



Ekādashi:

The Benefits of Fasting



Dr. Yogeendra Bhat Uli

Ekādashi:

The Benefits of Fasting

By:

Dr. Yogeendra Bhat Uli

Table of Contents:

Forewords by:

1. Sri Sri Sugunendra Theertha Swāmiji
2. Sri Sri Sushreendra Theertha Swāmiji
3. Sri Sri Vidyāprasanna Theertha Swāmiji
4. Shatāvadhāni Dr. Udupi Sri Rāmanātha Ācharya

Chapters:

1. The Rationale for Fasting
2. Fasting as a Path to Mental Purification
3. Eligibility and Observance of the Ekādashi Fast
4. Fasting as a Preventive Measure Against Disease
5. The Psychological Foundations of Ekādashi
6. The Virtues of Frugality Through Fasting
7. Fasting on Ekādashi as an Awakening of Inner Wisdom
8. Ekādashi Under Scientific Scrutiny
9. Ekādashi: The Most Spiritually Auspicious Occasion
10. Ekādashi as a Teacher of Discipline and Restraint
11. The 'Lakshmi-prada' Fast of Ekādashi
12. The Significance of Ekādashi in the Context of Pilgrimage
13. Ekādashi as the 'Maha Yajna'
14. Vaikuntha Ekādashi
15. Shri Krishna Jayanti: A Mandatory fast like Ekādashi

16. Ekādashi Fasting as a Means of Rectifying Spiritual Shortcomings
17. The Observance of Ekādashi by the Devathās and Ancestors
18. Ekādashi: The One Fast That Gratifies All Devathās and Ancestors
19. The Glory of Ekādashi Vrata in the Works of Sri Purandaradāsa
20. The Benefits of the Ekādashi Fast for Non-Vegetarians
21. Ekādashi: A Sattvic Discipline of the Highest Order
22. The Supremacy of Ekādashi Fasting Over Non-Violence, Charity, and Other Virtues
23. The Consequences of Neglecting the Ekādashi Fast
24. The Spiritual Implications for Both Those Who Eat and Those Who Feed Others on Ekādashi
25. Attaining Virtue Through the Observance of the Ekādashi Fast
26. Ekādashi as a Means of Great Atonement
27. The Profound Merit of Observing and Encouraging the Ekādashi Fast
28. Guidelines for Fasting Among Those With Physical Limitations
29. Ekādashi as an Aid in Overcoming Illness and Adversity
30. Ekādashi and the Principles of Physical Science
31. Sankrānti and Ekādashi: Direct Embodiment of Cosmic Perfection

- 32. The Universal Dimension of Fasting
- 33. A Call for Deeper Research Into All Aspects of Ekādashi

Gluttony is a Greater Scourge Than Poverty

In addition to spiritual Sadhana, performing Upavasa is also most important in view of good health. Shri Krishna has explained in Gita the usefulness of Upavasa as follows:

Yukthāhāravihārasya yogo bhavathi dukha hā

and again, Sri Krishna says:

Vishaya vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinah

Just as the key to mastering the mind lies within the stomach, so too does the fundamental physical health of the human body rest under its control. The stomach is the ultimate governor of both the intellect and the body — the all-regulating organ. This is precisely why, whenever any other organ is afflicted, whether it be the head, the legs, the back, or any other part, medicine is administered primarily through the stomach alone. When the stomach is pure, the entire body and mind remain pure as well. The stomach is, without question, the most vital organ of the human body, and its cleanliness, efficiency, and proper functioning are of the utmost importance to the Sadhaka. Beyond all this, the stomach also stands as a symbol and reminder of generosity and beauty.

Thus, the cleanliness and thorough purification of the stomach is of paramount importance for every aspect of life. It is much like the necessity of washing one's utensils before using them for cooking — an indispensable act of preparation. With this very principle in mind, our ancestors, drawing upon the wisdom of astrology, conceived and instituted the sacred ritual of Ekādashi fasting, designed to expel any half-digested or undigested food lingering in the stomach at least once every fifteen days. So deeply did they value this practice that they deemed it not merely advisable, but mandatory.

