

## LESSON 01

## CHARITRA

Charitra means the conduct. The conduct here does not mean just doing good or bad things but it is more than that. Charitra allows us to restrain from our inner desires so that there would be no harm done to any other living creature no matter how minute it may be or in any form. The charitra can reach to the peak when there is no attachment or hatred for things around or anywhere. It is not as easy as it sounds, because we usually develop the new habits while discarding some of the old ones. In order to change our habits, we must take the help of voluntary vows to restrict what we do and how we do, which eventually would lead us to naturally restrained life. Although different people take different vows, we should have ultimate goal to attain right conduct. As we find in the scriptures these vows have been divided into two main groups:

**Major Vows or Absolute (Maha) Vows (Vratas) for monks and nuns**  
**Minor Vows or Relative (Anu) Vows (Vratas) for householders**

### **Major Vows (Maha Vratas)**

In these vows, non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possessiveness are observed mentally, verbally, and physically in total. Each of these three aspects is further observed in three ways: not committing such acts, not asking anyone else to do, and not encouraging anyone else to do. Those who wish to observe these vows renounce worldly lives voluntarily and become sadhus (monks) and sadhvis (nuns). They are also called Anagari (no home). They are:

#### **1) Absolute Non-Violence Vow (Savvao Panaivayao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, non-violence is observed mentally, verbally, and physically in total including for daily needs.

#### **2) Absolute Truthfulness Vow (Savvao Musavayao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, lying is given up mentally, verbally, and physically in total. Only the truth is spoken.

#### **3) Absolute Non-Stealing Vow (Savvao Aadinnadanao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, stealing is given up mentally, verbally, and physically in total. Nothing is taken unless it is offered by the owner, and meets the restrictions of the monkhood life.

#### **4) Absolute Celibacy Vow (Savvao Mehunao Virman Vrata)**

Celibacy is observed mentally, verbally, and physically in total. Upon taking this vow, one can not even touch or think about a member of the opposite sex even including children.

#### **5) Absolute Non-Possessiveness Vow (Savvao Parigrahaao Virman Vrata)**

Greed and material possessions are given up mentally, verbally, and physically in total. Only items needed for a daily life are kept. (Digambara monks do not wear even clothes for this reason.)

### **Minor Vows (Anu Vratas)**

It is difficult for householders to fully observe the Major Vows and so, the vows they take are limited to some extent and therefore they are called minor vows. These vows are not as stringent as Major vows and people who take these vows are called shrawaks, shrawikas, or Agari (with home). They are grouped in to three:

#### **A. Minor Vows (Anu Vratas)**

##### **1) Vow of Limited Non-Violence (Sthool Panaivayao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, non-violence is observed towards living beings of two to five senses. While utmost care is to be taken to minimize the violence towards one sensed living beings because it would be hard to carry out daily life without this.

##### **2) Vow of Limited Truthfulness (Sthool Musavayao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, one should take the utmost care not to tell the lies.

##### **3) Vow of Limited Non-Stealing (Sthool Aadinnadanao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, one should take the utmost care not to steal or borrow the belongings of the others without their permission.

##### **4) Vow of Limited Celibacy (Sthool Mehunao Virman Vrata)**

In this vow, one should be faithful to the spouse and should not have extramarital sexual relationship.

##### **5) Sthool Parigrahao Virman Vrata (Vow of Limited Non-Possessiveness)**

In this vow, the earning for the material possessions and the greed for the collection should be as minimum as possible.

#### **B. Supplementary vows (Sila-Vratas):** They are divided into two groups:

##### **I. Supporting Vows (Guna Vratas)**

##### **II. Training Vows (Shiksha Vratas)**

##### **I. Supporting Vows (Guna Vratas)**

The following Guna vats support the above five vows so that they can be carried out more effectively.

##### **6) Vow of Limited Geographic Movements (Disha Pariman Vrata)**

In this vow, one should set limits within the scope of the travel or business, etc. Since it is necessary to move only so much to satisfy the needs, one should limit the desire to perform activities within the needed area.

##### **7) Vow of Limited Consumption and Occupation (Bhogobhog Virman vrata)**

In this vow, one should set limits on the consumption of various items whether they are used once or repeatedly. In this vow, one should also limit to the type of occupation to select because some occupations have more exposure to violence than the others.

##### **8) Vow of Limited Purposeless Violence (Anartha Dand Virati Vrata)**

In this vow, we limit our purposeless activities.

## II. Training Vows (Shiksha Vats)

The above eight vows tell us how we can limit our actions in order to reduce the influx of the karma. The next four vows train us to prevent karma from coming in and also to get rid of the existing karmas.

### 9) Vow of Self-control or Equanimity (Samayik Vrata)

Since we live a social life, it may not be possible to spend much time in shedding karmas, but we should spend at least forty-eight minutes a day in such efforts. During these forty-eight minutes, we give up all familial, social, economical, and cultural responsibilities, and we control ourselves mentally, verbally, and physically. During this time we should concentrate on religious readings or meditation, which will help prevent new karma from coming in as well as help us get rid of our old karma. These 48 minutes will also give us a glimpse as to how easy or difficult it may be to control ourselves. Once we become accustomed to doing this, we may extend the self-control time to a period of more than 48 minutes.

### 10) Vow of Day to Day Additional Limitation (Dishavakashik Vrata)

At the time of waking up, we take this vow in order to put definite limits on our activities for that day, and thus, limit our exposure to accumulating karma. In this way we learn to live a more controlled life.

### 11) Vow of Monkshood Exposure (Paushadh Vrata)

This vow teaches us how to live like a monk, or a nun, for a day. By taking this vow, we give up all our household, social, economical, and cultural responsibilities for a day. We should practice this vow as often as possible. By practicing this vow, the inflow of new karma is slowed down, and existing karmas are eradicated. If this vow is easy to observe, it may eventually lead to monkshood.

### 12) Vow of Selfless Offerings to sadhus and sadhvis (Atithi Savinbhag Vrata)

This vow teaches us to share. Sharing is more worthwhile when sadhus or sadhvis come to our door and we offer them with an open heart. Monks and nuns are the best receptors for this type of sharing. However, while giving or after giving we should not have any regrets or expectations in our mind. By sharing, we are developing a sense of detachment with the feeling that nothing is mine. Observing this vow will lead to liberation from worldly life.

Our thoughts while taking these vows are also very important. They should be positive and meant to destroy karmas.

We sometimes carry out activities for fun or to tease our friends and foes. However, we should realize that all such activities attract karmas. This vow reminds us not to build unnecessary karma.

There are three common obstacles to the vows:

**a) Deception (Maya)**

When we take a vow, it should be for the betterment of our soul. Vows should not be taken to show-off or receive praise. Also, they should not be taken to deceive others or they will produce inferior results.

**b) Expectations (Niyamu)**

Many of us take vows in order to gain something materialistic in return. That is not good because not only we use up what we gain, but we lose the main purpose of performing vows to destroy karmas.

**c) Wrong Beliefs (Mithyatva)**

This occurs when one, without belief in liberation, takes the vow thinking vows would bring the ultimate pleasure in this life. We should not forget that austerities are performed to liberate the wandering soul from worldly engrossment. We must understand the value of the vows mentally, verbally, as well as physically, or they will not bear the proper results.

If we can live with these ethics, then, we will eventually be living with right conduct.