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## The Future of Jain Dharma Demands CHANGE

Recently there has been significant awareness and discussion on the future of Jain Dharma around the globe. Young Jains around the world are invigorated and claim their stake in their future. It is heartening to see, conferences on future of Jainism like the one at Kellogg school of business, Chicago as well as the one in Nairobi, Kenya and YJI in Indore, India. It is a good start, however we must understand that we are not going to go from here to 'there' by maintaining status quo or continuing to do things in the same manner as our predecessors. Unless we change... and change rapidly, our vision for the future will just be a dream and not a reality. Mahavirswami said, "Vattana Lakkhano kalo" meaning the characteristics of time is change. Jainism accepts change as inevitable and yet in practice, there is a tremendous amount of resistance to change in Jain societies around the world. . "Change is difficult because people overvalue their traditional practices and undervalue what they may gain by letting go".

Now, you will find many, who will argue that Jainism has been around for thousands of years and will continue to survive forever without any change. This is the kind of thinking that has led to continued decline of Jains, from over 100 million at one time, to now less than 10 million. Even according to the findings of JAINA long range planning committee, we are 'loosing' young Jains in large numbers at an alarming rate. We just cannot deny these facts and remain complacent. We not only need to attract Jain youth but also listen to them and empower them to take leadership in their future. For this to happen, we need to re-evaluate our practices as well as the paradigm these practices are based on. Changes and reforms are an inevitable result of such critical but constructive analysis.

There are well meaning individuals who get upset at any critical analysis. They say "Don't talk about negative - keep things positive". A young boy came home and told his mother that he was going to flunk the math test. Mother said "don't be negative son, be positive". The young boy said "I am POSITIVE - I am going to flunk that test"!

When there are weeds in the garden we have two choices.

1. We can be positive thinkers and say "There are no weeds in the garden....there are no weeds in the garden....there are no weeds in the garden" and let the weeds take over the entire garden.
2. Alternatively, we accept the fact that there ARE weeds in the garden, pull these weeds out, take preventive measures and move on to have a beautiful garden.

The first choice is just a positive rhetoric, the second one is positive action. I too believe in being positive, and would take the second choice every time.

Some of our traditional practices and rigid thinking are like these weeds, they are destroying the inherent beauty of Jain way of life and contribute to the disharmony and fragmentations in our community. We all know this, we have seen it time and again. As long as we remain in denial, even with noble intention of not disturbing societal norms, the recovery is not possible. The challenge now is to accept the facts and do something about it before it defaces the entire garden. Young Jains, must

be vigilant and forward thinking. They must analyze our strengths, our weaknesses, our opportunities and our threats and be willing to deal with them. We all know that the basic principles of Jainism are scientific and the ‘truths’ presented in the scriptures are universal, however, their interpretation and thus the application have to be made in the context of time and space, which we find ourselves in. Jainism does not teach us to follow things blindly and dogmatically in the name of God or so called “Jinvani”.

Mahavir said “Accept not what I say as truth because it is backed by tradition, or because it is the law of the land, or because it sounds good, or because it comes from your teacher. Accept as truth only that which is sagaciously acceptable to reason as well as sentiment”. In his last sermon (Uttaradhyayan Sutra) he also said “Appanna Sachame Suche” meaning – find truth for your self.

“That which is old has become so only with the passage of time. That which is new is also going to become old. Old does not mean stable or irrefutable” –Acharya Siddhasen

“I do not favor Mahavir nor I am prejudiced against Kapil, I would accept anyone’s statement provided I find it true on the scale of logic” – Acharya Haribhadrasuri

“Would the systems established by our ancestors hold true upon examination? In case it does not, I am not here to justify it for the sake of saving the traditional grace of the dead, irrespective of the wrath I may have to face” – Acharya Siddhasen (Dwatrishinka)

Need I give more examples?

We need logic and evidence to govern our decision making and not blind faith or emotions. The latter may win you popularity but only former will ensure long-term health and growth of the community.

Being involved in Jain education, I constantly evaluate many Jain practices and the philosophical, spiritual, health or social justification behind them. The challenge of incorporating changes while continuing basic principles is enormous. Resistance from the “fundamentalist” in the organization can drain you dry and requires tremendous amount of patience and commitment. Despite of these challenges, I believe that it is a necessary step in achieving our desired objectives.

**Today, let us all commit to becoming change agents.**