



## Proceedings of “Ahimsa Day: 2012” Claremont Lincoln University

### Introduction by Matthew Fisher

Ph.D. student, Claremont Graduate University and Coordinator for Ahimsa Day 2012

On Oct. 2nd of every year, people around the world gather to celebrate World Peace Day with the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. Because the notion of *Ahimsa* (the Jain metaphysical doctrine of non-violence in thought, word, and deed) was a central component to Gandhi's non-violent perspective toward civil disobedience, the Jain Studies Program at Claremont Lincoln University ([jain.claremontlincoln.org](http://jain.claremontlincoln.org)), along with our partners at the Federation of Jain Associations in North America ([jaina.org](http://jaina.org)), and the Jain Center of Southern California ([jaincenter.net](http://jaincenter.net)), held the first annual *Ahimsa Day*. The theme of *Ahimsa Day* 2012 was: "Transformed Through Non-violence." The day's events included a theatrical production from CLU students recalling their experiences studying *Ahimsa* and

Jainism in India, as well as an interfaith chapel service organized by a rabbinical student and one of our Jain partners from the Jain Center in Buena Park, CA.

But the highlight of the day was the interfaith panel discussion on reconciliation and forgiveness. Seven scholars from different world religious traditions, and one from a western intellectual tradition, were asked to provide a five minute reflection on the question: what does forgiveness and reconciliation mean to you in light of your particular religious/philosophical perspective? And so it gives me great pleasure to share the reflections from the voices of Jainism, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Secular Humanism. More importantly, I hope the reflections are illuminative for the reader as she ponders this question for herself, for if there is one thing that we need in our world of globalized interaction between cultures, it is a willingness to forgive and reconcile misunderstandings when one is offended by another in order to mitigate violence around the world and build lasting peace.

**Prof. Keshav Patel**

President of Param Shakti Peeth of America and organizer of Ahimsa Day & International World Peace Day since 2009.

**“Non-violence as a World-force: The Essence of Non-violence”**

Non-violence requires a double faith: faith in God and also faith in man. Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed. It is the quality of our work which will please God and not the quantity. Religion is more than life. Remember that his own religion is the truest to every man, even if it stands low in the scales of philosophical comparison. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. A weak man is just by accident. A strong but non-violent man is unjust by accident. It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business. Anger is the enemy of non-violence and pride is a monster that swallows it up. Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit.

If I had no sense of humor, I would long ago have committed suicide. I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another. Man falls from the pursuit of the ideal of plan living and high thinking the moment he wants to multiply his daily wants. Man's happiness really lies in contentment. Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one

derived from fear of punishment. Each one prays to God according to his own light. Do I do all the evil I can before I learn to shun it? Is it not enough to know the evil to shun it? If not, we should be sincere enough to admit that we love evil too well to give it up. An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.

A man is but the product of his thoughts: what he thinks, he becomes. A 'No' uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a 'Yes' merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble. You must be the change you wish to see in the world. Where there is love there is life. You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty. Before the throne of the Almighty, man will be judged not by his acts but by his intentions.

For God alone reads our hearts. Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony. Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth. The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening. Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow men. Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever. A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people. Always aim at complete harmony of thought and word and deed. Always aim at purifying your thoughts and everything will be well. Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles, but today it means getting along with people. All the religions of the world, while they

may differ in other respects, unitedly proclaim that nothing lives in this world but Truth. In a gentle way, you can shake the world. Truth is by nature self-evident.

### **Dr. Deepak Shimkhada**

Adjunct Professor, School of Hindu Studies, CLU. Published author of countless journal papers and several edited books, Dr. Shimkhada taught courses on South Asian religions at various colleges and universities in California. Retired from Claremont McKenna College, he currently teaches courses on Hinduism at the newly created School of Hindu Studies at CLU. He is one of the founders of the School.

#### **“My Encounter with Forgiveness”**

One day I came home very upset. I had a quarrel with my best friend. Noticing my state of unhappiness, my mother asked me about the cause of my suffering (*Dukkha*). When I told her that my friend had unjustly forfeited me of my well-deserved turn in the game, she advised me to forgive him. I was 12 years old. It was then that I came to know about the concept of forgiveness. I grudgingly agreed to forgive my friend, and I had to admit that I felt better afterward. Ever since, I have made a conscious effort to forgive whoever wrongs me. So please do not push me into a corner; after all, I am a human being.

