

## Chapter 05 – Jain Laity or Householders (Shrāvakas and Shrāvikās)

Monks and nuns are very keen about the uplift of their souls and hence they sacrifice all worldly enjoyments and family relationships, and adopt the five great vows (Mahā-vratas).

For those who want to remain in family life, the complete avoidance of the five principle sins are difficult. For them Jain ethics specifies the following twelve vows to be carried out by the householder.

Of these twelve vows, the first five are main vows of limited nature (Anuvratas). They are somewhat easier in comparison with great vows (Mahā-vratas). The great vows are for the ascetics.

The next three vows are known as merit vows (Guna-Vratas), so called because they enhance and purify the effect of the five main vows and raise their value manifold. It also governs the external conduct of an individual.

The last four are called disciplinary vows (Shikshā-vratas). They are intended to encourage the person in the performance of their religious duties. They reflect the purity of one's heart. They govern one's internal life and are expressed in a life marked by charity. They are preparatory to the discipline of an ascetic's life.

The three merit vows (Gunavrata) and four disciplinary vows (Shikshā-vratas) together are known as the seven vows of virtuous conduct (Shilā).

A person may adopt these vows, according to his individual capacity and circumstances with the intent to adopt ultimately as full or great vows.

The layperson should be very careful while observing and following these limited vows. These vows being limited or restricted vows may still leave great scope for the commitment of sins and possession of property. The twelve vows are described as follows:

### ***Twelve Vows of Laity (Householders)***

#### **Five Main Vows of Limited Nature (Anuvratas):**

- |                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 01 Ahinsā Anuvrata       | - Non-violence Limited Vow   |
| 02 Satya Anuvrata        | - Truthfulness Limited Vow   |
| 03 Acharya Anuvrata      | - Non-stealing Limited Vow   |
| 04 Brahmacharya Anuvrata | - Chastity Limited Vow       |
| 05 Aparigraha Anuvrata   | - Non-attachment Limited Vow |

#### **Three Merit Vows (Guna-Vratas):**

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 06 Dik Vrata           | - Limited area of activity vow                       |
| 07 Bhoga Upphoga Vrata | - Limited use of consumable and non-consumable items |
| 08 Anartha-danda Vrata | - Avoidance of purposeless sins vow                  |

**Four Disciplinary Vows (Shikshā-vratas):**

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| 09 Sāmāyika Vrata         | - Meditation vow of limited duration     |
| 10 Desāvākāsika Vrata     | - Activity vow of limiting space         |
| 11 Paushadha Vrata        | - Ascetic's life vow of limited duration |
| 12 Atithi Samvibhāg Vrata | - Charity vow                            |

**Five Main Vows of Limited Nature (Anuvratas)**

**1. Non-violence Limited Vow (Ahinsā Anuvrata)**

In this vow, a person must not intentionally hurt any living being (plants, animals, human etc.) or their feelings either by thought, word or deed by himself or through others, or by approving such an act committed by somebody else. Intention in this case applies to selfish motives, sheer pleasure, and even avoidable negligence.

A person may use force, if necessary, in the defense of his country, society, family, life, property, and religious institute. His agricultural, industrial, occupational living activities do also involve injury to life, but it should be as minimum as possible, through being careful and using due precaution.

In Jain scripture the nature of violence is classified in four categories:

Premeditated Violence:

To attack someone knowingly

Defensive Violence:

To commit intentional violence in defense of one's own life

Vocational Violence:

To incur violence in the execution of one's means of livelihood

Common Violence:

To commit violence towards one sense living beings such as plants in the performance of daily activities

Premeditated violence is totally prohibited for all. A householder may not have a choice but to incur violence defensively and vocationally provided he maintains complete detachment. Common violence may be unavoidable for survival, but even here, one should minimize violence in all daily activities such as in preparing food, cleaning house, etc. This explains the Jain's practices of filtering drinking water, vegetarianism, not eating meals at night, and abstinence from alcohol. Nonviolence is the foundation of Jain ethics.

Lord Mahāvīr says:

'One should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture or kill any living being including animals, insects, plants, and vegetation.'

This is the essence of religion. It embraces the welfare of all living beings including animals, insects, vegetation ect. It is the basis of all stages of knowledge and the source of all rules of conduct.

## 2. Truthfulness Limited Vow (Satya Anuvrata)

The second of the five limited vows is Truth. It is more than abstaining from falsehood. It is seeing the world in its real form and adapting to that reality. The vow of truth puts a person in touch with his inner strength and inner capacities.

In this vow, a person avoids lies, such as giving false evidence, denying the property of others entrusted to him, avoid cheating others, etc. The vow is to be followed in thought, action, and speech, by doing it himself or by getting it done through others.

He should not speak the truth, if it harms others or hurts their feelings. He should, under these circumstances, keep silent.

## 3. Non-stealing (Achaurya / Asteya) Limited Vow

In this vow, a person must not steal, rob, or misappropriate others goods and property. He also must not cheat and use illegal means in acquiring worldly things by himself or nor through others or by approving such acts committed by others.

## 4. Chastity (Brahmacharya) Limited Vow

The basic intent of this vow is to conquer passion and to prevent the waste of energy. Positively stated, the vow is meant to impart the sense of serenity to the soul.

In this vow, the householder must not have a sensual relationship with anybody but one's own lawfully wedded spouse. Even with one's own spouse, excessive indulgence of all kinds of sensual pleasure need to be avoided.

