

ANUVRAT – THE JAIN PATH TO SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND WORLD PEACE

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Birth of the Anuvrat Movement

I consider it an honour to have been invited to make this presentation before the distinguished representatives of various religious traditions of the world who have assembled here again after one hundred years to know more of one another's beliefs and ways that can help individuals and groups to realize that the common aim of all faiths is to make human beings live together as brothers and sisters and fill their lives with happiness. I express my profound gratitude to the organizing committee for giving me an opportunity to introduce a movement that seeks individual commitment to certain basic human values – the degeneration of which is at the root of the wars, conflicts and various forms of violence that we see in different parts of the world today. Before I saw something about what *anuvrat* stands for or about its origin and history I must make it clear that it is a network of self-transformed people who volunteer to discipline themselves by accepting small vows and adhering to them out of conviction without expecting any reward for it. It is a movement of small vows or what we call a movement to rid society, nation and the world of moral filth and hatred. It is based on the view that the transformation of an individual into a responsible self-disciplined human being will lead naturally to the ushering in of a nonviolent socio-political world order paving the way for the lasting peace in the world which is torn by strife, terrorism and narrow nationalistic considerations. Selfishness seems to hold the people fast in its grip. It is being institutionalized rapidly and the outlook of the people is getting narrower and narrower.

The Anuvrat Movement has been engaged in the noble task of uplifting human life and revitalizing the rapidly crumbling moral and spiritual values among the people of the world irrespective of caste, creed and colour for the last forty four years.

Launched in March 1, 1949 by Acharya Shree Tulsi – the head of a Jain Sect and a leading visionary of India – the Movement has since grown steadily in size and stature. Though it does not lay claim to any spectacular success or achievement, there is no gainsaying the fact that its universal

appeal for self-awakening has created a great impact on the outlook and behaviour of many people. It was hailed and patronized by eminent people like the late Dr. Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajgopalachari, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Jai Prakash Narayan. It has been striving to infuse with new life people degenerating fast into what T.S. Eliot aptly calls 'automatons or living shadows inhabiting the great wasteland.'

On the day the Anuvrat Movement was launched, the Acharya declared:

1. First comes religion; and then the community or sect.
2. Though sects can be many, there can be only one religion.
3. Religion and politics must be kept apart.
4. Religion must take care of and improve the life of the people in the present and must not merely stress the hereafter.
5. It is character and not worship that is central to religion.

For those concerned about religious reconciliation and welfare of all human beings the message was clear. Narrow sectarianism and parochialism of all kinds was subversive of true religion. If there is only one religion, it will be for all humans whatever and wherever they are. Though there is no acceptance name for this human religion, it would be humanism in the best sense of the world. Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Jainism will all be then names of different sects and not of religions. If taken in the right spirit the above formulation will rule out the possibility of all feuds and wars in the name of religion, for by definition the latter can only be a unifying factor and an instrument for common weal. Further, life in this world is more important than that after death. Religious concerns should directly aim at improving the quality of life and righteousness of conduct should take precedence over formal and ritualistic practices associated with orthodox religion. Here was a veritable manifesto of good living and doing good.

Anuvrat means a small or basic vow. No vow, truly speaking, is either small or great. What is meant by a 'small' vow that is not accepted in its fullness. The name has its origin in the Jain tradition. Lord Buddha laid down the Middle Path for the monks. Lord Mahavir set forth a Middle Path for the ordinary householders. It is anuvrat. Acharya Tulsi took cue from Mahavira's programme to purify the life of his shravaks and gave it the form of a mass movement transcending all sectarian bounds. As a way it stands between violence and nonviolence. As far as possible, it is the path of nonviolence. A life without any restraint results in violence, whereas complete restraint leads to nonviolence. The former is harmful; the latter very difficult to achieve. It was this insight that lay behind anuvrat. If one

finds complete restraint impossible, let him exercise minimum necessary restraint. Anuvrat implies such a minimum necessary restraint. Perfection or the greatest being cannot be divided but it takes several steps to reach it and each step upwards brings the destination closer. The anuvrats or small or basic vows are graded steps to reach moral perfection.

It will be in fitness of things if I say something about the circumstances that led to the birth of the Anuvrat Movement. India became free after centuries of slavery. The congress and the Muslim league jointly took over the reins of Government. Riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims. Communalism made its ugly appearance resulting in the partition of India. Pakistan came into existence. Large-scale migrations of Hindus and Muslims took place. Both the countries were plagued by countless refugees. Their rehabilitation posed a complex problem.