Forgiveness in Hinduism is encountered in many stories and contexts. When I read them they comfort me, and they teach me the value of forgiveness. However, reading the stories is one thing, following them is quite another. In the *Ramayana*, when Ravana, the demonic king of Srilanka, abducts Sita, Rama’s wife, Rama and his brother go in search of Sita. When they finally land on the shores of the island of Srilanka, Rama sends a message to Ravana that he is willing to forgive him if he returns Sita without harm. When Ravana rejects Rama’s offer and tries to kill the messenger, Rama has no choice but to go to war. During the battle, Bibhisana, one of Ravana’s brothers, leaves Ravana and sides with Rama. Rama forgives Bibhisana for

being the brother of an enemy, and gladly accepts him as his ally. Anyone who is on the side of Dharma (righteousness) is a friend of Rama because Rama stands for Dharma.

The *Mahabharata* is another *puranic* text where the concept of forgiveness is thoroughly explored. Addressing Dhritarashtra, the blind king, Vidura, Dhritarashtra's half brother and advisor, says: "There is only one defect in forgiving persons, not another; that defect is that people take a forgiving person to be weak. That defect, however, should not be taken into account, for forgiveness is a great power. Forgiveness is a virtue of the weak, and an ornament of the strong. Forgiveness subdues all in this world; what is there that forgiveness cannot achieve? What can a wicked person do unto him who carries the saber of forgiveness in his hand? Fire falling on the grassless ground is extinguished of itself. An unforgiving individual defiles himself with many enormities. Righteousness is the one highest good; and forgiveness is the one supreme peace; knowledge is one supreme contentment; and benevolence, one sole happiness" (*Udyoga Parva, Section XXXIII*).

Again in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a section of the *Mahabharata*, Krishna says that forgiveness is one of the characteristics of one born of a divine state. Before a pooja begins, a Hindu priest often prays before a statue of a god with the following invocation: "O Lord, forgive three sins that are due to my human limitations: Thou art everywhere, but I worship thee here; Thou art without form, but I worship thee in these forms; Thou needest no praise, yet I offer thee these prayers and salutations." Finally, the *Mahabharata* extols: "Forgiveness is virtue; Forgiveness is sacrifice; Forgiveness is the Vedas; Forgiveness is the Shruti [revealed scripture]; He

who knoweth forgiveness is capable of forgiving everything; Forgiveness is Brahma [God]; Forgiveness is truth; Forgiveness is stored ascetic merit; Forgiveness protecteth the ascetic merit of the future; Forgiveness is asceticism; Forgiveness is holiness; And by forgiveness is it that the universe is held together” (*Mahabharata*, Book 3; *Vana Parva*).

The list is longer, but because of the limitation of space, this should suffice.



**Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae, B.Sc., Ed.M.**

Bhikshuni is presently a doctoral student in practical theology at Claremont School of Theology at Claremont Lincoln University, where she is conducting research in formal vajrayana Buddhist meditation practice. She was ordained a novice Buddhist nun in Mysore in 1991, took full-ordination Bhikshuni precepts in 1998 in Bodhgaya, India, and is also a priest in the Buddhist vajrayana tradition (Drukpa Kagyu and Gelug lineages primarily). A summa-cum-laude graduate in physics, she earned her master's degree in education from Harvard University, where she also studied Tibetan language in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies. She taught science and English in India and in Tibet while undertaking contemplative training in vajrayana Buddhism. After teaching Buddhism in Taiwan in the mid-1990's, she founded Mahaprajapati Hermitage in Sagarmartha Mt. Everest National Park in Nepal, where she completed ten years of cloistered, intensive, vajrayana retreat, including two great approaching retreats. Bhikshuni Lozang is also a trained chaplain and certified instructor in relationship education.

**“Reflection on Reconciliation and Forgiveness from Tibetan Buddhism”**

The main purpose of life is to be happy. The causes of lasting happiness are actions that benefit our selves and others. Such actions are the means to gratifying and continuing self-actualization. What prevents or interrupts states of happiness are those actions that cause suffering to ourselves and others. Our spiritual practice is flawless when all of our bodily actions, speech, and thoughts spontaneously and habitually cause only happiness, and do not ever cause harm, without exception. Until that time, it is useful to have methods that transform shortcomings and imperfections into a vehicle for moving forward toward more inner development. Reconciliation practice, known in Buddhism as "purification practice," is one of these methods.

