
Reception for the Bhagwan Mahavir Summer Fellows of 2011 of the Florida International University by JERF

Venue: Jain Center of South Florida, Weston, Florida, USA
Date and Time: September 18, 2011. 11:15 am to 12:30 pm EST
Program organized by: Jain Education & Research Foundation (JERF)
Web site: www.jaineducation.org

With a fellowship funded by the [Bhagwan Mahavir Professorship](#), the Bhagwan Mahavir Fellows spent the summer of 2011 in India studying aspects of Jainism there. The fellows shared their experience with the local Jain community whose generous donations made these activities possible.

The program included:

welcoming the [Florida International University \(FIU\)](#) Professor and students who visited India this summer;
welcoming the student from [Jain Vishva Bharati University \(JVBU\)](#), Ladnun to FIU;
announcement of the [Latika and Rajiv Jain Graduate Fellowship](#);
information about Preksha Meditation Training in Miami and other future events.

It was a warm sunny day and the program started on time with the melodious recitation of *Namokara Mantra* by Samani Chaitanya Pragyaji and Samani Unnat Pragyaji.



Samani Chaitanya Pragyaji and Samani Unnat Pragyaji

This was followed by a welcoming and introductory speech by Sapan Bafna President, JERF. He greeted the Professors, students and other esteemed guests. He gave a brief account of steadily increasing number of students and courses in Jainism offered at FIU. In the past, there have been more than 250 students who joined courses infused with Jainism, facilitated by renowned scholar Dr. Nathan Katz and Samaniji at FIU. He also informed the audience about the five courses being offered current semester.

This semester alone 135 students have already registered. He thanked the Jain Center and admired the participation of community members, donors and volunteers for all their support. He motivated the members to continue with active participation, donations and efforts to further the cause.

Mr. Bafna concluded with the announcement that all these courses along with the course on Preksha Meditation and Yoga are also open for the Jain community in Miami.



Mr. Sapan Bafna giving his introductory speech

On behalf of the Jain Community and JERF, Prof. Neptune Srimal, welcomed the members from FIU. Incidentally, Prof. Srimal is from the Earth Science Department of FIU. He introduced Prof. Katz as one of the most renowned religious studies scholar who specializes in Judaic studies, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures and first ever Bhagvan Mahavir Professorship. He has been working very hard to advance the cause of Jaina studies. Mrs. Jeevanprabha Mehta (EC Secretary JERF) was invited to present Prof. Katz with the customary gift.

Prof. Katz very generously expressed his gratitude to JERF for the remarkable contribution made by the organization, which encouraged the students for the summer school, to learn about Jainism. He also informed about the other Faculty fellowship and scholarships to encourage students in the area of Jainism.

This was followed by an introduction of Mr. Robert Callahan, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, FIU by the convener of the program. Mrs. Kusum Jain, active member of the Jain community presented Mr. Robert with the customary shawl. Mr. Robert acknowledged Geetika and Sapan Bafna as FIU alumni and that it is always a joy working with them. He further said that it has been enlightenment, more than pleasure, working with the whole team. Along with this he acknowledged Jains worldwide for doing the right thing with a right vision.



Prof. Neptune Simal taking the program further



Prof. Nathan Katz expressing his thoughts



Mrs. Kusum Jain presenting customary shawl to Mr. Robert Callahan



Mr. Gajendra Surana welcoming Dr. Erik Larson,

In this series of welcoming the professors of FIU, Prof. Simal expressed gratitude to Dr. Erik Larson, Chair Religious Studies for his presence and later introduced him. Mr. Gajendra Surana (Treasurer JERF) took the opportunity to greet Dr. Larson with the shawl.

Dr. Larson highlighted the impact of Samaniji's presence on the campus for past several years. He shared the student's positive feedback and reactions to the courses in Jainism and how it manifested in looking at the world in a new way. He appreciated all the efforts made by the Jain community and addressed Prof. Katz for his contribution in developing this.