Moreover, throughout the world, both humans and animals alike require rest in order to restore and rejuvenate their vitality. Even lifeless machines must be given periods of rest to regain their energy and continue functioning properly. Such being the case, how then can the machine known as the human stomach possibly operate with efficiency if it is never granted any rest at all? Viewed from this perspective, it becomes abundantly clear that gluttony has always posed a far greater problem for humanity than poverty ever has.

Bearing all of this in mind, all scriptures and religions have placed tremendous emphasis upon the practice of fasting. The timeless maxim '**Langhanam Paramoushadham**', or, fasting is the best medicine, encapsulates the importance of fasting. Moving forward in this significant direction, and taking careful

note of the importance of fasting as a multifaceted discipline that encompasses the body, the mind, dharmic ritual, and profound spiritual dimensions, our shishya Yogeendra Bhat has gathered its most critical aspects and completed his Ph.D. research thesis on *Fasting and Spiritual Progress: A Philosophical and Experiential Study*. His work is truly exceptional, remarkably distinctive, and exceedingly timely! Heartfelt congratulations are due to him!

--

His Holiness Sri Sri Sugunendra Theertha Swamiji

Jagadguru Sri Madhwacharya Moola Maha Samsthanam

Paryaya Sri Puthige, Sri Krishna Matha, Udupi.

Ekādashi

The Ekādashi Vrata stands as one of the most significant contributions of Acharya Madhwa. Among the many great Acharya, it was Acharya Madhwa who clearly established and confirmed the supreme glory of Ekādashi. Many people mistakenly believe that the observance of this celebrated fast is meant only for Sannyasis. Shri Madhvācārya explained the true significance of this sacred vow, declaring that it must be observed by all — irrespective of caste, creed, or varnashrama. Furthermore, he expounded upon the details of Ekādashi Vrata Acharana in his celebrated work ‘**Krishnāmṛutha Mahārṇava.**’

The observance of Ekādashi Vrata leads to special ‘anugraha of Lord Narayana.’ In extolling its greatness, it is said that “all other fasts stand behind Ekādashi” and that “Ekādashi is superior to all other fasts.” The famous story of Ambarisha in the Bhāgavatam also conveys the glory of Ekādashi. The observance of Ekādashi is essential for our spiritual practice.

As is well known, the observance of Ekādashi has become increasingly rare in the present age. This decline may be attributed primarily to a lack of proper awareness regarding its significance. If we explain its significance, it is our feeling that many will certainly follow it. The statements of Vedavyasa, which were expounded by Sri Madhvacharya, are accepted and

followed by people belonging to only one group. It is not surprising in itself at all. There may be many reasons including jealousy etc.,

Setting aside its spiritual dimensions, the significance of Ekādashi can equally be appreciated from a modern scientific perspective, where it reveals a wealth of benefits. The advantages of observing Ekādashi for both body and mind are numerous and well-documented. Given that Ekādashi fasting provides profound protection to the body it is no exaggeration that the celebrated saying “**Shareeramadyam Khalu Dharma Sādhanam**” has come to hold such enduring relevance. Health preservation and holistic development are achieved by fasting on Ekādashi. Scientists who have studied various methods of fasting have affirmed that the fortnightly Ekādashi fast is among the most effective. Their research has established that the body, mind, and intellect are all genuinely rejuvenated through this practice.

Temptations of taste and eating habits that hinder the path of spiritual attainment, are extremely hard to overcome, as indicated in the scriptures. Fasting on Ekādashi can help overcome the mouth chatter, and also advances us on the path to renunciation. Personally, Ekādashi is beneficial for physical health in addition to helping in spiritual advancement. We

believe that Ekādashi Vrata has given us Shri Krishna's anugraha.

Let us observe Ekādashi ourselves, and inspire those around us to do the same. If awareness of Ekādashi were to be disseminated in a purposeful manner, supported by a sound scientific foundation, a great many more people would stand to benefit from this sacred practice.

Shri Yogeendra has done commendable work in conveying the importance of Ekādashi to a wide audience. It is most praiseworthy that he has chosen this subject for his doctoral research and completed it with great success. May Lord Shri Krishna and Shri Mukhyaprāṇa bless him and his family. May the movement of Ekādashi Vrata spread far and wide through sincere and dedicated effort. May it be a source of good for all. May the grace of Shri Krishna remain always upon him.

