

Vows of Householders - Part 1

Twelve Limited Vows of Householders

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 full or 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 the 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
- 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

To be continued...