

The Ishaya Tradition, Part V:
The Five Novitiate Vows
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[*Note: All of the vows in the Ishaya Tradition are discussed in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. They are not promises made to an external institution or group; they are practices that, when observed, speed one's journey on the path of enlightenment. An understanding of the true, deeper meanings of these observances can give great insight into the Tradition of Ascension, and Vishvananda has already written a wonderful explanation. With his permission, we reprint it as Part 5 of the series. Jai Isham Ishvaram*]

One of the most ancient and powerful paths of growth is that of the Renunciate. Whether called a monk, nun, yogi, sannyasi, brahmachari, apostle, or initiate, one who has the ability and desire to slough off the worries of the world can benefit greatly from the commitment to one-pointed focus. It often propels the spirit forward more quickly than any other means of expansion. In the Ishaya Tradition, the first step to becoming a Renunciate is known as the Novitiate path. While "leaving the world" is not for everyone, (in fact it's not for many at all) it can be extremely beneficial to examine the commitment of the Novitiate life and see how its principals can be applied to modern existence.

Novitiates in the Ishaya Tradition take five vows. In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, each of these five is known as a **yama**, a *death* (an extreme word, but useful because it esoterically implies the complete release of mental investment). These five yamas are like different facets of a perfect gem; each facet is glorious, but is most beautiful when viewed in its connection with the supernal glory of the entire jewel. Collectively they represent the supreme Death of the ego, of pain, of suffering. It is important to note, though, that they are not and were never intended to cause an aversion to worldly life. It is sad that the modern world has so twisted spirituality that many of the internal values of renunciation have been sacrificed on the altar of materiality. ***The vows are primarily about a state of mind, not a course of action.***

The first and most important of the five Novitiate Vows is **Ahimsa**, often translated *non-violence*. It is most important because it is the beginning of the path, the first step on the journey, which, if missed, will lead the traveller astray. So what is this non-violence? Many have assumed that this means, as it sounds in English, to cease causing harm to any being. Aside from being virtually impossible (the body kills thousands of living organisms called bacteria every day), this way of thinking is also a misinterpretation of the essence of the vow. If we look at the vow in its original language—Sanskrit-- we notice that it comes from **a**, which means *not*, and *himsa* which is the desiderative form of the verb **han** (*to strike, obstruct, repress*). For us non-language-majors, that means that **himsa** actually means *desiring to strike*, giving us the following translations for **Ahimsa**: *not desiring to strike, not wishing to obstruct, and not desiring to repress*. Immediately we see that non-violence means removing the anger and limitations in our own minds. If this is done without judgement or repression, the natural result will be that all violence disappears in our environment as well.

The second vow, **Satya**, or *truthfulness*, arises from a combination of **sat**—*being, existing*, and **ya**—*relating to*. Therefore, a more accurate translation of **Satya** is *beingness, or existence*. What disturbs the innocent nature of pure beingness? Quite simply, it is dishonesty. This dishonesty doesn't really have anything to do with the outer world, except for the fact that someone who is lying to himself or herself will often lie to others. Dishonesty is lying to ourselves, creating illusory worlds in our own minds. These worlds are divorced from the Reality of existence; they are based on a dream. By aligning ourselves with **Satya**, we destroy these false realities, and enliven the natural laws that cause life to function in harmony; all of our True desires are supported and fulfilled by Mother Nature.

Asteya, or *non-stealing*, is the third vow of the Ishayas. Again we see the syllable **a**—*not*. This time, though, it is combined with **steya**—*adornment, envelopment*, (from **snai**—*to adorn, to envelop* and **ya**—*relating to*) giving us *without adornment* and *non-envelopment* as translations for **Asteya**. This vow is about not taking from others, but more importantly, it is not adopting any false beliefs that separate us from the Truth. The most common of these beliefs are those of ownership. In essence, we wrap ourselves in the armor of objects and ideas, hoping to insulate ourselves from pain and suffering. Unfortunately we find that, as we do so, we also desensitize ourselves to the beauty and joy that is inherent in all things. We stop stealing, not because it is bad, but because it directly inhibits our enjoyment in life. It is further true that by mastering **Asteya**, by not stealing ownership of any thought word or deed from the forces of the universe, that all the precious treasure of the world presents itself to us.

The fourth death is known as **Brahmacharya**, usually translated *self-restraint* and interpreted to mean celibacy. Its root is **Brahman**—*expansion, evolution, the Ascendant*, which is combined with **charya**—*action, practice, in union with* (from **char**—*go, act, practice, unite with* and **ya**—*relating to*) for translations like: *the action of the One, practice that leads to evolution, pervasion of all of life with the Ascendant*. This is the most active of the first five vows. At the deepest level, it is simply being in union with the Ascendant, but it also implies taking the action necessary to bring forth The One in all areas of life. It means doing whatever we can to direct our attention back to the Source at all times. Sexuality, especially as it is sometimes used in the world today, *can* take our attention away from this Source and lock it in the experience of limitation, but to say that this vow means that you are not allowed to be sexual in order to gain enlightenment is a gross misunderstanding of its essential nature. Mastering **Brahmacharya** is never losing sight of the Absolute, no matter what you happen to be doing. It also confers upon us the ability to save others from their suffering by showing them the power of the Ascendant.

The final Novitiate Vow is **Aparigraha**, *non-grasping*. **A**—*not*, **pari**—*around, fully, away from*, and **graha**—*take, seize, obtain* together translate: *not holding on, not fully obtaining*. The nature of life is constant movement; things constantly change from one moment to the next. At some point we began to believe that safety lies in stability. This resulted in the tendency to adopt a stable belief system and defend it to the death. In extreme cases, people will spend all of their energy attempting to force their environment into a rigid form, not allowing the slightest change in their world. This is unfortunate, because letting go of this control allows us to begin to see the perfectly orderly movement of nature. Every state of existence flows into the next, and the next, to eventually be replaced by the first again. Mastering **Aparigraha** clears our perception of this flow and ultimately brings knowledge of the past and future.

Now that we have seen the individual meanings of the Novitiate Vows, let's take a moment to see how they work together. It is no accident that the **yamas** are written in the above order. Non-violence is the first because it is our healing of the past. It takes all self-judgment and pain and transmutes it into energy that can be used in the present. The natural result of this healing is that we can finally be honest with ourselves. There is no more need to create illusions that keep the pain of self-judgment away. As truth infuses our lives, we naturally no longer need to envelop ourselves in objects and ideas; we can stand naked before the glory of God. The energy that was before used in protection can now be directed to the Totality. It naturally wants to return to its source, it has only been our constant redirection that has kept it bound. Just as non-violence heals our relationship to the past, non-grasping takes the power of the five vows and, moment-by-moment, directs it into the future. It allows us to let each Now melt away so the next can come without hindrance. Each vow follows in the wake of the last, each builds on the foundation of the previous and builds higher the castle of Freedom.

These vows are not just for the Renunciate, they can be directly applied to anyone's life to whatever extent that he or she desires. They are infinitely useful, because they make life simpler and simpler. There is no need to intellectualise or rationalize; we simply align all actions with the Truths of the five deaths. Most importantly, these deaths arise naturally from the simple process of Ascending. The more we Ascend, the more our previous impressions of pain and suffering are healed and the more non-violent we become, beginning the infusion of all of life with the power of the **yamas**.

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