Sri Sri Sushreendra Theertha Swamiji

Jagadguru Sri Madhwacharya Moola Maha Samsthanam

(Junior)

Paryaya Sri Puthige, Sri Krishna Matha, Udupi

Fasting In Order to Activate The Body

If a human being confines himself solely to a few basic instincts — food, sleep, and sensory pleasure, which are the natural inclinations of the physical body — he fails to realize the higher potential this body holds. This body is capable of achieving far more. Only when one endeavours to live with the conscious awareness that ‘this body is an instrument for Sadhana’ does this human birth truly become worthwhile.

This body is a far more evolved instrument than that of any animal — a gift of the highest order bestowed by God upon the human being alone. The intellectual capacity and the refined mind necessary for the pursuit of higher Sadhana are endowments exclusive to humanity. One who moves through life with the dual aspiration of living well in this world while also using this life as a means of preparation for the world beyond is truly a profound thinker.

This body should have plans for the welfare of both this world and the next. If the course of life is to move in that direction, spiritual achievement is also important. Among the various practices that support this goal, fasting stands as a particularly powerful instrument.

While most organs of the body are periodically granted rest, the digestive system is required to labor continuously. Should the digestive system too be given intervals of rest, it yields immense benefit both physically and spiritually. On one hand, fasting shields the body from serious illness; on the other, it serves as a powerful tool that not only removes existing disease but also awakens within us a keener alertness and enthusiasm for the contemplation of God. Yogeendra Bhat has extensively pondered on the significance of fasting from both the mundane and the supernatural. Inspired by his gurus, he is a cultural ambassador who is drawing people abroad towards spirituality in foreign countries. As a result of extensive study and thoughts, I was happy to know that he has completed his PhD thesis on the topic of *Fasting and Spiritual Progress: A Philosophical and Experiential Study*. We wish that the world will receive more contributions from him and pray to our Sri Samputa Narasimha Swami to bless him with greater achievements and prosperity.

Iti Shri Narayana Smaranam

Sri Sri Vidyaprasanna Theertha Swamiji

Jagadguru Sri Madhwacharya Maha Samsthanam

Sri Subrahmanya Matha, Subrahmanya.

Fasting on Ekadashi

We are continuously developing the body, yet every organ grows in an increasingly unregulated manner. We witness an expansion that surpasses all-natural measure. By distorting and misappropriating the resources of nature, the body is gradually becoming a breeding ground for new and unfamiliar diseases.

A proper diet plays a vital role in strengthening the eyes, ears, nose, and all other sense organs. Through food, every organ of the body receives the essential nutrients required for growth. The disciplined regulation of food is particularly beneficial in ensuring that the ten external senses — the five organs of action, the five organs of knowledge — as well as the internal faculty of the mind, function in an unimpaired manner. Food exerts its influence not only upon the body but also upon the mind in ways that are subtle yet profound.

The sun plays a major role in the preparation of food in nature. Thus, our ancestors saw the day of fasting as Ekādashi as a sun-centered day through continuous experimentation. Acknowledging the profound effect of Ekādashi upon both body and mind, they described its purifying power as a remedy for sin and expounded upon the simplicity it brings to karma tantra in daily life.

Here is the statement of life's achievements recorded in the Uttarakhand of the Padma Purāna:

**Ekādashendriyaiḥ Papam Yat Kritam Bhavati Prabho |
Ekādashyupavasena Tat Sarvam Vilayam Nayet**

The damage caused by the eleven senses will go away if one fasts on the eleventh day (Ekādashi).

In the past, we see in the Purānas, kings had told the people through orders and made it prevalent in every village. As beings who are themselves part of the solar system, if we align our dietary practice with the rhythms of Ekādashi, we may attain a life of genuine health and balance.

If we fast for 45 hours!?

We have eleven senses in our body. In order to get rid of the impurities that accumulate we have to fast on the eleventh day in a fortnight. This is a kind of complete rest. Medical science has recognized the changes that take place inside our body by giving this complete rest. Noticing the changes due to fasting in the body and on planetary movements, Vedic science has confirmed that fasting on the day of Ekādashi is best. Thus, people should not think of fasting as just a spiritual activity, rather, they should do it for their longevity.