The foundations of purification practice are based on the practical mechanics of reconciliation. First, mistaken behavior is made with respect to a basis. In the case of harsh speech toward a friend, for example, that person who receives it and is

negatively affected by it is the basis. In so far as all mistaken behavior is contrary to our spiritual development, the sources of guidance and inspiration for our spiritual cultivation are also bases for making reparations. Secondly, in order to use our mistaken actions as a vehicle for further inner growth, we have to first recognize them as mistakes, and generate a sense of regret regarding them, without losing sight of compassion for ourselves. In the case of harmful speech to a loved one, for example, how can we expect them to reconcile with us, and forgive our mistaken behavior, if we apologize without any sincere regret?

Thirdly, reconciliation requires some actual action. If I have spoken harmful speech to you, even if I recognize my mistake and cultivate a sense of regret, that is not enough for our relationship to be purified. I need to actually apologize in actual words, perhaps presenting you with a small gift, to show my recognition and regret of my mistaken behavior. Finally, no amount of recognition, regret, or apologetic behavior can effectively help relationships with those wronged, if we just go out and repeat the same mistaken behavior over and over again. Therefore, the final component required for a complete purification process is a solid determination to refrain from repeating the same mistaken behavior again in the future. Here we should be realistic and not delude ourselves with superficial promises. If you do not think you can refrain from the mistaken action forever, then you should plan to refrain from it for whatever length of time you feel realistically capable, be it one year, one month, one week, one day, etc., according to your abilities.

If we can engage these four essential factors sincerely through our purification practice, there is no reason why we cannot feel confident that we are

indeed purified and renewed at the end of it. In this way, purification practice is extremely liberating. There is no need to waste energy going over past shortcomings or engaging in energy-burning guilt trips. We purify ourselves and then move on. Because repetition of behavior is the main way for it to become habitual, purification practice is an effective obstacle you can throw in the way of negative behavior that might otherwise become routine. Another natural side effect is that we also reduce the potential for negative behavior to interrupt cultivation of our positive behaviors.

**Mindie Jo Snyder BFA, MAET, CAGS**

Mindie Jo Snyder is a rabbinic student at the Academy for Jewish Religion California while completing her doctoral dissertation at the European Graduate School in Switzerland. She began working as a program director for Philadelphia Parks and Recreation at the age of 11 and continued to develop arts based programming, integrating mental health treatment and spiritual traditions for people across the life span. In addition, she has served on various governmental committees, trained leaders and nurtured healthy communities across the US and abroad.

**“Reflections on the Jewish Day of Atonement:  
Yom Kippur, 9-10th of Tishri”**

Carefully assembling the brokenness of our lives and opening interior portals that allow for compartments to merge helps move us closer to a state of wholeness, holiness and *Shalom*. While *Shalom* often is identified with “peace” and “peace-making,” it maintains these other definitions about wholeness that are equally as relevant for the topic of forgiveness. Indeed, the integrative, compassionate and hopeful spirit of *Shalom* is animated with vigor throughout the Days of Awe. Gathered in a momentous crescendo and bathed in white, clergy, congregation and *Sefer Toratot* coalesce during the most sacred and solemn twenty-four hours of the Jewish calendar: Yom Kippur. *Shalom* beckons us, in all its dimensions, as fervent prayers are placed before God, all God’s creations and the entire Jewish community. This is Israel’s love song to win God back and the power of this auspicious time resonates throughout the coming year in all we do.

Indeed, it is in the doing that Jews connect with The Source of All Life and all things of this world. It is most important to understand that Judaism, as a religious tradition, is *anchored in behavior*, more so than belief. What we do and how we do what we do, as individuals and as a community, become the measure of our days.

Moreover, our behaviors reflect our humanness and our imperfections. We are not perfect, nor will we ever be perfect in this life. Jewish tradition honors the reality that people make mistakes. When we err or sin (“*het*”), we “miss the mark.” However, we always have the opportunity to correct our missteps, to do better in relationship to each other and to God.

