

Ekadashi

The Appearance and Purpose of This Special Day

(This article was written in 1956 by Sri Navinacandra Cakravarti, a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. There are many kathas of Ekadashi in the *Puranas*, but most explain the material benefits and blessings one gets from observing Ekadashi. This article, based on the conversation between Srila Vyasadeva and Jaimini Rishi, gives the real spiritual reason for following the vow of Ekadashi as emphasized by Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu in *Shree Caitanya-caritamrita* and later by Srila Prabhupada.)

Many devotees are very inquisitive about the appearance of Shree Ekadashi and about her special characteristics. Therefore I am presenting this description from the 14th chapter of the *Padma Purana*, from the section entitled “Kriya-sagara-sara”.

Once the great sage Jaimini Rishi said to his spiritual master, “O Gurudeva! Previously, by your mercy, you described to me the history of the Ganga River, the benefits of worshipping Lord Vishnu, the giving of grains in charity, the giving of water in charity, and the magnanimity of drinking water that has been used to wash the feet of the brahmanas. O best of sages, Sri Gurudeva, now, with great enthusiasm, I desire to hear of the benefits of fasting on Ekadashi and of the appearance of Ekadashi.”

“O Gurudeva! When did Ekadashi take birth and from whom did she appear? What are the rules of fasting on the day of Ekadashi? Please describe the benefits of following this vow and when it should be followed. Who is the utmost worshipable presiding deity of Sri Ekadashi? What are the faults in not observing Ekadashi properly? Please bestow your mercy upon me and tell about these subjects, as you are the only personality able to do so.”

Srila Vyasadeva, upon hearing this inquiry from Jaimini Rishi, became situated in transcendental bliss. “O brahmana sage Jaimini! The results of following Ekadashi can be perfectly described by the Supreme Lord, Narayana, because Sri Narayana is the only personality capable of describing them in full. But I will give a very brief description in answer to your question.”

“At the beginning of the material creation, the Supreme Lord created the moving and non-moving living entities within this world made of five gross material elements. Simultaneously, for the purpose of punishing the evil human beings, He created a personality whose form was the embodiment of the worst kinds of sin (Papa-purusha). The different limbs of this personality were constructed of various sinful activities. His head was made of the sin of murdering a brahmana, his two eyes were the form of drinking intoxicants, his mouth was made from the sin of stealing gold, his ears were the form of the sin of having illicit connection with the spiritual master’s wife, his nose was of the sin of killing one’s wife, his arms the form of the sin of killing a cow, his neck was made of the sin of stealing accumulated wealth, his chest of the sin of abortion, his lower chest of the sin of having sex with another’s wife, his stomach of the sin of killings one’s relatives, his navel of the sin of

killing those who are dependent on him, his waist of the sin of egotistical self-appraisal, his thighs of the sin of offending the guru, his genitals of the sin of selling one's daughter, his buttocks of the sin of telling confidential matters, his feet of the sin of killing one's father, and his hair was the form of all sorts of less severe sinful activities. In this way, a horrible personality embodying all sinful activities and vices was created. His bodily colour is black, and his eyes are yellow. He inflicts extreme misery upon sinful persons.

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu, upon seeing this personality of sin began to think to Himself as follows: ‘I am the creator of the miseries and happiness for the living entities. I am their master because I have created this personality of sin, who gives distress to all dishonest, deceitful and sinful persons. Now I must create someone who will control this personality’. At this time Sri Bhagavan created the personality of Yamaraja and the different hellish planetary systems. Those living entities who are very sinful will be sent after death to Yamaraja, who will in turn, according to their sins, send them to an appropriate hellish region to suffer.

“After these adjustments had been made, the Supreme Lord, who is the giver of distress and happiness to the living entities, went to the house of Yamaraja, with the help of Garuda, the king of birds. When Yamaraja saw that Lord Vishnu had arrived, he immediately washed His feet and made an offering unto Him. He then had Him sit upon a golden throne. The Supreme Lord Vishnu became seated upon the throne, whereupon He heard very loud crying sounds from the southern direction. He became surprised by this and inquired of Yamaraja, ‘From where is this loud crying coming?’