India gave herself a new Constitution which came into force on January 26, 1950. She became a republic. All adults were granted franchise. Elections were held. The Congress formed governments at the Centre and in almost all the States. It set itself the goal of establishing a socialist pattern of society. New commercial and property taxes were levied. The princely states were merged into the union and feudal landlordism was abolished. Untouchability was made a cognizable offence. Food controls were introduced as a result of shortages. Many development plans were formed and all-out efforts were made to implement them. Such were the conditions at the beginning of independence. Everything was new – elections, the Government, the administrative experience and the social order. Mahatma Gandhi vanished from the scene. Other leaders got bogged down in their respective political parties. The unity attained during the struggle for freedom was lost. Basic problems which remained hidden under the dazzle of independence surfaced gradually Casteism, untouchability, communalism, economic disparity, rising cost and beggary are India's basic problems. Then there are post-independence problems like indiscipline, love of offence, over-ambition, regionalism and language controversies. These and other similar problems caused lot of suffering to the people as well as a decline in their character.

Meanwhile, there was growth in education and general intellectual development. Old beliefs were weakening. New principles were coming into existence. Religious leaders were decrying intellectuals who in turn were trying to reinterpret the past to the former.

On the whole the situation was more destructive than constructive and generated more excitement than introspection. None was satisfied with it.

Dissatisfaction prevailed in all fields – social, religious and national. People were growing impatient of loss of character and indiscipline. The Anuvrat Movement was born in these circumstances. Emphasizing old vows and values, although it had nothing new in it, it gave a correct assessment of the prevailing situation. The people felt assured because the movement was launched as both a diagnosis of and a remedy for the prevailing malady.

Acharya Shree and his companions did not imagine the wide extent of the Anuvrat Movements's welcome and impact. Initially they had a modest desire to change the outlook of those in their immediate contact. These people should regard not merely as part of worship but as an instrument of purifying character. They should be models of good religious living. This thought troubled his mind for a year or two. Occasionally it was also talked about. It finally matured in 1949. Keeping the shravaks in view a list of vows were drawn. Acharya Shree saw it. It was felt that it should be further expanded. More and more thought was given to it. Compilation of lists of evil habits as well as of vows went on. Finally an outline emerged and Acharya Shree launched the Anuvrat Movement in Sardarshahar on March 1, 1949. Earlier, none-point and thirteen-point programmes had been propagated in an experimental manner.

These programmes had been adopted by some twenty-five thousand people. They could be regarded as a prelude to the Anuvrat Movement. The Movement was originally called Anuvrati Sangh (Anuvrat Association). It started with Acharya Shree's long marches. In the prevailing situation movements aimed at developing character were greatly needed. Anuvrati Sangh or Anuvrat Association fulfilled a felt need and therefore it did not take long to become popular. The public welcomed it as a beacon. Hundreds of people would gather in small villages, hear the vows of the Movement and adopt them.

The Movement had already crossed the boundaries of India. At the time of the inaugural session newspapers in England and America had commented on it. The well-known New York Weekly Time in its edition of May 15, 1950 wrote under the caption "The Atomic Bomb". Like some people in other places a lean, short, bright-eyed Indian is extremely worried about the present world situation. He is thirty-four year-old Acharya Tulsi, who is the head of the Terapanth Sect of the Jains. It is a religious community which believes in nonviolence. Acharya Tulsi founded the Anuvrati Sangh in 1949. After he has won over the whole of India to his vows, he plans to do the same with the rest of the world.'

The Anuvrat attracted notice in Japan also. The reactions of the people of all these countries reached the Acharya. Briefly the feeling of those people was that the vows had been propounded keeping India in mind and that a number of them were not useful for them. Then the Acharya decided to effect changes in the outline of the vows. The changes were necessary if the Movement was to have a worldwide impact. They were motivated by the thought that since the basic nature of man is universally uniform, only vows in consonance with it may be widely propagated. Thus the number of basic vows went upto 42. According to the original outline there were no graded steps or states for the followers of the Movement. Those who accepted the thirteen-point plan did not consider themselves members of the Movement. Then while there were some people who did not resort to malpractices like pay-offs and income tax evasion, there were others who found themselves unable to avoid them. Under these circumstances it was felt that it would be good to lay down progressive stages for the anuvratists (followers of anuvrat). On this basis three classes of anuvratists were prescribed: 1. New entrant Anuvratists, 2. Anuvratists, 3. Advanced Anuvratists. The vows prescribed for these classes were 11, 42 and 4 respectively.