Putting things in context, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is actually accompanied by a string of holidays that begins with the preceding month of *Elul*. During *Elul*, Jews deeply reflect upon the year before and honestly, thoroughly, assess all behaviors and choices. Penitential prayers and poems are introduced during *Selichot*, the bridge between the conclusion of *Elul* and the entry of *Tishri*. This month is the month of *Tishri*. It is said that Heaven and Earth converge, the veil to Great Mystery is lifted and we are closer to The Creator than at any other time. The gates leading to Heaven are flung open, enabling repentance and restoration, and we go through them.

*Tishri* overflows with the High Holidays: *Rosh ha-Shanah*, *Tashlich*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*. This year is 5773 on the Jewish lunar calendar. *Yom Kippur* begins at sundown on the 9th of *Tishri* and concludes at sundown on the 10th. It is a day of self-depravation and fasting (for all who are able), although it is not the only fast day in Judaism. The focus of one’s journey is intensely inward and prayerful.

Embracing the *Yom Kippur* liturgy, we come together to confess our sins against God and each other. We acknowledge Commandments (“*Mitzvot*”) that have been violated and plea to God for forgiveness, with all our heart, mind and soul.

“Adonai Eloheinu-our Lord, our God, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement. Seal us in the Book of Life for a good year, a sweet year, a year of health, happiness and peace.” We know that we have transgressed as we hold onto the hope for redemption.

Understanding that sin is an inevitable part of the human experience, there are two concepts that are always important (and especially so) during the High Holidays or Days of Awe: *Teshuva* and *Tikkun Olam*. We have the ability to return (*Teshuva*) to the divine purity of our soul, through repentance. As we improve our character and behavior, we repair the world (*Tikkun Olam*), which is a central tenant of Judaism. For the Jewish community, the emphasis is on repentance and the weight of change is on the perpetrator to right the wrong. There are five ancient steps to correct misdeeds that may appear quite logical and contemporary: awareness of one’s wrongdoing, admitting the wrong to the offended person, sincerely repenting, vowing never to repeat the offense and, ultimately, not repeating the wrong.

Acts of repentance and forgiveness are intimately connected. Repentance is seen as an obligation that holds both psychological and spiritual depth. Although tremendously important, engaging in sincere repentance does not guarantee forgiveness. In certain situations, the presenting reality can keep the acquisition of forgiveness at bay. Forgiveness, of course, remains most desirable. It fulfills two special purposes: one, symbolic and the other, personal. Most notably, attaining forgiveness enables the wrongdoer to achieve atonement for their actions.

Jews understand that God does not forgive our sins against another until we ask for and receive forgiveness directly from the one(s) we have wronged. There is

no intermediary between the Jew and God, between the Jew and their fellow. There is no process of admonition. In fact, the Jew is required to take all actions toward repairing relationships upon themselves directly, speaking the changes they wish to initiate. From the wrongdoer's mouth to the ears of the offended, and from the offended one's mouth to the ears of the wrongdoer, no barriers exist in the holy business of *Teshuva* and *Tikkun Olam*. In this way, the process of forgiveness is accompanied by a certain courage and intimacy.

These most holy days help us define time to make important changes, and stages of change are built into them. The Gates of Heaven do not close until *Shemini Atzeret (The Eighth Day of Assembly)*, so we have the opportunity during *Sukkot (The Festival of Booths)* to seek and receive forgiveness from those we have harmed. Requesting and receiving forgiveness relegates hurtful incidents to the past, reviving damaged relationships and clearing us of moral debts so we can move into a new year with honor, integrity, majesty and hope.

**Dr. Harvinder Sahota, M.D., FACC, FSCAI**

Dr. Harvinder Sahota is the inventor of the Angioplasty Perfusion Balloon Catheter and he performed the first angioplasties in India, Moscow, Mexico and Ukraine. He is the subject of the biography: "Hero of American Heart" (available in bookstores and online at Amazon and Barnes and Noble).

**"Sikhism and Forgiveness"**

The Sikh religion is the fifth largest religion in the world. It believes in one God. All are equal: rich, poor, man and woman. The Sikh religion says a woman who gives birth to Kings, saints, and leaders can be inferior to these offspring. In my opinion, there is no conflict between the Sikh religion and science. There are references to this in the Sikh Holy book. One of the main prohibitions is smoking. A Sikh is not supposed to smoke. You can say Sikh Gurus knew the harmful medical aspects of smoking. Eating meat is a personal choice. The Sikh religion neither encourages nor discourages eating meat. In Sikh Temples meat is not served because it may contribute to uncleanness.

