



Ahimsa in Action at Luvin Arms

By Dilip V. Shah

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During last Paryushan at our Jain center, we had a guest speaker Shaleen Shah who talked about an animal sanctuary in Colorado that he and his wife Shilpi had created. I read the literature he provided and heard him answer questions from the audience. Since it was the only sanctuary run by Jains outside of India, I was interested in learning more. I was curious to learn about a few things like: the motivation behind it, its financial support, where the animals came from, if they would be raised on vegetarian diet and if it was Jain sanctuary. He invited me to the sanctuary by telling me that "seeing is believing" and even offered me to stay with them.

For weeks, I kept thinking about that tempting offer – corresponded with Shaleen and explored their website until I made up my mind and finally booked a flight to Denver. Shaleen and his two little boys picked me up as I arrived at Denver airport early on a Friday evening in mid- December. His home and the sanctuary were about 30 miles from the airport. Shilpi greeted me at her home and welcomed me with warm vegan dinner. After the kids were put to bed, conversations about the sanctuary began. I wanted to learn about them and how they got the idea to start an animal sanctuary. They were equally eager to share their story:

Both Shaleen and Shilpi (Shahs) were born in India but grew up in Florida when their parents immigrated to America. Shaleen was an entrepreneur even in his high school years and Shilpi studied to be a CPA. They got married and in 2011, they were eagerly looking forward to the birth of their first child. – a baby boy they lovingly named Aarav. But then the life threw a curve; the newborn baby was not able to tolerate mother's milk. His face developed rashes and kept crying excessively. Their pediatrician diagnosed the child as "Lactose Intolerant" and advised Shilpi to stop consuming any dairy products at least for the next six months. Shilpi believed that as a committed vegetarian, she was eating all the right foods to raise a baby but promptly complied with doctor's order. She gave up milk, butter, yogurt or ghee and the baby got well soon.

Shilpi quickly adjusted to life without any dairy products – but she wanted to learn more about the factors that caused her son's sickness. She embarked on an extensive research and read in detail about the dairy industry and dairy animals. To her horror, she discovered extreme

cruelty the cows were subjected to. In order to maximize the milk production, they were artificially impregnated every year and fed antibiotics. Natural life span of cows is 20 years but at the age of six or seven, milk production starts declining and at that point they are sold to the slaughterhouse. Her heart was shaken to the core when she learned that newborn male offspring of the cows was routinely separated from their mother within 24 hours – never to meet again and shipped off to slaughterhouses within six months to veal industry. More she read, more she became sad. For centuries, humans have raised farm animals only to exploit them and in the end use them for food. In this age of industrialized food production, farm animals are confined to smallest possible space. Many animals never get to move around and birds are never given room to spread their wings or see the sun. They are not thought as God's creatures to be adored or loved but as commodities for consumption.

Shilpi's motherly instincts turned into compassion for all farm animals. She thought her son; Aarav had come into her life as a messenger from God to awaken her to the true meaning of Ahimsa. She discovered that just being vegetarian was not enough – use of all animal products – leather, wool, honey, dairy products like milk, butter



and cheese was the product of cruelty and violence. She turned into a complete vegan. A few months later, Shaleen joined her and turned vegan. Three years later the family grew again when Avi was born. Thankfully, he was born healthy. The family moved to a small town near Boulder and was enjoying the small town life surrounded by farms, thinking about what they can do to reduce the suffering of farm animals.



In the summer of 2015, Shahs learned of an animal auction nearby. Among thousands of animals destined for slaughterhouses were a pregnant mare (female horse) and two foals (baby horses) that the couple wanted to rescue. Shaleen rounded up some cash and headed to the auction to rescue this horse family from certain death. He did buy the mare and two foals but spent hours on the auction ground. He was emotionally drained seeing all kinds of animals – baby goats, sheep, horses, cows - many just days old being pushed on the weighing scale and on to the auction platform. All unwanted byproducts bid by the pound for buyers to take them to slaughterhouses. After saving the horses, while driving back home, Shaleen was consumed by the haunting cries of animals he had just left at the auction grounds. He kept praying, "if only we had land, we could do something."

That very night, his prayer was answered! Someone called to ask if he knew of anyone who might be interested in a 23-acre land parcel just a few minutes away from home. Shahs took that phone call as a sign from God. All night the two of them debated if they were ready to accept the massive responsibility of running an animal sanctuary along with raising two little kids. Shaleen could not erase the memory of all those animals he had seen on the auction ground and together they could not ignore sign from the God. Next morning they signed a lease for the farm and in August of 2015 "Luvin Arms" was established.