Sarvodaya leader Acharya Vinoba Bhave criticized the atomic vow concerning truth. He felt that there can be an atomic vow of nonviolence, but truth is indivisible and it therefore admits of only totality in the form of mahavrat (total allegiance to truth). Acharya Shree gave it a serious consideration but Vinoba's argument did not carry conviction with him. Truth is no different from nonviolence. There can be no truth where there is violence. Both nonviolence and truth are intrinsically indivisible. Height cannot be divided but it takes several steps to reach it and each step is different from the other. The anuvrats or atomic vows are graded steps to reach spiritual heights.

In some quarters there was a rumbling that the Anuvrat Movement does not go to the base. It merely skims the surface. Without solving the economic problem it is in vain to think of moral development. Acharya Shree did not term it a one-sided untruth but he did not subscribe to the view that people having no economic problems are necessarily moral. People have a very limited view of morality. Is the aggressive instinct not immoral? The Movement mainly aims at creating a climate of nonaggression, peaceful living and satisfaction with one's rightful share of things. Is this not something basic?

Some thinkers expressed the opinion that if individuals like Lord Mahavira, Lord Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi could not make the world

moral, how could Acharya Shree do it? To this Acharya Shree replied, when do I say that I am going to make the whole world moral? Of course our efforts should be directed towards that goal. The torch of morality should never be allowed to go out. Our efforts may not succeed, but we will at least not be blamed for not making them.

The work relating to anuvrat made some headway. But a new confusion arose. Our own followers started saying, 'Acharya Shree no longer insists on the people becoming Jains. He has slackened the propagation of Terapanth ... On the other hand some non-Jains started saying that Acharya Shree wanted to convert everyone to Jainism under the cover of anuvrat. If on one side there were these reactions, on the other quite a few people stressed the great need for the Movement. C. Rajgopalachari had written at the time of the first session, 'In my opinion this (Anuvrat Movement) is the first step in the direction of people's moral and cultural emancipation'.

While many western celebrities like Bertrand Russell and Martin Luther King were organizing huge peace rallies exhorting the people to raise their voice against the senseless caused by the nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by a strange coincidence, as it were, a relatively unknown religious preceptor of the East heading a Jain sect, seated far away in a remote town of the Thar desert of Rajasthan, was engaged in an identical mission, thought in a small way, of rousing the masses against violence and moral torpor. He heard the inner call that commanded him to throw off the yoke of sectarian dogmatism and launched a crusade against caste, untouchability, subjection of women and religious intolerance. His response to the call resulted in the birth of Anuvrat Movement. It was in this very way that Simon and Andrew responded when Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee called to them. The only difference was that the call Acharya Tulsi heard came from within, not unlike the one Saint Joan had heard centuries before in France. But unlike as in her case the inner voice directed the Acharya to launch a movement for liberating the individual from a bigoted sectarian outlook, fanaticism and an unethical approach, thereby automatically ensuring the emancipation of mankind.

The root of the malady lies in the individual. The Acharya realized that society cannot be purged without an inner transformation of man. Instinctively motivated by the maxim:

In small proportion we just beauties see;
And in short measures, life may perfect be.

Acharya Tulsi began his mission by carefully drawing up a code of conduct for all individuals in society. The Movement embodies a vision of a harmonious society free from exploitation and conflict. There is a striking similarity between his vision and that of Tagore's heaven of freedom as pictured by him in his immortal work *Gitanjali*.

The most important thing about the Movement is that it strives after the middle path steering clear of the two extremes of absolute asceticism (mahavrats) and unbridled materialism resulting in moral torpor and acedia. The Anuvrat Movement aims at ushering in an era of self-awakening – the antithesis of the Atomic Age.

The Acharya carries his message far and wide covering thousands of miles on foot, enjoining on the people the discipline of anuvrats. The voice of the Movement has by now permeated the masses focusing their attention on the importance of self-restraint. The phenomenal rise in incidents of communal clashes and racial riots in the fast-growing multicultural societies mushrooming all over the world giving rise to frenzied massacres like the ones the world watched helplessly in Sri Lanka, Lebanon, South Africa, Middle East and Bosnia makes it imperative for everyone to carry the Movement across the seas to ensure amity and reconciliation between differing groups and cultures.

