

LESSON 18

VOW OF OFFERINGS TO SADHUS AND SADHVIS (ATITHI SAMVIBHAGA VRATA)

The word atithi in Jainism has a special meaning and it should not be taken in general sense. Atithi word is formed of two parts. “A” means none or not and “Tithi” means special auspicious days for spiritual celebration. So “Atithi” means those people who have not limited their spiritual activities only on auspicious days but every day for them are an auspicious day. These people as per Jainism are sadhus and sadhvis. So, word “Atithi” in Jainism is reserved for sadhus and sadhvis. Sometime when there are no sadhus or sadhvis around then it is used for Jain shrawakas (male house holders) and shrawikas (female house holders). While for other guests the word is “Abhyagat”. So these two words should be understood in their own perspective. Therefore, under this vow shrawakas and shrawikas offer acceptable food and water as per their restrictions and items which are also acceptable for daily needs to sadhus and sadhvis so that they can carry out their austerities without any hurdles. The person offers food or needed items with a feeling of selflessness, love, joy and respect.

Some of the common items given to sadhus or sadhvis are: Achet food, Achet water, clothing, pots, blankets, and towels for the feet, etc. We must never give sadhu unboiled water, bread hot from the fire, bread on which green vegetables have rested, or anything that has gone bad. We must not call a servant and tell him to give the alms to an ascetic, but we must get up and give them ourselves, and must give without conceit.

The sadhus and sadhvis on their part must never send a message beforehand of their coming.

Offering alm is geed deed and accumulates good karma, as shown in incident below. Once upon a time in the state of Rajgriha there was a poor boy, so poor that he rarely tasted rich food. But once as a great treat his mother prepared a dish of rice and milk and sugar. Just at that moment a sadhu came by, and this boy offered this tempting dish to him. As a result this boy was born in his next incarnation as the son of a rich merchant, and he became a sadhu, and in his next birth will proceed to mochas.

For whatever reasons, lapses may happen while observing this vow. The following are common examples:

- 1) Mixing inanimate and animate things while offering,
- 2) Covering inanimate with animate things with an intention to avoid offering,
- 3) Offering something, which is spoiled, fermented or stale,
- 4) Asking others to offer instead of offering myself, in spite of being personally able to offer, or
- 5) Indulging in pride for offering.