There are about 900,000 Sikhs in the world: about 40% of the Indian population in the U.S.A., about 75% of the Indian population in Canada, and about 50% of the Indian population in the U.K. There are many in Africa, South America, Singapore, and Malaysia. You can find Sikhs in all aspects of society in these countries. They are doctors, engineers, business people, and elected officials. Recently it was reported that Sikhism is the 3rd fastest growing religion in the U.S.A., after Islam and Buddhism. There are many Americans and Canadians who have adopted the Sikh religion. It is also reported that Sikhism is the 3rd fastest growing religion in the world after Islam and the Baha'i faith. Sikhs are peace loving.



They will only fight in self-defense or in the defense of defenseless. Sikh history is full of such examples.

**Stephanie Varnon-Hughes, M.A., S.T.M.**

Stephanie Varnon-Hughes is a Founding Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* and a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, where she earned her Master's in Church History in 2008 and her S.T.M. in 2009. A schoolteacher, Stephanie received the Most Promising New Teacher of the Year Award of 2005 in St. Louis, Missouri and has taught English and Performing Arts in public schools in St. Louis and the Bronx. She studies at Claremont Lincoln University, focusing on building and piloting a multi-religious curriculum for public secondary school students. She is an accomplished playwright with two plays produced at the St. Louis Repertory Theatre.

**“A Christian Perspective on Forgiveness”**

As a Christian, the importance of forgiveness has been imprinted upon me for two main reasons. First, because of the words of the Lord's Prayer that I have said tens of thousands of times, in locations ranging from gilded chapels in Prague to orphanages in Haiti. Second, because one story with themes of forgiveness marked my heart when I was young, and has continued to challenge me in adulthood. When I was little, I read and re-read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. If you are Christian, and looking for an Adenten discipline, I recommend you to reexamine the Narnia series. As a child, I abhorred Edmund: he was the younger brother, not beautiful like Susan, not sweet and brave like Lucy, not noble like Peter. He is dark, jealous, and mean. He teases his sister, he lies, and he is the first to fall for the White Witch's advances. In fact, his treachery leads his family into harm, and ultimately leads to Aslan's death. I hated Edmund as a child and was sure I was most like Lucy.

Developmental psychologists who study moral development remind us: as adults, we want mercy, but children thirst for *justice*. This is because children have little need of needing mercy. When I was older, and re-reading the story of Edmund, I realized that I sin in hundreds of ways, known and unknown, in things done and

left undone, every day. I am more like Edmund than is comfortable. My fears and insecurities lead me to boast, to fudge the truth, and to betray my Christ just as he did. From *this* perspective, the scene where Aslan walks alone with Edmund brings me to my knees. Neither the reader nor the other characters in the book know what Aslan and Edmund talk about as they walk alone together, but we do know that Aslan has forgiven Edmund. Aslan tells the other children, “There is no need to talk about what is past.”

When I was a child, this seemed so unfair. Now that I know my own sin and brokenness, I understand the power of God’s ability to forgive. The words I’ve said ten thousand times are the words of what we Christians call “The Lord’s Prayer.” In it, we ask God to “forgive us our trespasses, *as we forgive* those who trespass against us.” “As we forgive.” Aye, there’s the rub. Of course God forgives us, but in this prayer, as we model what we believe Jesus himself taught us to say, we are reminded—in the same breath we ask for forgiveness—to remember how we ourselves *participate* in forgiveness towards others. Christianity is a relational religion. I believe we are made to be in relationship with one another. In fact, I believe that humans were so deeply flawed that the distance between me and God was too great, and so God became human, to close the distance and enter into relationship with me. And being part of a relationship—being human is hard. It’s a messy endeavor. In this life, we are flawed, and make so many mistakes. In this life, it is not just forgiveness that I must seek, it is forgiveness that I must seek to extend. And in my practice of forgiving others, I learn more—bit by bit—about how God forgives me.

**Imam Mahmoud Harmoush, M.A.**

Imam Mahmoud Harmoush is the leader of the Muslim Community Center of Murrieta and Temecula Valley (MCC of MTV), Southwest Riverside County, California, USA, and a lecturer at California State University, World Languages Dept. San Bernardino campus. He is one of the founders of multiple organizations including the Murrieta-Temecula Interfaith Council and the Syrian American Council. He is currently pursuing his master's in Islamic Leadership at Claremont Lincoln University.