Acharya Shree realized in the wake of his experiment of enjoining the discipline of anuvrats on the individuals that a radical attitudinal change in man was not possible merely through the advocacy of the anuvrat code of conduct. It must be accompanied by another effective tool that can gradually induce him to introspect. Yuvacharya Mahapragya came up with a bright idea of a unique technique of meditation called Preksha Dhyana as a means to bring about a mass psychological transformation. Acharya Shree added Preksha Meditation to his programme of reconstruction of moral and spiritual values. Fortified with this potent means of an attitudinal change in man, the Anuvrat Movement has added a new and important dimension. A follower of the anuvrat code has to practise Preksha Meditation every day, which inclines him naturally to imbibe the anuvrat discipline. It ultimately becomes an integral part of his character.

After the nuclear holocaust witnessed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki thousands of peace organizations sprang up in all parts of the world raising their voices against nuclear weapons and demanding complete disarmament. We feel heartened to note that some success has been achieved in reducing nuclear arsenal. These people say that their main aim is to save the world from the third world war but as a matter of fact many will agree with me

when I saw that the third world war has already begun. It is war against nature. Environment and ecological disaster that closes in on humanity now will result in the annihilation of all forms of life on this earth. Its impact is likely to be more ghastly and horrible than the tragedy of Hiroshima. It is the duty of this Parliament of the World's Religion to let the world know that if our life style doesn't change, if we continue to destroy forests, plants and other species just to satiate our thirst for physical comforts, fashions and grab all resources for our family and for a few people ignoring national and social interests, we are in for a bigger catastrophe and that is the end of life itself on this planet.

We must spread the message of deep ecology that all life is bound together. We must limit our needs. ANUVRAT MOVEMENT is in fact an ecological and environment ethic which all should join to save the world. It is not an organization. It is a self-transformation network. Everyone irrespective of his caste and creed is invited to join it.

The Rajsamand Declaration and Ladnun Declaration issued by the First and Second International Conferences in 1988 and 1991 at Ladnun and Rajsamand set forth a concrete action plan based on deep ecology for saving this planet from ruination.

This ecological ethic is summed up in the following vows:

1. I will not kill any innocent creature.
2. I will neither attack anybody nor support aggression and will endeavour to bring about world peace and disarmament.
3. I will not take part in violent agitations or in any destructive activities.
4. I will believe in human unity, will not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour, etc. and will not practise untouchability.
5. I will practice religious tolerance.
6. I will observe rectitude in business and general behaviour.
7. I will by degrees develop a pure tenor of life and control over senses.
8. I will not resort to unethical practices in elections.
9. I will not use intoxicants like alcohol, hemp, heroin etc.
10. I will lead a life free from additions.
11. I will do my best to avoid contributing to pollution.

Commenting upon the ANUVRAT MOVEMENT, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the former President of India has made the following

observations in his article on Acharya Tulsi published in the book **Living with a Purpose:**

“Acharya Shri Tulsi has been the head of the order of Terapanthis for twenty-five years. It has a large number of monks and lakhs of laymen. The great respect which they all have for Acharya Tulsiji is a sign of his outstanding personality.

Acharya Shri Tulsi’s impact on the Indian community is due to the Anuvrat Movement which he has started. There is a general feeling in the country that while we are attending to the material progress and doing substantial work in that direction, we are neglecting the human side of true progress. A civilized human being must be free from greed, vanity, passion, anger. Civilizations decline if there is a coarsening of moral fibre, if there is a callousness of heart. Man is tending to becoming a robot, a mechanical instrument caring for nothing except his material welfare, incapable of exercising his intelligence and responsibility. He seems to prefer comfort to liberty. Our politicians are resorting to direct action to enforce their particular viewpoint or to fulfill their desires. This is unfortunate and to remedy this growing indiscipline, lack of rectitude, egotism, the *Anuvrat Movement* was started on March 1, 1949. It requires strict adherence to the principles of good life. It is intended to impart education in moral and spiritual values.

We cannot say that, as a result of this movement, things have improved very considerably. Public spirit, commercial integrity, individual rectitude, family life, peaceful behaviour, these require to be cultivated. These cannot be achieved by merely talking about them. The only way in which this can be brought about is by imparting to our young people the essentials of our culture. These may be summarized in the three great words – *abhaya, ahimsa, asang* – which are the common possessions of all systems of religious thought.”

