

21 November 2025

2:00- 3:30pm

Session 2 (M21-204): Compassion as a Path to Freedom

Organizers:

Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute, christopher.miller@arihantainstitute.org

Stephanie Corigliano, Cal Poly Humboldt, stephanie.corigliano@gmail.com

Presiding:

Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute, christopher.miller@arihantainstitute.org

Presenters:

- **Alba Rodríguez Juan, University of California, Riverside**, alba.rodriguez.juan@gmail.com

Between Entanglement and Enlightenment: Rethinking Compassion in Jain and Buddhist Thought

Abstract:

This presentation explores the ethical emphasis on compassion (*karuṇā*, *dayā*) in Jain and Buddhist traditions, particularly in relation to the Jain tenet of non-harming (*ahimsā*) and the Buddhist principle of loving-kindness (*mettā*). In Jainism, *ahimsā* and compassion are inseparable, functioning not only as social ethics but as rigorous ascetic disciplines encompassing thought, speech, and action. While orthodox Jain doctrine views compassion as karmically entangling, it also signals right insight (*samyag-darśana*), inspiring one to assist others. In Buddhism, the *bodhisattva* ideal likewise grounds compassion in a transformative orientation toward others' suffering. This paper argues that in both traditions, compassion is not merely an emotional response, but a disciplined form of ethical self-cultivation rooted in detachment and the pursuit of a higher mode of being. Through vows, meditation, and philosophical reflection, Jain and Buddhist thinkers usually framed compassion as a transformative practice linking inner development with ethical engagement in the world.

Bio

Alba Rodríguez Juan is a PhD Candidate in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). She earned a degree in Psychology from the University of Valencia, Spain, and completed a master's in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University. Her research focuses on South Asian philosophical and religious traditions, with a main focus on the continuities and discontinuities between traditional and contemporary forms of Jain ethical and meditation practices. She is currently writing her dissertation on the yoga-related writings of Yaśovijaya, widely regarded as the last great philosopher of Jainism—a profoundly influential yet underexamined figure.

- **Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa-Baker, Loyola Marymount University**, nirinjan.khalsa@lmu.edu

Cultivating Compassionate Courage as Sage Warriors

Abstract

This presentation will explore the Sikh ideal of the Sage Warrior (*sant sipahi*) as one who operates with compassionate courage in the face of injustice and suffering for communal and individual sovereignty, liberation, and freedom. In Sikh conceptions, compassion or 'daya' is most often translated as 'mercy' signifying a sense of power, agency, and sovereignty of an individual, community, or the divine. It will examine the ways in which compassion or mercy (*daya*) is one of the five key virtues in Sikhism and how it is inextricably interlinked with the others: truth (*sat*), contentment (*santokh*), humility (*nimrata*), and love (*pyaar*). Through a hermeneutics of Gurbani, self, and other, this paper will explore the philosophical and practical ways in which compassionate courage is understood as a tool toward individual and collective liberation (*mukti*). It will do so by highlighting historic and contemporary Sikh examples of sacrifice, *seva*, non-violent protest, and movement organizing.

Bio

Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa-Baker is a Sikh kirtan musician, scholar and practitioner. She is currently Senior Instructor Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, where she also served as Clinical Professor Jain and Sikh Studies and Acting Director Graduate Yoga Studies. Her ethnographic research and publications investigate Sikh kirtan through a decolonial lens to explore diversity in Sikh identity,

pedagogy and practice. Throughout her scholarship, teaching, and music, Nirinjan highlights the importance of embodied practices to cultivate ethical action in daily life. She currently serves as co-chair Sikh Studies Unit at the American Academy of Religion, is part of various interfaith initiatives, and in Fall 2024 toured the country with the Revolutionary Love Tour, sharing Sikh music and wisdom to cultivate courageous hearts and communities. Her CV and publications can be found at <https://lmu.academia.edu/NirinjanKaurKhalsaBaker>

□ **Eileen Goddard, University of California, Santa Barbara**, Eileengoddard@ucsb.edu

The Interweaving of Cosmology, Soteriology and Compassion in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Tradition

Abstract

The sixteenth century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, inspired by Caitanya, envisions that supreme Godhead Kṛṣṇa has three aspects through which he simultaneously encompasses, oversees, and permeates the universe. Although Kṛṣṇa eternally resides in his transcendental realm Goloka-Vṛndāvana alongside associate devotees (*bhaktas*), Kṛṣṇa also animates the natural world and resides in the heart of every embodied being. This paper analyzes Gauḍīya philosopher Jīva Gosvāmin's *Bhakti Sandarbha* in order to argue that the cosmological pervasiveness of Kṛṣṇa's divine presence is theorized as the foundation of all compassion in the Gauḍīya tradition. Jīva contends that as a *bhakta* progressively develops devotional love for Kṛṣṇa, so the expansive love for all other beings also spontaneously develops. I argue that the highest *bhakti* stages of soteriological realization according to the Gauḍīya tradition also align with the ethic of compassion such that every realized *bhakta* instinctively treats all beings like a dear son or friend.

Bio

Eileen Goddard is a Religious Studies Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She teaches courses on Indian religious traditions and philosophies at UCSB and the University of Houston. Eileen's research focuses on the sixteenth century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition and comparatively analyzes Indian religious constructions of perfected minds and bodies. Eileen's broader research interests include Hindu and Indian philosophies, *bhakti* traditions, classical Sanskrit aesthetic theory (*rasa*), and gender and sexuality. Eileen completed her M.A. in Religion at Rutgers University and B.A. in Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

□ **Jonathan Dickstein, Arihanta Institute**, jhdickstein@gmail.com

Feelings and Vows: Dharmic Understandings on the Relationship between Compassion and Nonviolence

Abstract:

In *Guardians of the Transcendent*, Anne Vallely recalls a Śvetāmbara Terāpanth nun reciting Ācārya Bhikṣu's twenty principles of dharma. The final principle declares: "Nonviolence and compassion are one and the same." Beginning with Jainism, this talk explores the relationship between compassion and nonviolence across dharmic traditions, giving additional attention to early Buddhism and Classical Yoga. Can the two be equated when compassion often appears as a feeling, disposition, or orientation (*bhāvanā*), while nonviolence is typically framed as a vow of disciplined practice (*vrata*)? To investigate this question, the talk engages a contemporary psychological definition of compassion as "a cognitive, affective, and behavioral process consisting of: 1) Recognizing suffering; 2) Understanding the universality of suffering; 3) Feeling empathy; 4) Tolerating uncomfortable feelings aroused in response; and 5) Motivation to act/acting to alleviate suffering." By juxtaposing these frameworks, the talk clarifies how principles, feelings, and practices intersect—and diverge—in shaping ethical thought and life within dharmic traditions.