**“Forgiveness in Islam”**

Muslims believe that God created Adam and Eve and bestowed on them the blessing of intellect and reasoning. However, when they failed the simple test and ate the fruit of the prohibited tree, the Quran tells us that they suffered pain from feeling guilt and shame. However, they regret and repent to God who accepted their repentance and forgave them for their sins. Islamic theology explains to us that in addition to the fact that God uniquely equipped humans with the gift of intellect and reasoning, He also granted humans a unique capability to violate God's orders if he /she wants to. However, he/she will be accountable for his/her decisions and the consequences of them. God's rules were made clear concerning human actions. Our scholars tabulate them in the following five categories:

- A- Mandatory (Fard), must do to fulfill your obligation toward God (prayers)
- B- Recommended (Wajib/mustahab), highly liked and rewarded (extra charity)
- C- Allowed / permissible (Mubah), it is up to the person to do or not (drive the car you like)
- D- Discouraged (Makrooh), it is better not to do (being cheep/stingy)

E- Prohibited/forbidden (Haram), it is a punishable violation (drinking alcohol, killing)

All human actions go under one of the above categories, thus, humans will experience different internal feelings, especially in the case of obedience or disobedience to God's order. Adam's action of disobedience resulted in a feeling of guilt (Zanb-Sine) that burdened his conscious. There was no way to get out of his feeling other than sincere repentance, to stop doing what he did, and to ask God for forgiveness. The Quran told us that Adam did and God accepted his repentance and forgave him. God said: "Then Adam received from his Lord Words. And his Lord pardoned him. Verily, He is the One who forgives, the Most Merciful" (Surah 2:37).

The concept of forgiveness is a central Islamic concept that God explained to us in order that we exercise it in our lives. Forgiveness is carried out on three levels:

- 1- Between the person and God. Failure in following God's rules or disobeying His rules leaves the believer in a state of anguish and pain, however, God forgives the person when he/she acquires the feeling of guilt, shows remorse and repentance, and asks for forgiveness. God said: "Say 'O Ibadi' (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: verily. Allah forgives all sins. Truly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (Surah 39:54).
- 2- The second level is when the person forgives himself/herself after realizing that they have transgressed against themselves by neglecting their duties toward their spirit, their body, and their other duties. Families, friends, and society are included in these duties. The way of forgiveness is by

acknowledging their mistake, asking for forgiveness, returning the rights/property to their right owner, and reversing the course of their actions.

- 3- The third level of forgiveness is between the person and the rest of the world. If you develop the feeling of guilt and regret for damaging nature, animals, or the environment in any way that is not acceptable by normal standards, then you should be accountable for your actions and you should repent by reversing the action and mending the damages.

Authentic reports tell us that Prophet Muhammad asked God for forgiveness more than seventy times while meeting his companions. Forgiveness is one of the attributes of God, and should be the guiding value in our dealings and interactions.

**Kile Jones, M.T.S., S.T.M.**

Kile Jones is a Ph.D. student in Religion at Claremont Lincoln University. He has published articles in *Zygon*, *Free Inquiry*, and *Philosophy Now*, and his academic writing focuses on the possible relationships between unbelieving communities and liberal religious traditions. He is also Editor-in-Chief for *Claremont Journal of Religion*.

**“Forgiveness from a Humanist Perspective”**

I am pretty sure most of us here are familiar with Alexander Pope’s famous saying, “To err is human, to forgive divine.” As a humanist, I think that “to err is human, and to forgive is human.” Humanism, as far as I understand it, promotes forgiveness and reconciliation (when appropriate) without any need for the supernatural, spiritual, or metaphysical. All that we need for forgiveness and reconciliation is empathy, sympathy, reason, and sentiments.

In 2002 the French philosopher Jacques Derrida spoke to university students in South Africa about “pure” or “radical” forgiveness. One young student said at end of his lecture, “Don’t you think it fulfills an ideological function to speak to us, telling us in a sense, we should not ask for forgiveness, because then we ruin ‘pure,’ ‘unconditional’ forgiveness, at the same time you are telling oppressed people they should forgive without expecting repentance?” This statement gets to heart of what we think about forgiveness. Should forgiveness be contingent on repentance and apology? Should one forgive somebody for horrific evils? Are there some evils that should never be forgiven?