“Yamaraja in reply said, ‘O Deva! The different living entities of the earthly planetary systems have fallen to the hellish regions. They are suffering extremely for their misdeeds. The horrible crying is because of suffering from the inflictions of their past bad actions.’

“After hearing this the Supreme Lord Vishnu went to the hellish region to the south. When the inhabitants saw who had come they began to cry even louder. The heart of the Supreme Lord Vishnu became filled with compassion. Lord Vishnu thought to Himself, ‘I have created all this progeny, and it is because of Me that they are suffering.’”

Srila Vyasadeva continued: “O Jaimini, just listen to what the Supreme Lord did next. After the merciful Supreme Lord thought over what He had previously considered, He suddenly manifested from His own form the deity of the lunar day Ekadashi. Afterwards, the different sinful living entities began to follow the vow of Ekadashi and were then elevated quickly to the abode of Vaikuntha. O my child Jaimini, therefore the lunar day of Ekadashi is the selfsame form of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, and the Super-soul within the heart of the living entities. Sri Ekadashi is the utmost pious activity and is situated as the head among all vows.

“Following the ascension of Sri Ekadashi, that personality who is the form of sinful activity gradually saw the influence that she, Ekadashi, had. Thus, he approached

Lord Vishnu with doubts in his heart and began offering many prayers, whereupon Lord Vishnu became very pleased and said, 'I have become very pleased by your nice offerings. What boon is it that you want?'

"The Papa-purusha replied, "I am Your created progeny, and it is through me that you wanted distress given to the living entities who are very sinful. But now, by the influence of Sri Ekadashi, I have become all but destroyed. O Prabhu! After I die all of Your parts and parcels who have accepted material bodies will become liberated and return to the abode of Vaikuntha (the spiritual domain). If this liberation of all living entities takes place, then who will carry on Your activities? There will be no one to enact the pastimes in the earthly planetary systems! O Keshava! If you want these eternal pastimes to carry on, then You please save me from the fear of Ekadashi. No type of pious activity can bind me. But Ekadashi only, being Your own manifested form, can impede me. Out of fear of Sri Ekadashi I have fled and taken shelter of men; animals; insects; hills; trees; moving and non-moving living entities; rivers; oceans; forests; heavenly, earthly and hellish planetary systems; demigods; and the Gandharvas. I cannot find a place where I can be free from the fear of Sri Ekadashi. O my Master! I am a product of Your creation, so therefore very mercifully direct me to a place where I can reside fearlessly."

Srila Vyasadeva then said to Jaimini, "After saying this, the embodiment of all sinful activities (Papa-purusha) fell down at the feet of the Supreme Lord Vishnu, who is the destroyer of all miseries and began to cry.

"After this, Lord Vishnu, observing the condition of the Papa-purusha, with laughter began to speak thus: 'O Papa-purusha, rise up! Don't lament any longer. Just listen, and I'll tell you where you can stay on the lunar day of Ekadashi. On the date of Sri Ekadashi, which is the benefactor of the three planetary systems, you can take shelter of foodstuffs in the form of grains. There is no reason to worry about this any more, because My form as Sri Ekadashi will no longer impede you.' After giving direction to the Papa-purusha, the Supreme Lord Vishnu disappeared and the Papa-purusha returned to the performance of his own activities.

"Therefore, those persons who are serious about the ultimate benefit of the soul will never eat grains on Ekadashi. According to the instructions of Lord Vishnu, every kind of sinful activity that can be found in the material world takes its residence in this place of (grains) foodstuff. Whoever follows Ekadashi is freed from all sins and never enters into the hellish regions. If one doesn't follow Ekadashi because of illusion, he is still considered the utmost sinner. For every mouthful of grain that is eaten by a resident of the earthly region (on Ekadashi), one receives the effect of killing millions of brahmanas. It is definitely necessary that one give up eating grains on Ekadashi. I very strongly say again and again, 'On Ekadashi, do not eat grains, do not eat grains, do not eat grains!' Whether one be a kshatriya, vaishya, shudra, or of any family, he should follow the lunar day of Ekadashi. From this the perfection of varna and ashrama will be attained. Especially since if one (even) by trickery follows Ekadashi, all his sins become destroyed and he very easily attains the supreme goal, the abode of Vaikuntha."

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