

YAMA – PRINCIPLE-5 - Aparigraha

(Need, Not Greed)

1) What is Aparigraha? - Aparigraha is the concept of non-possessiveness. It means to detach from people, places, and material things. It urges us letting go of everything that we do not need and possessing only as much as necessary. Aparigraha means to avoid enjoyment of such amenities and comforts of life which are unnecessary for the preservation of life

2) Quotation - *aparigrahasthairye janmakathamtasambodhah*

One, who is not greedy is secured. He has time to think deeply.

His understanding of himself is complete.

“The more we have, the more we need to take care of it. The time and energy spent on acquiring more things, protecting them and worrying about them cannot be spent on the most basic questions of life. What is the limit to what we should possess? For what purpose, for whom and for how long? Death comes before we have had time to even begin considering these questions.”

Translation and commentary by TKV Desikachar.

(3) What does “taking only what is necessary for you to live” really mean?

This means that we must have the basic objects to live a comfortable, safe and healthy life and that the purpose of material things we have in our life is to allow us to live this way. Instead of thinking of possessions as status symbols or something that represents our success, they should be thought of as simply tools that allow us to accomplish our goals in life.

While it is important that we have certain material objects in our life so that we can live comfortably, becoming obsessed over material possessions can result in these possessions controlling our life. Viewing material objects as tools that allows us to accomplish our goals in life can free us from being controlled by these objects. Our focus should not be outward to material objects, but instead, our focus should be inward on a spiritual journey that allows us to purify ourselves and also to be able to create positive change in the universe.

In practicing aparigraha the objects of pleasure will increase or decrease with person, place and time; but the definition of aparigraha, as mentioned above, will be applicable to all persons, in all countries and at all times.

The lesser thing we have the less attached we are, and the freer we feel, the happier we are.

Aparigraha -Gandhiji’s Story

Gandhi was passionate about the virtue of simple living, and despite being quite well-off in his barrister days, made a point of cutting his own hair and doing his own laundry. He could never get his head around the idea of servants, and when his ashram was established near Ahmadabad,

caused considerable controversy by getting everyone involved in cleaning the bathrooms. This was a time when only 'untouchables' did this work.

When the family was leaving South Africa to return to India, they were showered with gifts of jewelry in thanks for Gandhi's legal and political efforts in the Indian community. Though his wife naturally wanted to wear the jewelry, such show off was against Gandhi's principles, and he instead put the pieces into a trust. Over the years the interest from this deposit was used to assist various community needs, and his wife later saw the value of the act.

This simple living philosophy was inspired by the principle of *aparigraha*, or non-possession. The principle incorporated the idea of trusteeship, or wisely utilizing goods for the benefit all. Though he had needed to set up two or three houses for his family, Gandhi came to believe that possessions only created the illusion of security and certainty, which in reality could not be provided by anything or anyone except God. He relates the time he was charmed by a life insurance salesman and took out a policy to protect his family in the event of his death. He later cancelled the policy, believing it to be a moral mistake.

Story of Vishnu-dasa: Aparigraha means not to grasp or clutch onto things. One should not be greedy and should learn to live with few possessions. Many years ago in south India there lived a pious Brahmin named Vishnu-dasa. His life provides a good example of a man who firmly practiced Aparigraha.

Vishnu-dasa lived during the time of the King Chola of Kanchi. King Chola prided himself on his piety. He offered fresh flowers and pearls to the gods in his daily worship. One day while the king was offering his prayers, the simple Vishnu-dasa arrived at the temple. Unmindful of the king, he sat down to pray. During his worship, Vishnu-dasa offered the gods a few holy Tulasi leaves and some clear, fresh water from an earthen pot.

Seeing this, the proud king was offended, "You poor Brahmin, how dare you offer the Lord such meager offerings? You shall never attain the kingdom of heaven." Let us see who attains the kingdom of the gods first," replied Vishnu-dasa. On returning to his palace, the king called his minister and asked, "what shall I do to please the gods?" "Why not make a grand charitable home for the needy and the poor, your Honor?" "That's an excellent idea. Let the work commence immediately" commanded the king.

The pious Vishnu-dasa meanwhile continued to live an austere life devoted to prayer and worship. He lived simply and ate only one meal a day. One day after completing his prayers, the poor Brahmin, Vishnu-dasa, cooked his food and left it to cool on the window. He then went out for a short walk. When he returned he found that someone had eaten his food. The next day the same thing happened. The thefts continued daily. Deprived of his daily meal Vishnu-dasa thought, "Perhaps the gods want me to fast."

A few days later, while Vishnu-dasa was walking around as his food cooled, he noticed a ragged beggar creeping up to the window. As Vishnu dasa watched unobserved, he saw a hungry wretch stuffing food into his mouth and then sneaking away. Vishnu-dasa felt very sorry for the starved beggar. Noticing that the beggar had left the butter uneaten, Vishnu-dasa ran after him, "Please wait," shouted Vishnu-dasa, "you have forgotten to eat the butter!" But the beggar ran faster, thinking that Vishnu-dasa wanted to beat him.