As a humanist, I have no authoritative book, figurehead, or tradition to point to in order to try and answer these difficult questions. All I can say is that forgiveness is contextual. We have to recognize that forgiveness can be used for

good and bad. If forgiveness is a way to hide from confrontation and ignore evil, than I am against it. If forgiveness is the delicate balance between truth and love, that confronts evil and oppression without sliding into cynicism and apathy, I am all for it.

I am not speaking for all humanists when I say this, but I do not think forgiveness and reconciliation are altruistic or based in some kind of “duty.” In fact, one of the best reasons to forgive somebody is the way it makes you feel better about yourself. So I think we should not have self-less forgiveness, we should have self-full forgiveness. We should also think this way because it is a contradiction to think that a self can do something self-less. Humanists often find a strong impetus for forgiveness and reconciliation because only people—not Gods, spirits, or forces—can better the world. As the humanist Eve Garrard once said, “Indeed our reason for forgiveness may be partly due to our lack of religious belief: if we don’t choose to break the cycle of hatred, there isn’t going to be anybody else to do it for us.”

But what about a “duty” to forgive? Do we have a duty to forgive and reconcile? I do not think so. In my mind, duty and forgiveness are mutually exclusive. Image this scenario: My partner wrongs me and I forgive her, she then asks, “why did you forgive me?” I respond by saying, “because it was my duty as your partner to forgive you.” What is wrong with my response? What’s wrong is that my duty-based ethics has hidden any notion of care or personal concern. I would rather say to my partner, “I forgave you because I love you.” In conclusion, the humanist perspective on forgiveness and reconciliation is one of sentimental



concern, self-full and freely given, which aims at bettering ourselves, and the world.

“To err is human, and to forgive is human.” Let us be humans tonight, and try our best to forgive and reconcile.

**Ms. Poorvi Parekh, B.A., M.B.A.**

Ms. Parekh has been a teacher at the Jain Center of Southern California for over fifteen years. She conducts a workshop for high school children in the application of Jain principles in their day-to-day activities. The Jain Center of Southern California is located in Buena Park in one of the largest Jain centers outside of India and has one of the longest histories as a stand-alone Jain temple in the U.S. There are over 1000 registered families that attend a variety of religious and cultural activities held at the site. Ms. Parekh is an investment professional by occupation and has been a resident of California since 1996. She completed her BA in Economics at the University of Hong Kong and her MBA at Shenandoah University in Virginia.

**“Forgiveness & Reconciliation – a Jain perspective”**

Today’s theme goes to the very heart of Jain religion. Ahimsa parmo dharma—non-violence is the supreme religion. Jainism encourages sensitivity towards not just human beings, but all sentient life forms, including animals and plants, even single-celled beings. With every thought, every word and every action, followers of Jain Dharma try to minimize the harm they may cause to even the smallest living being. Inherent in the consciousness of every living being is the desire to live. An ant, if it senses danger, will try to run away. The ant’s right to live should be respected, and a Jain monk would gently brush it off the path he is walking on. But we also know that we can’t avoid stepping on every ant as we walk down the road.

The idea behind Ahimsa is to minimize violence through the recognition that not all harm can be avoided. For those unintentional actions that bring physical harm to small insects, plants and other living beings, one seeks forgiveness. In Jain dharma, the prayer of Universal Forgiveness is perhaps second only to the Namokar Mantra.

Khamemi Savva Jive,  
Savve Jiva Khamantume  
Mitti Me savva Bhuvu Su  
Vairam Majjha Na Kenai

I forgive all living beings; may all living beings forgive me; all living beings are my friends; I have malice towards none. This prayer recognizes that each of us exists in a symbiotic relationship with all living beings around us in this great universe, a universe that is teeming with entities that are interdependent and have to live in mutual assistance and harmony. And for each individual soul every good and bad action committed has its karmic consequence, the fruit of which will be borne at some point in the present or future life. By seeking forgiveness, one asks that their actions, especially if they have caused harm to others, become fruitless and do not generate any further moral consequence.

