

Aparigriha: An Ubiquitous Virtue



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Aparigriha – A Social Observance

Patanjali Rishi's Patanjali Yog Sutra is one of the oldest text written on Yoga. In 29th aphorism of second chapter (Sadhana Pada) of this Patanjali Yog Sutra, Patanjali Rishi coins the term "Asthanga Yoga", enlisting the 8 Limbs of Yoga. Namely Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana Dhyaan Samadhi.

The concept of *Aparigriha*, 4th in the 5 Yamas, signifies the virtues of non-possessiveness, non-attachment and non-greediness. The word "*Aparigriha*" is the opposite of the word "Parigriha", which directly translates to having the desire for possessions. The precept of *Aparigriha* is a self-restraint or temperance from the type of greed and avarice where one's own material gain or happiness supersede over that of other human beings, life forms or nature. Furthermore, Patanjali Rishi has also stated benefits of *Aparigriha*, as "When one is steadfast in non-possessiveness (*Aparigriha*), there arises knowledge of the why and wherefore of past and future incarnations."

Prima fascia this, so called outcome of *Aparigriha*, is very vague and surreal. Moreover if we see the literal definition of word *Aparigriha* in congruence with literal translation of its benefit, it becomes even more confusing. Most importantly it is very difficult to actually relate between the action and its outcome and it raises more questions than answers."Why is non-possessiveness enlisted under head of Social Observance instead of Personal Observance?"; "How can one gain knowledge, of his future and past incarnations, by following non-possessiveness? "Why does a Yogi require such knowledge of future and past incarnations? And how will it contribute towards reaching the final destination of Yoga, Kaivalya?"

Aparigriha – An Inherent Virtue of Ashtanga Yoga

In the previous segment, we established that, meaning of *Aparigriha* revolves around Non-Greediness, or in other words, limiting our needs, barely down to the essential things and detaching from everything else that is unnecessary. Through this context, by following *Aparigriha*, incidentally, one is able to follow the subordinate Yama of Asteya.

Asteya means Non-Stealing. In other words, Non-Acceptance of anything that is not yours. Asteya prohibits a Yogi from Stealing directly from someone else, robbing them, or forcefully acquiring from them. On a broader level, it also prohibit the Yogi from even claiming anything that is not his own. Even if it is a miniscule office supply from your work desk.

Key towards followance of Asteya is, elimination of the desire for such a materialistic objects. This mental state is achieved upon practicing principles of *Aparigriha*.

Similarly, all other Yamas could be viewed in the light of concept of *Aparigriha*. For example, **Bramhacharya** means Chastity

or Continence in thought, in words and in deed, always, and in all conditions. Patanjali Rishi states that upon followance of Bramhacharya, one conserves Energy. The actual word used for energy is 'Virya' or 'Semen'. Bramhacharya is often mistaken as abstinence of Sexual activities, but it actually denotes conservation of energy. Energy can be conserved by consuming it judiciously. Again it brings us to the fundamental principle of *Aparigriha* - limiting our needs to only those that are essential and detaching from everything else (Lust, Desire, etc.)

Also when we talk about Yama of **Truth**, we often refer to its direct meaning of Non-Lying, or speaking only the truth. But a purer inference can be found in a verse from **Vashishta Samhita**.

When the truth is known, all descriptions cease, and silence alone remains. (III: 84)

In other words, one can say that, best way to follow Yama of Satya, is to speak only when it is necessary, Silence is an even better option. Even Hathapradeepikakar, in 15th shloka of first chapter of the text Hatha Yog Pradeepika, says that talking too much destroys Yoga. Hence it is advised that, a Yogi should detach from temptation of speaking too much and speak only when there is utmost necessity of speaking. Once again we see a connection to the concept of *Aparigriha*.

Such a connection can be seen not just in Yamas, but in all the other Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga.

For example, let us consider the limb of **Niyama**.

Since *Aparigriha* is a virtue of Non-Possessiveness, satisfaction with what one already has, or contentment embodies its essence, deriving a parallel to the Niyama of **Santosha**.

Earlier we saw that Materialistic Attachments are often caused by Love for life and Fear for death. Such a belief is irradiated by immense faith in the Absolute truth, or in other words, Niyama of **Ishwar Pranidhana**.

So on and so forth.

To talk about other Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga, Patanjali defines the limb of **Asana** as be "*Stira-Sukham-Asana*" (2.46 P.Y.S) Meaning, an Asana is Asana, only and only if it is comfortable and steady. To attain this comfort and steadiness Rishi Patanjali states in the very next aphorism that. "*Prayatna-Shaithilya-Ananta-Samapattibyaam*" (2.47 P.Y.S) Meaning, upon taking an asana, one should deliberately relax all the muscles. Only that stress should remain on the body, which is induced due to the Asana itself. In other words one can say that, a yogi should

stabilize himself and detach himself from any movement, and strain the body to sustain the utmost necessary stresses.

