

ETHICS OF IT ALL



Matthew Zaro Fisher, President Jerry D. Campbell, Dr. Manibhai Mehta, Dr. Nitin Shah, Sudhaben Modi, Rajen Dhami, Dilip Shah and Brianne Donaldson at lamp lighting inauguration ceremony.

On August 24 & 25, Claremont Lincoln University was the host of **“2012 Claremont Lincoln International Jain Bioethics Conference”**. The spiritual interaction of 25 scholars with students and the members of the Jain community was a delightful learning experience for everyone involved. Over 125 participants exchanged their views on Bioethical issues with Jain, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Christian, Jewish and Islamic perspectives. The two-day conference began with welcoming remarks by President of the CLU, Dr. Jerry Campbell. Dr. Campbell stated that the philosophy of the Claremont Lincoln University, the world’s first fully interreligious is to offer a seat to every religion on an equal footing, so that we may all learn from each other and join together to wage Peace in the world. Dr. Sulekh Jain of Houston, Chair of the JAINA’s Academic liaison committee and Chair of the International School of Jain Studies made the opening remarks detailing the Jain collaboration with Claremont Lincoln University. After the lamp lighting ceremony (flameless candles to minimize himsa and candles that would stay lit for the entire conference), Pramodaben gave the benediction (MANGLACHARAN) by a video message and Gurudev Shri Chitrabhanuji expressed his warm wishes and hope that the International Jain Scholars conference will continue year after year.

The planning committee for the conference included range of sessions covering issues ranging from conception and birth to death. The first was a general session where, Professor Cromwell Crawford

from University of Hawaii answered whether Religion can help understand Bioethics or not. Establishing the significance of Religion and Spirituality into Bioethics and various decisions in Life & Death set a stage and tone for this very first and unique conference. The next session talked about "Procreation". Many aspects of Bioethics including Birth, Artificial Insemination, Surrogate Mothers, Abortion etc., were discussed. Next discussion was about "Living with Non-Violence". Then came discussion about the "Future". The role of Stem Cells and Gene Therapy were the main focus of presentations and discussions. Finally, the most coveted, challenging, controversial and very relevant topic in the present day and age "The End of Life" was discussed. In fact, the *Los Angeles Times* carried an article on the Bioethics conference highlighting the same issue on Sunday, August 19th edition. The article created such a surge that conference registrations nearly doubled in the last three days! Steve Lopez of *LA Times* wrote the article covering Dr. Nitin Shah's personal experiences and quoted him: "We as Americans refuse to accept death as an eventuality," Shah said. "But we're all going to go, some sooner, some later." Other speakers interviewed and quoted were Dr. Faisal Qazi, Professor Crawford and Whitney Braun (an ISJS alumnus). Each session had a Keynote speaker and also a Responder.

There were five Keynote speakers at the conference. The First was Dr. Cromwell Crawford of University of Hawaii. India born Cromwell is a much-loved friend of the Jain community in North America and chair of the Academic Council of International School of Jain Studies. In his speech, Dr. Crawford argued that indeed, religion has a lot to contribute to the discussion on Bioethics. The next keynote speaker was Dr. James Hughes of Trinity College, Connecticut. he spoke on "Procreation": "How Do We Care For future People?" with an emphasis on Jain and Buddhist ideas on reproductive ethics. Dr. Dilip K. Bobra of Phoenix, Arizona, gave a keynote speech "Living With Non- Violence". Dr. Brian Cummings of University of California, Irvine, gave a keynote speech about " The Future" highlighting Stem Cell Research – what is the Science and what is the Hype?

Three speakers presented views on Sallekhna – Jain thinking on imminent death due to disease, old age or when one is unable to function self-sufficiently - and tradition of progressive withdrawal that leads to peaceful death. Dr. Christopher Chapple of Loyola Marymount University who had witnessed in 1989 an octogenarian Jain sadhwi's last hours of her Sallekhna - explained why it should not be called "Death by Starvation". Samni Dr. Chaitanya Pragya, a keynote speaker on "End of Life" drew a distinction between Euthanasia and Sallekhna. Whitney Braun, a doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University, discussed the various legal issues on Sallekhna in India and in the US.

Two presentations were made via Skype. The first one was from Ahmedabad by Dr. Surendra Singh Pokharna (Former Scientist with Indian Space Research Organization). He spoke about how General System Theory and Jain Philosophy could provide new ways of looking at the field of Bioethics. The other was by Dr. Shugan Jain of New Delhi, Director of ISJS, who discussed available Jain literature on medical sciences, metaphysical considerations, Karma doctrine and basis of ethical-spiritual practice for leading a happy life as well as for its end. Dr. Subhash Jain of the University of Iowa discussed Karma theory and bioethics. He proposed a criterion for ethical conduct – a non-violent deed producing less karmic load to measure bioethical issues. On the issues of vivisection Dr. Gary Francione of Rutgers University spoke forcefully against all animal experimentation and Dr. Brian Cummings of University of California, Irvine, spoke of stem cell research – what is the science and what is the hype? Dr. Varsha Bhatt Mehta of University of Michigan spoke of the ethical dilemmas of medical personnel in neonatal practice.