Indeed in Jainism, the universe is made up of millions of souls that find themselves in bondage with karma and are in a continuous state of rebirth and reincarnation. Each entity is experiencing the outcome of some previous action, both good and bad. The experience of inequalities, of pleasures, of pain and suffering among living beings, is evidence of the existence of this karma. Every worldly being is part of this cycle from time immemorial. The only way to liberate one's soul out of this cycle is through the shedding of all karmas. Now, most of us are too bound by our own obscuring karmas to completely appreciate the potential of Moksha or liberation, but there is an awareness that each person has the ultimate choice and control of taking action or refraining from action, especially if the action will likely harm another living being.

If one refrains from action, one can prevent the accumulation of new karmas. If one chooses to react, then as soon as their action is carried out, the seed is sown and the soul's freedom is replaced by the inevitable liability to bear its consequence. When we go through troubled times, often our first reaction is anger and blame. When that accentuates to passion or rage, we often fail to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and untruth, and good and bad. For this reason, Jain Acharyas, or teachers, have proclaimed anger as leading to delusion or degradation.

On the other hand, the person that does not get enraged even when there are obvious reasons for getting upset exhibits Uttam Kshama Dharma. This Uttam Kshama or Supreme Forgiveness implies patience, forbearance and pardon. The person who patiently bears adversity without blaming others and accepts the circumstance as the outcome of his previous karmas, who can transcend the situation at hand to a state of self-realization, has been termed as gifted with Supreme Forgiveness. His act of forgiveness becomes instrumental in shedding karmic bondage and cutting across the cycle of birth and death. He is brought closer to recognizing the true nature of the soul, which in its original nature is forgiving, pure and simple. Kshama virasey bhushana: "Forbearance is the ornament of the brave," and the persons gifted with the Supreme Forgiveness are worshiped by the heavenly gods and the learned saints.

Only persons with stable minds can acquire the virtue of Supreme Forgiveness. When you forgive, you stop feeling resentful, there is no more indignation or anger against another for a perceived offence, difference or mistake;

there is no clamor for punishment. It means the end of violence and no further karmic consequence.

In this context, forgiveness is not a favor we do for someone else; it is a gift we give to our self. It's that simple. It is also for this reason that practicing forgiveness is a big part of spiritual practice in Jainism. Each year, Jains observe the holy period of Paryushan Parva, an eight to ten day period that is dedicated to self-purification and spiritual enrichment. It is also a time when the laity takes on various temporary vows of study, restricted diet and fasting, and a spiritual intensity similar to temporary monasticism. The last day of Paryushana Parva is the most auspicious for Jains since the ritual of Samvatsari Pratikraman is performed on this day. During this prayer, Jains repeatedly seek forgiveness from various living creatures, including one-sensed beings like plants and microorganisms that they may have harmed while eating and doing regular activities.

Pratikraman also provides retrospection for all negative deeds and mistakes committed in the past year and a resolve to not let them happen in the future. This exercise of self-observation and repentance in Pratikraman emphasizes the importance of self-effort in moving the soul towards divine consciousness. Devout Jains perform the Pratikraman twice a day during Paryushan. After the Pratikraman, it is customary to request forgiveness from everyone by saying "Micchami Dukkadam." The implication behind "Micchami Dukkadam" is that if I have done any harm to you willingly or un-willingly through my action, speech or thoughts, then may those bad deeds be forgiven, be fruitless and not carry any further consequence. The spirit of forgiving and being forgiven is continued after

Pratikraman as individuals proactively ask for forgiveness from family and friends that they interact with and also when individuals exchange their messages in writing or by phone with those they cannot see face to face.

At the Jain Center of S. California, Paryushan is an eventful period. Each year, a prominent religious dignitary is invited to spend the period there and provide religious discourses in the mornings and evenings to benefit the community. There are similar discussions in English for those who cannot understand Gujarati or Hindi. The ritual of Samvatsari Pratikraman is held in English for the youth so that they can appreciate the sentiments of repentance and the spirit of Universal Friendship.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Forgiveness is not an occasional art, it is a permanent attitude." The origins of Jainism go back to ancient times, but the concept of Ahimsa is a timeless proposition. In our current time it has inspired great political leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. In this spirit, if I have misstated anything or said anything that unintentionally hurt anyone's feelings, may my actions be forgiven and rendered fruitless. Micchami Dukkadam.