Recently, American podcaster Lex Fridman interviewed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for about three hours. For this interview Fridman revealed that he had fasted for 45 hours, only drinking water. During the podcast Prime Minister Narendra Modi also explained that fasting is not just avoiding eating food, it is a scientific process deeply rooted in traditional and Ayurvedic methods.

First 6 to 12 hours- Glucose Dependency

In the beginning of the fasting, the body uses glucose as the primary source of energy for a few hours. After the food gets digested, the sugar level starts gradually decreasing in the blood. At this time the body divides the stored carbohydrate as glycogen and converts it to glucose. This helps in supplying energy to the body. The pancreas decreases the production of insulin, because of this the fat in the body gets used up.

12 to 24 hours - Glycogen consumption and fat burning

By about 12 hours the glycogen storage starts depleting. The body now starts the metabolic process of breaking down fats stored in fat cells for energy. This process leads to ketosis. As a result, the liver converts fatty acids into ketones. These ketones provide an alternative source of energy to the brain and muscles which help improve cognitive function and focus. Thus, the fat in the body starts burning and the body gets the

energy. Additionally, the autophagy process starts, which helps maintain cellular health by removing dysfunctional proteins and organelles forming new cells.

24 to 36 hours - Increase of autophagy, hormonal changes

Autophagy is significantly enhanced during this process, as the body begins recycling its damaged cellular components, thereby influencing overall metabolism and aiding in the generation of new, healthy cells. This remarkable process of autophagy is widely associated with a variety of health benefits and is believed by many scientists to play a crucial role in the prevention of serious diseases, including cancer as well as various neurodegenerative conditions.

The levels of Human Growth Hormone (HGH) rise remarkably, increasing by three to five times their normal amount. This surge greatly assists in the repair of muscles and accelerates the burning of stored fat within the body. Alongside this, the levels of adrenaline and noradrenaline are likewise elevated, and as a result, the body burns fat at an even more efficient rate. Furthermore, the body's sensitivity to insulin is considerably enhanced, which in turn proves highly beneficial in regulating and controlling blood sugar levels.

36 to 45 hours – Effect of fasting

The production of glucose takes place primarily through the process known as gluconeogenesis, whereby the body skillfully generates glucose from amino acids and lactic acid. At the same time, the body exercises a most effective control over its caloric intake. Interestingly, this process may also influence the rate of digestion in such a way that it is enhanced tenfold or even fifteenfold, rather than being diminished as one might expect. Inflammation throughout the body is notably reduced, and this in turn assists in lowering the risks of heart ailments, cancer, and the weakening of the nerves. The utilization of body fat is significantly increased, leading to a natural reduction in overall weight. Moreover, the pace of the deep cellular repair process is greatly accelerated, which results in the removal of old and weakened cells and paves the way for the growth and development of fresh, healthy new cells in their place.

Research on autophagy is presently being carried out across every corner of the world. It is widely believed that the process of autophagy begins within our body once we have fasted for a period of forty-five hours. In the year 2016, the prestigious Nobel Prize was awarded to the Japanese scientist Yoshinori Ohsumi for his groundbreaking discovery of autophagy. Through his remarkable research, he demonstrated that autophagy is closely linked to the prevention of aging, cancer,

and also debilitating disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, which arise from the disability of the nervous system. Studies conducted in the year 2019 further revealed that the autophagy process is set into motion whenever an individual undertakes fasting for a duration exceeding twenty-four hours. Additionally, the studies published in 2018 in the Journal of Cell Metabolism demonstrated that fasting for more than forty-eight hours can substantially increase the production of stem cells within the body, which in turn strengthens the immune system and greatly aids in combating various diseases.

Seven Healthy Advantages of Autophagy

Helps reduce weight by burning the body fat at a faster rate.

Insulin production increases, which helps reduce the risk of Type-2 diabetes.

Autophagy helps cleanse the cells by removing the old and damaged cells.

Reduces inflammation which reduces the pain in joints, heart and chronic diseases.

Brain health improves by maintaining a healthy nervous system which enhances mental clarity.