Further ahead, Rishi Patanjali describes the Limb of **Pranayama** in the 49th aphorism of the Sadhana pada. The aphorism describes Pranayama as “*Tasmin-Sati-Shwaas-Prashwaas-Yogor-Gati-Vicchedah-Pranayama*” (2.49 P.Y.S) Meaning, Pranayama is nothing but cessation of inhalation and exhalation. Even the 2nd shloka of 2nd chapter of Hatha Yog Pradeepika makes a similar inference. It states “*Chale-Vate-Chalam-Chittam-Nischale-Nischalam-Bhavet Yogisthanutva-Mapnoti-Tato-Vayu-Nirodhayet*” (2.2 H.P.) Meaning, when respiration is disturbed, the mind becomes disturbed and when mind is disturbed respiration is disturbed. By controlling respiration, the Yogi can control mind and make it steadier.

The actual purpose of Pranayama is much more wide scope, but observing these two verses through our point of view one can again see that the focus is given on controlling the rate of respiration down to bare essentials. This breath control can even be related to energy conservation that we saw earlier.

Pratayahara the fifth limb of Ashtanga yoga and also the most pivotal limb. Patanjali describes it in the 54th Aphorism of Sadhana pada. The Aphorism states.

Svavishayasamprayoge-Chittasvarupanukara-Ivendriyana-Pratayaharah (2.54 P.Y.S)

Meaning, **Pratayahara** is, as it were, the imitation by the senses of the mind by withdrawing themselves from their objects. Pratayahara is often translated as Abstraction, but in true sense, it should more aptly be seen as Detachment. In other words, Pratayahara is the real **Aparigriha**. Condemning oneself from outer, worldly objects and detaching from them, to become inward bound. Towards the final goal of Yoga. Kaivalya.

Even when it comes to **Dharana**, Patanjali defines Dharana “*Dasha-Bandhas-Chittasya-Dharana* (3.1 P.Y.S)

Meaning Dharana or concentration is nothing but confining of the mind within a limited mental area. Mind can accumulate numerous thoughts at once. Detaching from all those thoughts and focusing on one single point is Dharana.

In his version of Yamas Swami Swatmaram has included all Yamas of Patanjali, only except for the Yama of **Aparigriha**. Out of other 6 Yamas that he added in this shloka, meaning of Mitahara is closest to **Aparigriha**. Mitahara literary means, sparing diet or measured diet, but in context of Yamas, one can relate to it by considering its meaning as “consume only that is necessary”

Thus in essence, the virtue of **Aparigriha**, in the sense of ‘detachment from unnecessary’, is ubiquitous in almost all the limbs of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga or rather it is an inherent virtue to be followed in the path to reach emancipation. This ubiquity is seen not just in texts related to Yoga, but also in other sacred and non-sacred texts of Hindu Religion. On a wider scope, it is even seen that many religions all over

the world, also propagate this concept of **Aparigriha** in their own way.

Aparigriha – A Universal Belief

Apart from Hinduism, **Aparigriha** is also one of the virtues in **Jainism**. It is one of the five vows that both householders and ascetics must observe. This Jain vow is the principle of limiting one’s possessions (**Parimita-Parigraha**) and limiting one’s desires (**Ichha-Parimana**).

In Jainism, worldly wealth accumulation is considered as a potential source of rising greed, jealousy, selfishness and desires. Giving up emotional attachments, sensual pleasures and material possession is a means of liberation, in Jain philosophy. Eating enough to survive is considered nobler than eating for indulgence. Similarly, all consumption is more appropriate if it is essential to one’s survival, and inappropriate if it is a form of hoarding, show off or for ego. Non-possession and non-attachment are a form of virtue, and these are recommended particularly in later stages of one’s life. After Ahimsa, **Aparigriha** is the second most important virtue in Jainism.

Along with Jainism, even **Buddhism** has many references of **Aparigriha**. In the ten sikkhapadas for the monks, occurs a precept called “*Jata-Rupa-Rajata-Patiggahana-Veramani-Sikkha-Padam-Samadiyami*.” This means that the monk is to abstain from accepting gold and silver and money. If he does not abstain, i.e. if he collects money and gold and silver, or asks others to do so, or uses that which has already been accumulated, he is accused of Nissaggiya-Pachittiya offence.