I cannot resist the temptation of quoting here Acharya Tulsi and Yuvacharya Mahapragya’s message issued to the Parliament of the World’s Religions about ANUVRAT Philosophy. They say:

“The twentieth century is a century of scientific achievements. During this period science has made advances in all directions. Their social advantages are self-evident. The facilities and conveniences available today were not there in the past. As a result of these facilities all physical discomforts have been considerably reduced. One is reminded of an ancient Sanskrit maxim – *Skandhat skandhantaram nayat* – it is a human habit to

transfer the burden from one shoulder to another and thus feel comforted. It is not indicative of the present state of affairs. We are exchanging one kind of unhappiness for another. This succinctly characterizes the tendency to yield to convenience. The hedonistic attitude gave berth to materialism and the latter created an endless appetite for the accumulation of wealth. According to us violence, terrorism and other similar evils are not basic but derivative. The real factors causing them are the attitudes rooted in consumerism, acquisitiveness and hedonism. Those who are actually engaged in violence and are terrorizing people have no different attitude. Ordinary people in society desire convenience, consumer items and wealth, so do those spreading violence and terror.

No effective method of preventing terroristic activities and crimes can be found without having an integrated approach to economic planning. Intellectually it was felt that all such problems would be resolved automatically with economic development. However, experience has shown that economic development has further complicated these problems. The solution to the problem can be summed up in one word – self-restraint. It is essential that it be practiced on an extensive scale. Self-restraint connotes reduction and limitation. It means exercising restraint in relation to conveniences, consumption and wealth. It is in this context that the ANUVRAT Declaration ‘self-restraint alone is life (Sanyamah Khalu, Jeevanam) is capable of providing a permanent solution to the present day problems.

Man lives by bread but he cannot live by it alone. Even what we eat and drink proves nourishing only when it is accompanied by restraint. Thus it can be said that what gives life to life or the supreme life-sustaining principle is self-restraint. And if there is any one thing that has been most neglected in the scientific age, it is self-restraint. The message of Anuvrat is that of self-restraint. The philosophy of Anuvrat is that of self-restraint. To spread this message extensively we will have to study both our past and our present. And the greatest concentration has to be on the educational system which is responsible for the present-day hedonism, consumerism and acquisitiveness.

We can hope for a new man, a new society and a new world if the seeds of self-restraint are sown in the young students’ minds from the very beginning. Materialistic expansion and spread of armaments cannot bring about a new world order. It is a reality and we will do ourselves immense good by accepting it. For if we refuse to accept it now, the problems arising in the future will compel us to do so.

Anuvrat was relevant when it was started. But today it is infinitely more relevant. Its relevance has increased a thousandfold. What is needed now is that we should all come together and apply our minds collectively to the basic cause of our problem. Mere pruning of leaves or watering the plant will not do. We have to find out the root cause. We will find that the biggest problem today lies in our education and lifestyle. To find a solution serious deliberations are needed by putting all the heads together. The Anuvrat philosophy is a must for a happy and peaceful life. From this point of view it can be said that the twenty-first century will be the century of Anuvrat, the century of spirituality. We hope the delegates of this Parliament of the World's Religions will give serious thought to it and will adopt *anuvrat* as the way of life for ensuring survival of not only human beings but all forms of life which are inseparably connected with them.

What is Anuvrat? Briefly the following points can encapsulate it:

1. It is a human code of conduct
2. It is a non-sectarian religion
3. It is a philosophy of life which gives primacy to character or righteousness and holds worship to be secondary
4. It is a philosophy which relatively gives more importance to the present than to the past or the future and concentrates on ways or proper living and evaluating the present
5. It is a new formula for solving our problems
6. It is a vow to reduce one's wants and limit one's consumption.

It asserts the following truths which keep stirring our consciousness:

Sanyamah Khalu Jeevanam – self-restraint alone is life.

Let the world be transformed through the Anuvrats.
Self-discipline precedes disciplining others.”

I hope Acharya Tulsi's clarion call and his concern for the entire humanity will inspire the delegates to this historic Parliament of the World's Religions to do some heart-searching. If we believe in religion, we must unite ourselves to stop the dance of violence and purge religion of the stigma that it generates more violence and hatred than love. ANUVRAT is one way. Acharya Tulsi makes an important point in his message. He says that seeds of nonviolence should be sown in the minds of young people. Seville Statement issued by the top scientists of the world in 1985 – the international year of peace – also stresses the same point. ‘Both war and peace originate

in the mind of man.' Let us strive to root out the seeds of violence that sprout in our minds with the help of *Anuvrat*.

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