The digestive system works better and the stomach functions properly.

Longevity increases – research conducted on mice have shown that longevity increases by fasting.

The following people should not fast for 45 hours:

1. Pregnant women or women nursing young babies.
2. People with Type -1 diabetes or who have hypoglycemia.
3. Serious heart condition, very weak or under weight people.
4. People with vertigo, tiredness, weakness or who easily faint.

The Japanese scientist Yoshinori Ohsumi was awarded the Nobel Prize solely on the basis of his observations of the changes that occur within the body, without taking into consideration the tradition of ritual fasting or the influence of planetary movements upon such practices. Fasting undertaken without this deeper understanding can, on occasion and with certain exceptions, result in harm or injury to the body. However, the traditional fasting that is observed on the sacred day of Ekādashi bestows upon the practitioner not only numerous health-related advantages, but also a wealth of additional spiritual benefits. By augmenting one's store of

punya, the sins accumulated during previous births are gradually washed away and dissolved, thereby granting the soul the blessing of Sadgati. A thorough and masterful analysis of all the explanations and clarifications contained within the Purāṇas was carried out by Jagadguru Shri Madhwacharya himself, who firmly upheld and lovingly bequeathed to us all the sacred observance and celebration of the Ekādashi day.

Shravana + DwAdashi— Two Days of Fasting

Punya-shravana-nakshatre Dwadashi Yadi Sanbhavet |

Tathropavasam Kurveeta koti-yajna-phalam labhet ||

In accordance with this great śāstra-dharma saying, whenever Shravana nakshatra falls upon a Dwādashī, the person who observes fasting on that day attains Kotiyagnaphala. On this very basis, Acharya Madhwa, in his 'Krishnamrutha Maharnava,' has prescribed the observance of fasting across two days.

**Dwadasheem Shravanopethām yo noposhayeth-
sumandadheeh |**

Pancha-samvatsara-krutam punyam thasya vinashyathi ||

The person who does not do fasting on shravana dwadashi loses five years worth of punya.

Acharya Madhwa's opinion is clearly stated by Shri Vishnu Thirtharu:

Madhyanha-vyāpīnēe Shrona Uposhyā vishnu-thathparaiḥ |

Only when Shravana nakshatra remains till afternoon on the day of Dwadashi, will Vaishnavas perform two days of fasting.

Normally, whichever nakshatra happens to be present at the time of sunrise on a particular thithi, that entire day is recognized and referred to by the very same thithi and nakshatra. However, in actual reality, it is not necessary that either the thithi or the nakshatra must remain present throughout the whole day (all twenty-four hours) or continue until sunrise of the following day. Through proper calculations, we can precisely determine exactly how long each of them remains.

Therefore, if Dwadashi is present during sunrise but Trayodashi is soon going to commence thereafter, then even if Shravana nakshatra happens to remain throughout the entire day, one need not undertake fasting, as declared by Rishi Atri.

Purvam avartanad - urahvam Vishnubham Yadi Yogashaha |

Tatholpa Dwadashee tatra Dwadashyam eva Paranam ||

If Shravana nakshatra is present during sunrise but Dhanista nakshatra is soon going to commence, then even if Dwadashi

continues to remain throughout the entire day, one need not undertake fasting, as stated by the Smṛti.

In the case where both Dwadashi and Shravana nakshatra happen to be present at sunrise, but both of them are soon changing over to the next thithi and nakshatra, then fasting need not be observed on that day.

However, if both Dwadashi and Shravana nakshatra continue to remain present until the afternoon, up to Abhijit lagnam, and persist beyond it, then fasting must indeed be undertaken on that very day.

Shri Vishu Thirtha's saying, known as 'Madhyānavyāpinī,' implies that if both the Shravana nakshatra and Dwadashi happen to remain present until the afternoon, then fasting must be observed on that very day. This principle is clearly explained and affirmed in the Dattātreya Samhitā —

Madhyana-vyapinee Shrona Dwadashya saha Sangatha|

UpoShya Dwadashee thatra -|

Udayad-abhijin-lagna-gamini shruthi-vasare|

Phalgune Prostapadyam va hyuposhya vratam-

acharet|(Mareechi)

Dinardha-samyutham Shronam Dwadashya Saha Sangatham

|

Tām-uposhya vratam kuryat Vamanasya-ativallabham

||(Samvartha)

If the thithi-nakshatra yoga is not there at least till afternoon that day fasting should not be done as per Rishi Marichi.

