

Bhishma Panchaka (the last 5 “Vedic” days of Damodara month)



Bhishmadeva instructing the Pandavas in these five days before he left his body. The last five “vedic” days of the month of Kartik (Damodara) {this year its falls from **14th - 19th November**} are traditionally known as the Bhishma Panchaka or Vishnu Panchaka. In the Hari Bhakti Vilasa, it is said that if one is capable, one should observe fasting from certain foodstuffs on the Bhishma-panchaka for the pleasure of the Lord. (This is optional and according to ones capabilities). The Padma Purana says that one pleases the Lord and makes spiritual advancement by such austerities. If one could not fast or perform any tapasya for Lord Damodara for the previous 25 days then by fasting on these 5 days he/she receives the same benefits as fasting the entire month. During this vrata, offering of certain items to the Lord are also prescribed.

They are listed below. Here are offerings prescribed for Bhishma Panchaka.

Devotees may offer the following to the Deity form of the Lord:

On the first day, one must offer padma (lotus) flowers to the feet of the Lord

On the second day, one must offer bilva (wood-apple) leaves of the thigh of the Lord

On the third day, one must offer gandha (scents) to the navel of the Lord

On the fourth day, one must offer java flower to the shoulders of the Lord

On the fifth day, one must offer malati flower to the head (siro-desa) of the Lord.

(Of course in South Africa we do not have certain of the above ingredients so mentally offer for example a bilva wood and so forth. What’s important is that we must perform this vrat with faith. That is what Lord Damodara is looking for.)

Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has explained that just as Ekadashi is the holiest of days, Kartik is the holiest of months. What is not so well known, however, is that the last five days of Kartik are especially important. [Excerpts from "Vaishnava-kanthahara, compiled by Krsna-Balarama Swami) "The last five vedic days of Kartik month are

known as Bhishma-Panchaka. Grandfather Bhishma fasted for these five Vedic days, preparing to give up his life. However one observes Kartik vrata, he should intensify it for the last five vedic days. The best way to observe the Kartik vrata is to abstain from eating grains for the whole month, and to take only milk or water for the last five days. If one eats grains during the month, he should avoid them for the last five days. Also, one should only eat once a day. This is the proper procedure [for strict adherence]."

"This five vedic day fast is difficult for those people who are not serious and who are hypocrites. If someone observes this fast, he is considered to have observed all other fasts, because it is greatly meritorious and frees one from great sins. Therefore, everyone should make a great endeavor to fast on these last five days of Bhishmadeva". "The fast should begin by remembering Srila Bhishmadeva on tenth Dasami day (i.e. 14th November and should end on Purnima [full moon] i.e. on the 19th November. One should eat only vegetables or fruits and should worship Lord Krsna. If one needs to eat, one should do so only in the evening." "All of one's material and spiritual desires can be fulfilled and all of the senses can be controlled by following this five-day fast. One should follow this Kartik fast in a most auspicious place of pilgrimage. If one follows this Kartik fast, one can obtain the results attainable from fasting on the auspicious fasting days for a whole year. "Srila Suta Goswami says in the Padma Purana, Uttarakhanda, 'this liberating fast is unknown even to the devas. If one listens to what I have said and fasts on these five days, even if he had sex with an unqualified woman or (his sister, daughter, mother, etc.), he becomes free from those sins. Even if someone attentively listens to this narration, he also achieves happiness. I tell you the truth again and again that one should keep this fast, and continue performing it unceasingly - such a person surely achieves liberation."

"In the month of Kartik, which is very dear to Shree Hari, one who bathes early in the morning attains the merit of bathing in all places of pilgrimage. Anybody who offers the Lord a ghee lamp in the month of Kartik, O brahmana, becomes free from all kinds of sins, such as killing a brahmana, and he goes to the abode of Lord Hari." (Brahma Khanda). "Suta Goswami says, "If anyone fasts and observes the Kartik vrata according to the rules and regulations, the Yamadutas, the messengers of Yamaraja, run away from him, just as an elephant runs away by seeing a lion. This dear fast [vrata] of Lord Vishnu is even better than performing one hundred great sacrifices that would take him to heaven because the person who observes the Kartik vrata goes to the spiritual world." (Padma Purana) "Although one can easily reach Mathura [Vraja Mandala] on this earth, and although Kartik month is easily observable, and although in the month of Kartik all of the places of pilgrimage, oceans, rivers, and lakes come to the Mathura area, still, those human beings who are foolish and suffering in the ocean of material existence do not take advantage of it." (Padma Purana). "Oh sage, that foolish person who does not offer a lamp in Lord Keshava's temple during Kartik is not considered a Vaishnava (a devotee of the Lord)." The conclusion is, as Lord Brahma tells Narada Muni in the Skanda Purana: 'O son Narada, the month of Kartik is very dear to Lord Keshava.

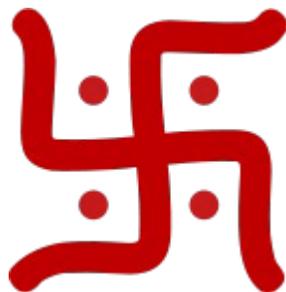
If anyone acts meritoriously in this month just to please Lord Vishnu, he receives unlimited results" The point to emphasize here is that Kartik is not just about fasting.

The most important thing is to somehow or another increase our activities in devotional service, especially during this holy month. If hundreds of millions of Islamic faithfuls can follow severe vows of fasting during their month of Ramadan, then we should be able to perform some special austerities to please the Lord of Kartik, Shree Damodara, as it has been prescribed and laid down by our Acharyas. Srimati Radharani is Herself the Queen of Vrndavan, who maintains the vows of and directly reciprocates with Her devotees during this, holy month, which is also called Urja vrata. Kartik is the best, the purest of purifiers, and most glorious of all months. Kartik month is particularly dear to Lord Shree Krsna. This month is full of bhakta vatsalya. Any vrata, even the smallest, will yield huge results. The effect of performing a Kartik Vrata lasts for one hundred lifetimes, whereas ordinary vratas only last for one lifetime! Srimati Radhika is the presiding deity of the holy month of Kartik. Rupa Goswami and others refer to Srimati Radharani as Kartik Devi; in other words, Shree Radhika is the Goddess or presiding Deity of the Kartik Vrata. = From the Padma Purana.

Vrndavandhama, ki jaya!
Kartikvrata, ki jaya!
Urjavrata, ki jaya!
BhishmaPanchaka, ki jaya!
DamodaraLila, ki jaya!
Jaya Shree Shree RadhaDamodara!
Jaya, jaya Shree Radhe!

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Compiled for the upliftment of Sanatan Dharma
Narottam Das & Arjun Nandlal

T.C.

E-mail info@dipika.org.za

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