The monks are not supposed to have any attachment for any worldly possessions, which are only symbolized in gold and silver and coins that means detachment from all mundane objects that is everything such as wife, children or servants etc. In one of his exhortation to Anathapeeka, **Lord Buddha** said, “*It is not life and wealth and power that enslave men but the cleaving towards them. He who possesses wealth and uses it rightly will be a blessing for his fellow beings*”.

For that matter even Islam stresses on being Non-Greedy and detached. In fact, a verse from **Holy Quran** mentions “*Man as ‘Greedy Creature’ and this man, if he does not keep himself under control becomes so greedy and covetous that he does not become contented even if the entire world is given away to him*” – *Holy Qur’an*

Even in **Christianity**, Non-Covetousness is a virtue. King James’ **Bible**, in one of its verses says “*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15) Meaning, detach yourself from all sorts of covetousness. Abundance of possessions is not the aim of life. Very similar to the concept of **Aparigriha**.

References to Concept of **Aparigriha** are not just found in religious context but also in philosophical context. One such an example is of the Japanese philosophy of Wabi-Sabi. The Philosophy of Wabi-Sabi is essentially a philosophy of aesthetics. Characteristics of this philosophy include asymmetry, asperity (roughness or irregularity), simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, intimacy, and appreciation of the ingenuous integrity of natural objects and processes. In essence the

aesthetic is described as the beauty that is “*Imperfect, Impermanent, and Incomplete*”, derived from the Buddhist teachings of the “Three marks of existence”, impermanence, suffering and emptiness or absence of self-nature. Word ‘Wabi’ refers to Loneliness, in congruence with Nature and Detachment from everything that is unnecessary. While word ‘Sabi’ embodies beauty or serenity that comes with age, when the life of the object and its impermanence. Wabi and Sabi both suggest sentiments of desolation and solitude. In a spiritual context, these may be viewed as positive characteristics, representing liberation from a material world and transcendence to a simpler life.

Much Similar to our outlook of *Aparigriha*! Wabi-Sabi describes a means whereby one can learn to live life through the senses and better engage in life as it happens, rather than be caught up in unnecessary thoughts. In this sense Wabi-Sabi is the material representation of Zen Buddhism. The idea is that being surrounded by natural, changing, unique objects helps us connect to our real world and escape potentially stressful distractions.

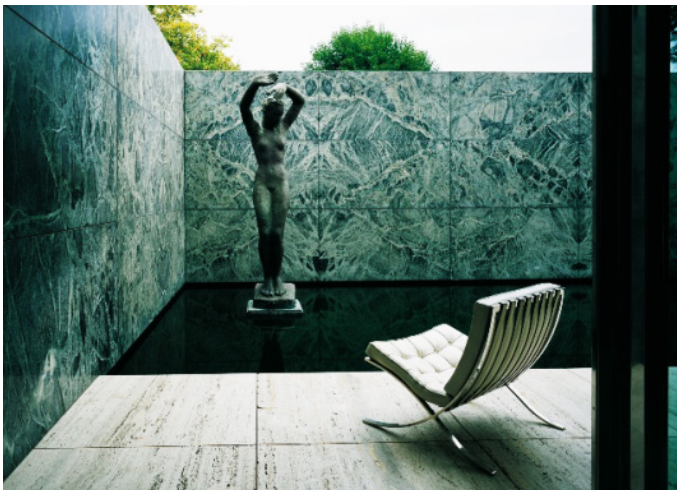
After examining all above References, it is evident that understanding of Concept of *Aparigriha* is on a large and ubiquitous scale. So much so that one can say that it is a Universal Belief.

Aparigriha – A Rational Philosophy in Architecture

By profession I am an Architect, and it intrigues me to draw parallels of the concept of *Aparigriha* in the field of Architecture and design. Until now we saw *Aparigriha* in a very theoretical or philosophical context, but applying this concept in the field of architecture will let me explore its Rational Application in the real world.

In the recent history of Architecture, there are many architects, who have rejected the conventional and traditional norms of articulation and ornamentation in art, architecture and design.

One such an international architect who revolutionised Architectural language towards Modernism is the German Architect **Mies Van der Rohe** (1886-1969). Mies pursued an ambitious lifelong mission to create a new architectural language that could be used to represent the new era of Architecture. He applied a disciplined design process using rational thought to achieve his spiritual goals.



He believed that the configuration and arrangement of every architectural element, particularly including the character of enclosed space, must contribute to a unified expression.

Mies also studied the great philosophers and thinkers, past and present. His architecture was guided by principles at a high level of abstraction, and his own generalized descriptions of those principles intentionally leave much room for interpretation. He also coined the phrase, “*Less is More*” – *Mies Van der Rohe*

A quote of only three words but contain an entire Philosophy within it. The concept of is to strip everything down to its bare essentials and achieve simplicity. The idea is not completely without ornamentation, but that all parts, details and joinery are considered as reduced to a stage where no one can remove anything further to improve the design. This also strike a chord with our principle concept of *Aparigriha*.