## 5. Non-possession / Non-attachment (Aparigraha) Limited Vow

Non-possession is the fifth limited vow. As long as a person does not know the richness of joy and peace that comes from within, he tries to fill his emptiness and insecure existence with the clutter of material acquisitions.

One must impose a limit on one's needs, acquisitions, and possessions such as land, real estate, goods, other valuables, animals, money, etc. The surplus should be used for the common good. One must also limit every day usage of the number of food items, or articles and their quantity.

The Jain principle of limited possession for householders helps the equitable distribution of wealth, comforts, etc., in the society. Thus Jainism helps in establishing socialism, economic stability, and welfare in the world.

Non-possession, like non-violence, affirms the oneness of all life and is beneficial to an individual in his spiritual growth and to society for the redistribution of wealth.

## Three Merit Vows (Guna-Vratas)

### 6. Limited Area of Activity Vow (Dik Vrata)

This vow limits one's worldly activities to certain area in all the ten directions; north, south, east, west, north-east, north-west, south-east, south-west, above and below. A person gives up committing sins in any place outside the limited areas of his worldly activity. This vow

provides a space limit to the commitments of minor sins such as defensive, vocational, and common violence for our survival not restricted by the limited vows of non-violence. Thus outside the limited area, the limited vows assumes the status of full vow (Mahā Vratas).

#### 7. Limited use of Consumable / Non-consumable items vow (Bhoga-Upbhoga Vrata)

Generally one commits a sin by one's use or enjoyment of consumable (Bhoga) and non-consumable (Upbhoga) objects.

Consumable (Bhoga) means enjoyment of an object, which can only be used once, such as food and drink. Non-consumable (Upabhoga) means enjoyment of an object, which can be used several times, such as furniture, clothes, ornaments, and buildings.

One should, therefore, limit the use of these two objects in accordance with one's need and capacity by taking these vows. This vow limits the quantity and number of items to the commitment of minor sins not restricted by non-possession limited vow (Aparigraha Anuvrata).

#### 8. Avoidance of Purposeless and Unnecessary Sins Vow (Anartha-danda Vrata)

One must not commit unnecessary or purposeless sin or moral offense as defined below.

- Thinking, talking, or preaching evil or ill of others
- Doing inconsiderate or useless acts such as walking on grass unnecessarily
- Manufacturing or supplying arms for attack
- Reading or listening to obscene literature, or carelessness in ordinary behavior

#### Four Disciplinary Vows (Shikshā-vratas)

#### 9. Equanimity or Meditation Vow of Limited Duration (Sāmāyika Vrata)

This vow consists in sitting down at one place for at least 48 minutes concentrating one's mind on religious activities like reading religious books, praying, or meditating. This vow may be repeated many times in a day. It is to be observed by mind, body, and speech.

The meditation of 48 minutes makes a person realize the importance of the life long vow to avoid all sinful activities and is a stepping-stone to a life of full renunciation. During Sāmāyika time, one meditates on the soul and its relationship with karma.

One should practice this vow of Sāmāyika by giving up affection and aversion (Rag and Dvesha), observing equanimity towards all objects, thinking evil of no one, and being at peace with the world.

#### 10. Limited Duration of Activity Vow (Desāvākāsika Vrata)

This vow sets new limits to the limitations already set by Dik Vrata and Bhoga Upbhoga Vrata. The general life long limitation of doing business in certain areas and the use of articles are further restricted for particular days and times of the week. This means that one shall not, during a certain period of time, do any activity, business, or travel beyond a certain city, street, or house.

### 11. Limited Ascetic's Life Vow (Paushadha Vrata)

This vow requires a person, to live the life of a monk for a day or longer. During this time one should retire to a secluded place, renounce all sinful activities, abstain from seeking pleasure from all objects of the senses, and observe due restraint of body, speech and mind. A person follows five great vows (Mahā-vratas) completely during this time. He passes his time in spiritual contemplation, performs meditation (Sāmāyika), engages in self-study, reads scriptures, and worships Gods (Arihantas and Siddhas). This vow promotes and nourishes one's religious life and provides training for ascetic life.

### 12. Charity Vow (Atithi Samvibhāg Vrata)

One should give food, clothes, medicine, and other articles of his own possession to monks, nuns, and pious and needy people. The food offered should be pure and given with reverence.

One should not prepare any food especially for monks or nuns because they are not allowed to have such food. Donating of one's own food and articles to monks and others provides an inner satisfaction and raises one's consciousness to higher level. It also saves him from acquiring more sins if he would have used the same for his nourishment, comfort and pleasure.

### Peaceful Death (Sanllekhanā):

In the final days of life, a householder can attain a peaceful death if he/she truly follows the above twelve vows. The peaceful death is characterized by non-attachment to worldly objects and by a suppression of passions at the time of death. The last thought should be of a calm renunciation of the body, and this thought should be present long before death supervenes.

### Conclusion:

By performing these twelve vows, a lay follower may live a righteous life and advance towards a fuller and more perfect life, and conquer desire. While earning wealth, supporting family, and taking up arms to protect himself, his family, his country, against intruders, he is taught self-restraint, love and enmity. On one hand, he is debarred from doing any harm to himself, to his family, to his country, or to humanity by reckless conduct. On the other hand, by giving up attachments he gradually prepares himself for the life of ascetics.

If one goes deeper into the rules laid down, he will find that the practice of limiting the number of things to be kept or enjoyed eliminates the danger of concentration of wealth at one point, which will help to minimize poverty and crime in society. Thus limiting the desires of individuals, results in an ideal society.