Dr. Whitney Bauman, Assistant Professor at the Department of Religious Studies at FIU and first Bhagwan Mahavir Summer Faculty Fellow was introduced by Prof. Srimal as a young man with more than thirty years of teaching ahead. Dr. Bauman bravely visited India this summer to understand, comprehend and relate Jainism in addition to some of his current research projects. Mrs. Deepika Dalal, South East Regional Vice-President of JAINA, honored Dr. Bauman with shawl.



Mrs. Deepika Dalal welcoming Dr. Whitney Bauman



Dr. Whitney Bauman during his presentation

Dr. Whitney Bauman, conveyed his reverence to Acharya Kanaknandanji and Mahendra Muni for sharing their wisdom with him on various aspects of Jaina philosophy. He acknowledged Samani Charitra Pragyaji, Vice Chancellor JVB, Ladnun and Prof. N. L. Kachhara from Udiapur, for the warm hospitality and contributing to his understanding. Dr. Bauman put together a stimulating presentation on his India experiences and shared his thoughts on the occasion.

This was followed by a grand welcome of the four students who went to Jani Vishva Bharati University (JVB), Ladnun (located in the Thar Desert) in the peak summers to expand on their Jaina studies and experience living Jainism. Dr. Mayur Maniar and Dr. Satish Shah presented the students with a book titled *An Introduction to Jainism* by Prof. Jeffery Long. These students were:
Mr. Stephan Vishal Mahavir, Senior (i.e., final year student), Department of Psychology
Mr. Tal Berman, Department of Environmental Studies
Ms. Gabriela Largaespada, Department of History

Students did a wonderful positive power point presentation of their experiences in Ladnun. They highlighted upon the course content, different field trips, meeting some families and the extraordinarily beautiful campus of JVB Ladnun throughout the presentation.



FIU Students - Mr. Stephan Vishal Mahavir, Mr. Tal Berman, Ms. Gabriela Largaespada with Dr. Mayur Maniar



FIU Students Presentation



Audience charmed by FIU Students Presentation



Prof. Neptune Srimal introducing Mr. Sanjeev Bothra & Mrs. Shivani Bothra



Mrs. Shivani Bothra expressing her gratitude

Prof. Srimal introduced and extended warm welcome to Shivani and Sanjeev Bothra who arrived from India. He further introduced Shivani, student from JVBU, Ladnun as the first Bhagvaan Mahavir fellow who has joined the Masters Program in Religious Studies at FIU.

Shivani took this opportunity and conveyed gratitude towards Samaniji, FIU community and the Jain community here in Miami. Furthermore she appreciated all the support extended to her for a meaningful social, cultural and academic experience ahead.

Mr. Bindesh Shah, (EC Member, JERF) was invited to express few words of gratitude. He encouraged the audience by acknowledging their presence and how it adds to the success of the program. He recognized and was thankful to the FIU administration, Faculty for their dedication and continued support in achieving success in such a short time. He concluded by addressing to the members of JERF for their countless hours of voluntary work in putting together this program and invited everyone to join for aarti followed by lunch.



Mr. Bindesh Shah



Mr. Mukund Shah and the audience

Mr. Mukund Shah, President, JCSF (Jain Center of South Florida) was invited by Prof. Srimal to articulate his gratitude. Mr. Mukund Shah expressed a vote of thanks by acknowledging the Samanijis, esteemed guests, speakers, and management.

The program started by Samaniji and was finally wrapped up by a short concluding speech by Samani Chaitanya Pragyaji. She elucidated the openness, attentiveness of the students and their keenness on learning religions without of any dogmas. In addition to this, she expressed and admired the support of the faculty and administration of the FIU department with special reference to Dr. Larson (Chair) and Dr. Katz. She also informed about the Preksha Meditation training course, which initiated on September 17, 2011. Thirty students enthusiastically participated in this eighteen-hour certificate course. The enrollment for next course is much higher. This course is divided into three levels: introductory, advanced and intensive.



Samani Chaitanya Pragyaji with her concluding speech



Mumukshu Sheetal bai, Samani Chaitanya Pragyaji and Samani Unnat Pragyaji



Post program interaction between department colleagues

More than 200 people who were present at the program joined in for the *arti* and the lunch at the Jain Centre of South Florida.



Aarti



Community lunch after the program