Brianne Donaldson, completing her doctoral dissertation on metaphysical approaches to animal liberation from the perspective of Process Philosophy, at Claremont Lincoln, was probably the most emotional speaker of the conference. She warned about how many Jains speak of Jainism as a

“scientific religion”. It is imperative that Jains not rush too hastily into a collapse with modern techno-science and its limited claims to judge the value of life based on cost and benefit. Dr. Predrag Cicovacki, Professor of Philosophy at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts and Director of Peace and Conflict Studies, discussed Albert Schweitzer’s view that killing another living being is never morally permissible. Dr. Nitin Shah, Professor of anesthesiology at Loma Linda University spoke of the “Religion of Humanity”. He shared the joy he experienced by participating in various medical camps in India, South Africa and Haiti. Rabbi Harold Rabinowitz, President of The Reference Works Publishing House brought levity as he discussed what Jews could learn from the Jains.

Scholars of other faiths made the conference even more vibrant. Dr. Rita Sherma of the Nalanda Confluence Institute discussed the Hindu chaplaincy program they are offering and Dr. Ram Agarwal from the University of Miami presented a paper on Hindu Bioethics in the present medical context. Dr. Robert presented a Christian perspective on “Conscience and Consciousness”. Faisal Qazi, President of Medical Network Devoted to Service (MiNDS) presented the Islamic view on Brain Death. Seth Clark of CLU presented Buddhist perspectives on Reincarnation and Rabbi Elliot Dorff discussed the approach of Judaism to moral issues raised by the new artificial reproductive techniques and modern genetic testing. A father and son duo – Dr. Thomas Peteet and **John Ray Peteet** explored **how the virtues embodied in four major religious traditions shape the character, attitudes and behavior of physicians making bioethical choices.**

There were many other scholars who responded to the papers presented – Dr. Harvinder Sahota, Faisal Qazi, Rita Sherma, Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Dr. Manoj Jain, Dr. Robert Hesse, Dr. Kalpana Savla, Dr Ram Agarwal, Swasti Bhattacharya, Dr. Manish Mehta, Dr. Jayesh Shah and others engaged in lively questions and answers session with the audience. Detailed information can be seen on Jain studies page at: jain.claremontlincoln.com

This was the first International Jain Scholars conference in the US jointly organized by CLU, JAINA, JCSC – (Jain Center of Southern California) and ISJS – (International School for Jain Studies). This collaboration between 4 distinct entities is a promising start for many good things to come for Jain studies at CLU. Three past presidents and two current regional vice presidents of JAINA were in attendance. Their three past presidents, the current president Dr. Jayesh Shah and many community members represented JCSC. It should be noted that the members of the Jain community of southern California generously supported the conference. Several scholars and participants commented that this was the first conference they ever attended that invited interfaith dialog between seven major religions on the important topic of Bioethics and hoped that more such conferences will take place.

Six ISJS officers were present to witness the birth of Jain studies and to see it take center stage at a major University in the US. Some of the important steps in that direction are:

- Campus wide Ahimsa Day on October 2 with emphasis on Forgiveness.
- A two week Jain studies camp on CLU campus for Jain youth in 2013
- The offering of a class on “Bioethics in Dharma Traditions” in fall 2012 semester
- A long term and fully funded CLU/ISJS India based research program to study the role Jains played (or did not play) in the violent aftermath of partition of India. This project has generated lots of interest in India and has resulted in new partnerships with some of the most venerable institutions.
- Progress on plans to offer on-line fundamentals of Jainism lecture series free of cost.
- The topic for the 2013 Jain Scholars conference will be: “Women’s Perspectives in Dharma Traditions”.

- Creation of a Jain sacred space on CLU campus - may be a 6' x 4' Jinalay (Temple) in marble. Goal is to complete this prior to October 2013.

All of these steps are designed to enrich Jain studies at CLU. At this time in America, CLU is the only university committed to offer Graduate degree program for Jain studies. There is a promise for the Jain Scholars conference to become an annual event at CLU where it will become a precursor for the course offered each the fall.

In honor of Gurudev Chitrabhanuji's 90th Birthday, who was the major financial supporter of the conference the entire two-day event was made a Jain vegan event for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The meals were fabulous and were served in the open air space surrounded by trees. The location offered participants the opportunity to mingle with scholars and academicians to continue their conversations and treasure the new connections they had made. This was truly a multi cultural, multi religious perspective on Bioethics that was an occasion for respectful exchange of views across religious boundaries befitting the Claremont Lincoln University's purpose for being. The conference organizers Dr Nitin Shah, Matthew Zaro Fisher, Brienne Donaldson, Dr. Manish Mehta, Rajen Dhama, Dr. Manoj Jain and Lidiya Potapenko deserve Kudos for organizing a much-needed conference. All the organizers got their sustenance from the Provost Dr. Philip Clayton who first conceived the annual Jain Scholars Conferences at CLU.

CLU provost Dr. Philip Clayton held a dinner reception (jain Vegan menu) at his home prior to the conference for several speakers, organizers and donors. Dr. Jerry Campbell, President of CLU spoke to the group explaining the vision of CLU. This was truly a remarkable event to mingle and to learn how important a role Jain Studies" has at CLU.

The Jain Center of the Southern California hosted a dinner reception for all the participants after the closing of the conference that included a tour of the complex, Divo and Arti in the Temple and marvelous dances and a skit on Bioethics by the children. Matthew Zaro Fisher presented a slide show of his six weeks in India for ISJS program of Jain studies, which received much applause. Dr. Cromwell Crawford delighted everyone with his foxy Hindi admiration for Jainism, for India and for the hospitality of the Jain Center of Southern California. This was the most joyful and fitting ending to a two-day serious learning experience for all.

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