The property they leased was neglected for many years and needed a lot of work to convert it into an animal sanctuary. To create a sanctuary, one requires the knowledge of safe rescues, animal husbandry, farm and pasture management, trailering and hauling of animals, barn design, construction skills, animal first aid and local and

state regulations. In addition to the knowledge, one also needs equipment. A tractor with implements, skid steer, several sized animal trailers, utility and dump trailers, manure spreader, UTVs, and general land management skill. Depending on the variety of animals you plan to shelter you need several barns, automatic water systems, heating, miles of fences, etc. One must also develop strong network of partnerships relationships with dozens of vendors, suppliers, and professionals to help them align with the organization's values and culture. As a functional non-profit, one has to master the basic skills of non-profit governance, tax and compliance regulations, fundraising, marketing, volunteer management, strategy development, and community development. And on top of it one needs a lot of money to run this.

In addition to all that, Shahs had unwavering commitment to non-violence and compassion for all beings as their guiding principle. They would only provide plant-based feed or medicine not animal based products. Their faith and value system did not permit compassion for some at the cost of cruelty to others. This meant that they would only rescue and shelter birds or animals that thrived on grass or grains. They were to accept some omnivorous animals but certainly not any carnivorous animals. They also decided to not purchase animals. The sanctuary was created to shelter abused or neglected animals with a firm "No Kill" policy. Once adopted, they would keep them to the end of their natural lives. They would not breed animals nor return them to previous owners. As a commitment to not exploiting animals, they would compost eggs laid by any bird.

They also firmly believed that a sanctuary, as a practical matter could only do limited amount of work. Their 23-acre farm could possibly save a hundred lives directly. But extending compassion to a large number of animals, education and outreach was critical to their plan. Their sanctuary would serve as a host - a meeting place for humans to interact with farm animals.



People were surprised to learn that a pig was the fourth most intelligent animal in the world or cows have four stomach compartments or goats could climb a tree and some could jump as high as 5 ft. Visitors to the sanctuary could observe animals and birds in somewhat natural habitat and begin to appreciate their majestic lives. Through outreach programs

and education, visitors could choose to become vegetarian or vegan. Imagine this fact: One vegetarian can spare lives of 100 animals annually and over the lifetime may spare lives of 6,000 or 8,000 animals – far more than any animal sanctuary can possibly achieve.

Hence the Shahs decided to make theirs an open sanctuary. They shared innovative ideas in creating a more efficient and effective sanctuary and published all they learned with other existing and upcoming sanctuaries around the world to make a bigger impact for animals around the world. Their home for abandoned, abused and neglected farm animals was going to be a platform through which their stories could be heard and it resulted in the more compassionate world for animals everywhere. Through tours, community events, vegetarian and vegan cooking lessons and support programs it would inspire more people to adopt a plant-based lifestyle resulting in the rescuing of the multitude of animals from the life of suffering and cruelty.

The open sanctuary concept drew attention of scores of volunteers from neighboring towns. Their first volunteer workday drew 35 kindhearted strangers. They had found a winning formula – “**Connecting Communities through Compassion**”. Most of these volunteers were vegan and members of a local animal rights organization. After the first three resident horses, two pigs, two goats, chickens and roosters rescued from abandoned backyard were adopted in the sanctuary. Slowly the sanctuary became home to 30 animals. Every bird and animal was given a name like Franklin, Felix, Rudy, Benjamin, Oliver, Rocky and so on. Volunteers helped erect barns, and collect donations of surplus vegetables from nearby grocery stores for the animals.



A wealthy animal rights activist noticed their progress – and made a generous offer of \$600,000 as the matching grant to assist in purchasing a 40-acre farm with a barn, more amenities, and a 3 bedroom house. The new property was within 30 miles of 1.5 million people and more adaptable to convert into an animal sanctuary. In September of 2016,

the new property was purchased and is now the permanent home of the Luvin Arms Sanctuary. It is centrally located for everyone from Denver to Ft. Collins to Boulder just outside Erie, CO. It has a bigger parking area, community and education center, a food garden, and medical and quarantine barns. The slow process of moving from the rental property to the current property will be complete by March of 2017. The existing barn on the new property was eminently suitable for three horses and they were transferred first. In the first phase of construction activity, three barns; a multi-species barn for cows, goats, sheep, and pigs, a bird barn for hens, ducks and turkeys, and a dedicated rooster barn all of the various sizes, will have to be built before all animals can be transferred at the cost of \$300,000. Local ASPCA (American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) has already requested that they accept a few cows they have rescued. The sanctuary will be able to shelter 130 animals where animals will be able to graze freely.

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We got up early on Saturday morning to be at the new site as 20 volunteers were scheduled to arrive there to assist three construction workers in erecting of the first of the three barns that was going to be 50’ wide barn for cows, goats, sheep and pigs. Volunteers were already there when we reached the farm and the contractor’s men were guiding them into correctly positioning the tall posts as the outer periphery of the barn into ground.



had to finish making three barns in coming weeks. That evening as we were preparing to go home, Shaleen got a call from a farm hand at nearby feedlot that had 50,000 sheep. Two 6 months old sheep had stopped eating for a couple of days and were very weak. The farm hand asked if the sanctuary would accept them and Shaleen just sprang into action. He and a volunteer hitch a trailer to his truck and headed to rescue the two sheep. The sheep were brought to the new sanctuary and put in one of the empty stalls in the horse barn. A volunteer stayed behind to make them comfortable with blankets, feed, and water. It was past eleven that night when Shaleen reached home but he was still on the phone talking to the volunteer about how the sheep were doing.

