

## Twelve Vows of Layperson

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

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

Of this twelve vows, the first five are main vows of limited nature (Anuvratas). They are somewhat easier in comparison with great vows (Maha-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 (Shikhsa-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 that is marked by charity. They are preparatory to the discipline of an ascetic's life.

Three merit vows (Gunavrats) and four disciplinary vows (Shikhsa-vratas) together are known as Seven vows of virtuous conduct (Shilas).

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

The layperson should be very careful while observing and following these limited vows. This 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:

Five Main Vows of Limited Nature (Anuvratas):

1. Ahimsa Anuvrat - Non-violence Limited Vow
2. Satya Anuvrat - Truthfulness Limited Vow
3. Achaurya Anuvrat - Non-stealing Limited Vow
4. Bhramacharya Anuvrat - Chastity Limited Vow
5. Aparigraha Anuvrat - Non-attachment Limited Vow

Three Merit Vows (Guna-vrats):

6. Dik Vrata - Limited area of activity vow
7. Bhoga-Upbhoga Vrata - Limited use of consumable and non-consumable items vow
8. Anartha-danda Vrata - Avoidance of purposeless sins vow

## Four Disciplinary Vows (Siksha-vratas):

9. Samayik Vrata - Meditation vow of limited duration
10. Desavakasika Vrata - Activity vow of limiting space
11. Pausadha Vrata - Ascetic's life Vow of limited duration
12. Atithi Samvibhaga Vrata - Limited charity vow

## 1. Non-violence Limited Vow (Ahimsa Anuvrat):

In this vow, a person must not intentionally hurt any living being (plants, animals, humans etc.) or their feeling either by thought, word or deed, himself, or through others, or by approving such an act committed by somebody else.

Intention in this case applies selfish motive, sheer pleasure and even avoidable negligence.

He may use force, if necessary, in the defense of his country, society, family, life, property, religious institute.

His agricultural, industrial, occupational living activities do also involve injury to life, but it should be as minimum as possible, through carefulness and due precaution.

Four stages of violence are described:

- 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 in the performance of daily activities

Premeditated violence is prohibited for all. A householder is permitted to incur violence defensively and vocationally provided he maintains complete detachment. Common violence is accepted for survival, but even here, one should be careful 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 Mahavir says:

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

This is the essence of religion. It embraces the welfare of all animals. It is the basis of all stages of knowledge and the source of all rules of conduct.

## 2. Truthfulness Limited Vow (Satya Anuvrat):

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, and 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 silence.

### 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, nor through others or by approving such an act committed by others.

### 4. Chastity (Bhramacharya) 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 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 empty and insecure existence with the clutter of material acquisitions.

Lord Mahavir said, security born of material things is a delusion. To remove this delusion, one takes the vow of non-possession and realizes the perfection of the soul.

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 the every day usage of number of food items, or articles and their quantity.

This Jain principle of limited possession for householders helps in 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 the society for the redistribution of wealth.

### 6. Dik Vrata - Limited Area of Activity Vow

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 sins not restricted by the limited vows of non-violence. Thus outside the limited area, the limited vows assumes the status of full vow (Maha-vratas).

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

Generally one commits the 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, cloths, ornaments, buildings.

One should, therefore, limit the use of these two items in accordance with one's need and capacity by taking these vows.

This vow limits the quantity of items to the commitments of sins not restricted by Aparigraha Anuvrata.

#### 8. Anartha-danda Vrata - Avoidance of Purposeless Sins Vow

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 the grass unnecessarily
- Manufacturing or supplying arms for attack
- Reading or listening, immoral literature, or carelessness in ordinary behavior

#### 9. Samayik Vrata - Limited Meditation Vow

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 a life long vow to avoid all sinful activities and is a stepping stone to a life of full renunciation. During Samayik time, one meditates on soul and its relationship with karma.

By giving up affection and aversion (Rag and Dvesha), observing equanimity in all objects, thinking evil of no one, and being at peace with the world, one should practice this vow of meditation (Samayik).

#### 10. Desavakasika Vrata - Limited Duration of Activity Vow

This vow sets the new limit within 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 a particular days and time 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, house.

#### 11. Pausadha Vrata - Limited Ascetic's Life Vow

This vow requires a person, living a life of a monk for a day. During this time one should retire to a secluded place, renounce all sinful activities, abstain in seeking pleasure from all objects of the senses, observe due restraint of body, speech and mind. A person follows five great vows (Maha-vratas) completely during this time. He passes his time in spiritual contemplation, perform meditation (Samayik), engage in self-study, read scriptures, and worship Gods (Arihants and Siddhas).

This vow promotes and nourishes one's religious life and provides training for ascetic life.

## 12. Atithi Samvibhaga Vrata - Limited Charity Vow

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

One should not prepare any foods especially for monks or nuns because they are not allowed to have such foods. 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 of more sins if he would have used the same for his nourishment, comfort and pleasure.

### Peaceful Death:

In the final days of life, a householder can observe a peaceful death. The house-holder can attain a peaceful death (Sallekhana) if he truly follows the above twelve vows. The peaceful death is characterized by non-attachment to the worldly objects and by a suppression of the passions at the time of death. The last thought should be of a calm renunciation of the body, and this thought should ever 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 intruder, 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 his 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 practice of limiting the number of things to be kept or enjoyed by himself eliminates the danger of concentration of wealth at one point, which will help to minimize poverty and crime in the society. Thus limiting the desires of individuals results in an ideal society.