhist heritage may contribute to a wider human happiness. I certainly do not advocate the propagation of one religion at the expense of others, nor do I seek a new unified world religion. Because of the different aptitudes and dispositions of our minds, as human beings we need different approaches to peace and happiness. This is why our different religious traditions should be not grounds for antagonism, but a source of human enrichment.

I deeply regret that I shall be unable to join you personally today, but assure you that my thoughts and prayers are with you. As I write this message rapidly changing events in Burma are giving us a vivid reminder of the courage and fortitude required to conduct ourselves in a non-violent and peaceful way, especially in the face of brutality. I offer my own heartfelt support to the peaceful movement for freedom and democracy in Burma and take this opportunity to appeal to other freedom-loving people all over the world to support such non-violent movements wherever

they occur.

The Dalai Lama
September 29, 2007
(Dharamsala/India)

<http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=18158&article=First+IOJ+Ahimsa+Award+given+to+the+Dalai+Lama+and+Nelson+Mandela&t=1&c=1>

Ahimsa Day in the Palace of Westminster.

October 8th. was a date that I had been looking forward to with the keenest sense of anticipation for it marked another Ahimsa Day at Westminster.

In the years that the Institute of Jainology have been arranging for this wonderfully calming and spiritual occasion I, and many of my colleagues, have come to treasure Ahimsa Day and to draw sustenance from it.

This year I was able to bring my experience of the previous week when I had found myself in Union Square, New York where the statue of the Mahatma Gandhi had been garlanded on the anniversary of his birth and where I had experienced another of the Ahimsa Miracles.

New York City is a temple of materialism whose veins are flooded with dollars and where the spiritual dimension to life is more often noted by its absence. On this occasion the roar of the traffic seemed to diminish and the constant manic rush of the people seemed to slow to a more measured pace.

The UN had recognised Ahimsa day but, for me, the quiet and introspective ceremony of the garlanding and calm reflection was the most memorable aspect of the day.

Walking away from Union Square was to re-enter a world of brutal commercialism and I bore away the memory of Ahimsa in New York as if it were the delicate fluttering flame of an oil lamp that I held within myself.

The illumination would last me until London and sustain me on the long journey – as it sustains many of us on the longest journey of all. Between New York and Westminster came the desperately sad news of the passing on of that great Jain diplomat and politician Dr.L.M.Singvi.

For me he encompassed the Jain strengths of peace, passion, poetry and practicality. I will never forget meeting the then High Commissioner at India House and his advice is followed by my colleagues and I who make up the Labour Friends of India to this day. I will never forget the ties that he handed out or the busts of Gandhi that he delighted in placing everywhere he could – even in Shakespeare's house!

His writing on the constitution was – and is – unequalled. His great lecture on "Dharma and Development" resonates still with all of us who heard or read it. And so to Ahimsa Day in the Palace of Westminster with the image of Union Square and the memories of Dr.Singvi in my mind.

Just to enter the Attlee Suite was to realise that people can physically alter and affect the atmosphere around them. Here amidst the chaos of a Western legislature was an ancient truth and the emotions of compassion, humility, karma, spirituality and ahimsa.

To be there was to be refreshed. To be there was to be privileged and to be there was to be enlightened. My well word copy of Jagdish Prasad Jain "Sadhak" – Fundamentals of Jainism – is on my desk as I write this but the blessings that my encounters with the Jain community have given me will always be carried in my heart.

I thank you all for your example and for your proof that there is a better way for the world to live..

Steve Pound MP