When they broke for lunch, I got my chance to speak to the volunteers. I was amazed at their passion and determination that they

The next morning, the nearby church was to bring 15 sixth graders for a tour of the old sanctuary. This was my chance to see rest of the animals and see actual operation of the sanctuary. As soon as we got there, Shaleen got to work. He had to move some piles of feed and assist a couple of volunteers who were moving manure to a pile designated for it. When the kids arrived, they first presented a donation check for the sanctuary in the amount of \$350.00. Shaleen thanked them and proceeded to give a tour of the facility. He introduced each resident of the sanctuary by its name and told the story of how they arrived at the facility. A designated volunteer for every day of the week for morning or evening shift was responsible for feeding them and cleaning their stalls. Animals were weighed once a week and received wellness visit from veterinarians. There were four different veterinarians affiliated to the farm and each one of them responsible for certain species of animals. Kids asked many questions and promised to return as volunteers once they reached the age of 18.

Later in the day Shaleen and Shilpi were planning to take me to a vegan restaurant in Boulder before my flight back home but our plans changed abruptly with a phone call from the volunteer nurse practitioner at the sanctuary regarding deteriorating health of the two sheep that arrived the previous day. We were told that sheep needed to be examined and treated immediately by a veterinarian. Fortunately, CSU - Colorado State University in Ft. Collins (30 miles from the Sanctuary) has a Veterinarian Teaching Hospital with 24/7 staffing. Both sheep were loaded in a trailer hitched to Shaleen’s truck and the whole Shah family and I was on our way to the hospital. The vet at the hospital was briefed by the nurse practitioner at the farm about the symptoms observed by her and they were prepared to handle the emergency at 5:00 pm on a cold Sunday evening. Luvin Arm has an active relationship with the hospital and the paperwork was ready for admitting the animals quickly. After the initial diagnosis, we were told that the emergency tests and the first-night stay will cost around \$1,000 and the costs may escalate as treatment options become clear after 24 hours. Both Shilpi and Shaleen immediately consented to the cost estimates and instructed the hospital to do everything they could for both the sheep. As it turned out, the sheep might have to remain in the hospital for about two months, one sheep would be blind in one eye and the final bill from the hospital would be approximately \$10,000. We headed back from the hospital to the sanctuary, unhitched the trailer and headed to a restaurant near Denver Airport. My visit to the Sanctuary and with this remarkable couple was coming to a close. It just dawned on me that for the first time in my life, I was a vegan for the weekend and I liked it.

On my way home, I kept thinking about Shah family’s journey of compassion for the farm animals with steely determination. I watched them, on a cold December morning, as they got ready in the morning and went to the

sanctuary dressed like farmers rushing to go to work. They both had trained themselves to handle all kinds of tasks on the farm - driving the tractor, handling and feeding the animals, cleaning the stalls and some construction work etc. Shaleen shared that he devoted 60% of his time on the sanctuary and 40% of his time on his business that he runs from his home. In addition to raising the two boys, Shilpi considers looking after wellness of all the animal residents of the sanctuary, recordkeeping and all the office work for the sanctuary as her mission in life. Their little boys, Aarav and Avi know names of every resident of the sanctuary and think of themselves as guardians of them all.



Transitioning to a new permanent location, Shahs have undertaken a huge financial project. They have borrowed money against their home to fulfill urgent need to start building proper barns to house the animals that will need \$300,000. There is monthly cost of \$5,000 per month to feed for Wellness/Vet care and eventually there will be need to hire 5 staff positions for animal care, Outreach/Education and fund raising etc. at the cost of \$18,000.

Many animal shelters in America, like The Humane Society, keep the animals they receive for a fixed number of days and offer them free as pets to any takers. If no one comes forward in that period of time, shelters consider it humane to euthanize them – “put them to permanent sleep”. Luvin Arms is a “No Kill” facility. Jains of North America need to adopt this sanctuary as their own, as a token of their commitment to compassion and support the sanctuary. They need immediate help to build miles of fencing, and a medical barn.

Your generous support will continue to serve animals over many years. Luvin Arms is a 501 C (3) registered nonprofit organization and donations to it may be tax deductible. You may send the donations via Jivdaya Committee of JAINA and forward it to Rita Sheth 5308 E. 80th Place, Tulsa, OK 74136

Or send directly to:
Luvin Arms 3470 Country Road 7, Erie, CO 80516-8613.

For more information, visit their website at: www.LuvinArms.org or on facebook.com/luvinarms