One more prominent example is found in the contemporary architecture is that of Japanese Architect, Tadao Ando. Ando’s architectural style, emphasizes on nothingness and empty spaces to represent the beauty of simplicity. He favors designing complex (yet beautifully simple) spatial circulation while maintaining the appearance of simplicity. The simplicity of his architecture emphasizes the concept of sensation and physical experiences, mainly influenced by Japanese culture or rather Zen Buddhism.

The religious term Zen, focuses on the concept of simplicity and concentrates on inner feeling rather than outward appearance. Zen influences vividly show in Ando’s work. In order to practice the idea of simplicity, Ando’s architecture is mostly constructed with concrete, providing a sense of cleanliness and weightlessness.

To give an example, below are images of two of his famous projects “The Church on Water” (1988) and “The Church of Light” (1989). The concept of *Aparigriha* is manifested aptly in these buildings.



In both of these projects, one can see that, the traditional notion of ornamentation or glorification is discarded, and both the buildings are stripped to its bare essentials. Detaching itself from all unnecessary features of any sorts, and yet beautiful.

Something very similar to what Leonardo Da Vinci quoted. “*Simplicity is the ultimate Sophistication*” – *Leonardo Da Vinci*

On a Non-Aesthetical note, one can also compare *Aparigriha* with Sustainable Architecture, where idea is to minimize energy consumption

while construction of the building (as well as after its completion)

One more example, can be given, that of a Mosque in Turkey, by Architect **Emre Arolat**. He designed the mosque by bringing down the entire form to the bare essentials. Revolutionising the conventional notions of articulation and decorative features of a traditional Mosque.



Many other examples could be given to draw similar parallels. In all these examples you will find that, emphasis is given on detachment of the building from anything and everything that is unnecessary, while focusing only on the primary function of the building, incidentally making it much more “simple” to relate with.

All these examples along with other parallels of same sorts, have had a deep impact on my design philosophies as well. My own design Philosophy is Minimalism. The essence remains the same. Focus on essentials and shed away the rest. Fortunately I got to work in a studio where I was given freedom to express my design philosophy. I have purposely given asset of very wide spread examples. Since more we see this concept, applied, in isolation, in various Walks of life, the more we affirm that *Aparigriha* is not just a Social` observance but indeed it is a ‘Rational’ understanding of the word ‘Purpose’.

As a conclusion of which, the meaning of word *Aparigriha* transcends from “Non-Possessiveness” or Non-Desire” to a more profound virtue or rather a Fundamental Way of Life.

Aparigriha – A Fundamental Way of Life

Going back to the questions raised in the first segment, Why is non-possessiveness enlisted under head of Social Observance instead of Personal Observance? How can one gain knowledge of his future and past incarnations, by following non-possessiveness? Why does a Yogi require such knowledge of future and past incarnations? And how will it contribute towards reaching the final destination of Yoga, Kaivalya?

When you do not accumulate, then the knowledge of the previous births, could be interpreted as, ‘When, a person says “more for me, more for me”, then he is obsessed with fear, one does not know the eternal value of life’. Life has been there for ages and will continue for ages to come. Non-accumulating simply means confidence in one’s existence. Confidence is in one’s ability. Knowledge of one’s self. The one who is so afraid that whether he will get to eat tomorrow or day after

or even later, will store and store and store. One who has confidence in his ability to gather food, will sail relaxed and enjoy the temporary journey of life. This confidence in one’s existence can only be achieved upon acceptance of the Ultimate Truth and detaching ourselves from all Materialistic Matter. It may sound restricting but in reality, it is freedom from worldly refrains, which, stated by Patanjali Rishi, and is the final Goal of Yoga. “*Tada-Drashtuh-Swarupe-Awasthanam*” (1.3 P.Y.S)

Meaning, Final aim of Yoga is Emancipation from worldly cycles of birth and deaths. This may seem very difficult to achieve in today’s times, but even if we follow all the Yama of *Aparigriha* to its core, we may be able to achieve peace of mind. This will require the Sadhaka to have a sense of gratitude, conscious actions based on noble love and most importantly Vairagya, ‘dispassionate detachment” from sense objects, along with selfless service for others without expectations of rewards. Doing so, definitely bring a life of much simplicity, equanimity and contentment for the Sadhaka.

To conclude I will say *Aparigriha* in the form of renunciation is not only the final destination of Yoga but also the means of reaching there.