



GARY L. FRANCIONE
Distinguished Professor of Law
Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Scholar
of Law and Philosophy

Office Phone: (973) 353-5321
E-mail: gfrancione@kinoy.rutgers.edu
Fax: (973) 353-1445

October 1, 2008

Dear Friends of the International Summer School for Jain Studies:

Jai Jinendra.

I am an American academic who has for 25 years taught law and philosophy, first at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law and now at Rutgers University School of Law. My primary area of scholarship has involved the moral and legal status of nonhuman animals. I have written several books and many articles on this topic. My most recent book is *Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation*, published in June 2008 by Columbia University Press. I am working on another book for Columbia University and I have just been named as co-editor of a new series on animal ethics that will be produced by Columbia.

I have been a vegan for 26 years. The primary basis of my veganism has always been spiritual; I accept that all life is sacred and reject violence against all sentient beings. I have long maintained that Ahimsa should be the guiding principle of all human behavior.

In May 2008, I enrolled in a course on Preksha Meditation at the Jain Vishwa Bharati Center in Iselin, New Jersey. It was an absolutely marvelous experience. Samaniji Mudit Pragya and Samaniji Shukla Pragya are devoted and excellent teachers who have a profound understanding of all aspects of the marvelous meditation system developed by Gurudev Tulsi and Acharya Mahaprajna. Each class was a truly inspiring event. I now practice Preksha Meditation on a regular basis and I try to attend weekly meditation sessions at the JVB Center.

In addition to learning Preksha Meditation, I have embarked on a formal study of Jain philosophy and doctrine. The Samanijies have been eager to provide further instruction to me and have been most generous with their time.

During my study, I ran across an essay on veganism and Jainism by Pravin K. Shah, Chairperson of the Jain Education Committee of the Federation of Jain Associations in North America. I contacted Pravin and we discussed my interest in learning more about Jainism. Pravin was kind enough not only to send me materials to read but to direct me to books and essays that would help me to understand the fundamental doctrines of Jainism. Pravin also got me in touch with Dr. Sulekh Jain, Dr. Cromwell Crawford, Dr. Anne Vallely, and others. Sulekh, Pravin, and I now talk regularly by phone and through email and I have benefited enormously from their extensive knowledge about Jaina doctrine and their ability to explain these concepts to people like me, who have been trained in Western philosophy and religion.

I presently plan to attend the International Summer School for Jain Studies in summer 2009 so that I can learn from scholars such as Dr. Shugan Chand Jain and others who are involved in the program. I am already studying the most excellent Study Notes that Sulekh provided to me and I am most impressed by the high intellectual quality of these materials. It is clear that the ISSJS program is developing into a first rate academic program. I am excited to participate not only because I regard what I am learning to be important for me as a personal matter, but because I am going to incorporate what I am learning into my teaching and scholarship on animal ethics and human rights/animal rights theory. I have already begun to discuss Jaina doctrine with others, including other academics. For example, I have shared the Study Notes with Professor Gary Steiner, Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Bucknell University, who is my co-editor for the Columbia University series on animal ethics and he is thinking of applying to ISSJS for next summer as well. In my course on human rights/animal rights, which I am teaching this semester, I am discussing Jaina doctrine and Ahimsa.

The primary reason that I am writing to you, however, is to emphasize to you the importance of making Jainism accessible to those who were not born into the Jain tradition. Although the Jains who I have had the good fortune to meet—the Samanijies, Pravin Shah, Sulekh Jain, Shugan Jain, etc.—have been nothing but helpful and generous with their time, and with providing and recommending books and other educational materials, Jainism is still very much something that is shared largely by those who were born into it—and not even by all of them. I have met a number of Jain youths who are completely unacquainted with Jainism and that is sad.

It is my hope that the leaders of the Jaina community will realize that an important task before them is to consider seriously ways in which Jainism can be made more accessible to all of us. The doctrines of Ahimsa, Anekanta, and Aparigraha are more relevant than at any time in human history. These doctrines speak to all of the pressing issues of our time: war, poverty, violence, and ecological destruction.

Thank you for considering my views, which are my own and should not be attributed to Rutgers University.

Gary L. Francione