Udayam Vyapya Yo Yogaha Thithi-nakshatra-samyuthaha |

ā madhyanhe Na chet Soyam Kuryat Tatraiva Paranam ||

For all these the original source is from Shri Vedavyasa's VarAha Purāna.

Uttarāmishritam Shronam Naivoposhya vrati bhavet |

NāpiMadhyānatho Nyunā Langhanarha Bhavet Vrate

āto madhyanaga Grāhya Vishnu-vrata-chikirhubhihi |

Uttara Vedharahithaha Shravano dwadashee-yuthaha |

Vyapnoti yadi Madhyanam Kuryat Tasyam-uposhanam |

Shronapi Dwadashee vāpi Madhyanat Purvameva tu |

Khanditha Syathada naiva dwadashyā Samushoshanam ||

For instance, on 9-9-2011, according to Drugganitha calculations, the Dwadashi thithi is going to conclude before

noon (at 11 a.m.); therefore, even though shravananakshatra continues to remain present beyond noon, fasting is still not to be observed on that day. Accordingly, the Dwadashi pārāṇe must be performed in strict accordance with the Purāṇas.

On 10-3-2020, however, both the Dwadashi thithi and shravana nakshatra are going to remain present until late afternoon, and hence fasting must be undertaken on both of the days, namely Ekādashi and dwadashi.

It is Drugganitha alone that can reliably inform us precisely how long a given thithi or nakshatra is going to remain, and thus it is this very calculation that ultimately determines the rules governing the observance of fasting. Whenever we happen to miss these calculations, and the nakshatra does not continue to be present until the afternoon, or even the commencement of the thithi is not clearly established at the time when Aruṇodaya occurs, there will inevitably arise changes in the observance of the Ekādashi– Dwadashi fasting. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to faithfully follow the correct calculations by all possible means and to undertake the fasting in the proper manner.

Bhukti-muktiprada Ekādashi

One must fast on both Shuklapaksha and Krushnapaksha Ekādashi. According to Varaha Purāna by fasting on

Shuklapaksha Ekādashi he will be bestowed with wealth in this world. By fasting on Krushnapaksha Ekādashi he will get Moksha.

**Yatha Shukla Tatha Krushna Uposhya Hi Prayatnataha |
Shukla Bhuktiprada Nity ā Krushna Muktia Prayacchati ||**

Fasting On Dwadashi

Usually, whichever thithi is present during the sunrise on a particular day that day is recognized by the same thithi. If the Ekādashi thithi starts two hours before sunrise, then that day is considered appropriate for fasting. Before sunrise, during Arunodaya, if dashami thithi occurs from the previous day as well as at sunrise, even if Ekādashi occurs, fasting still cannot be done that day. It is considered as Ekādashi in contact with dashami, and is called - VidhaikAdashi. Knowingly or unknowingly if one does that day Ekādashi vrata and does the fasting, he will lose his previous hundred janmas punya. Therefore it is better to do the fasting on the following day which is dwadashi.

Dashami-Ekadashee Vidha Noposhya tu Kadāchana |

**Dashami Samyuta hanti Punyā Janma-shatarjitam || (Nārada
Purāna)**

The Bhagavad Gita, which is considered the essence of all scriptures, is the home of the messages of Sri Krishna. Therefore, if something is present in the Gita, that implies that it is present everywhere. At the end of the Gita, which largely discusses the theory of karma, Sri Krishna says, ‘Yajno Danam Tapashchaiva Pavanāni Manishi Nam’, that sacrifice, charity and penance are things that cannot and should not be left out. Sacrifice is a very elaborate program, and charity is mainly meant for the rich. And what is this penance? Shruti itself clearly says that. ‘Yajno DANena TapasA NAshake’, fasting is a physical, mental, and obligatory penance. It is both verbal and silent. That is, it is a pre-trikarana, pure Vedic karma, that is, penance, in the sense that fasting is the main one. If we ask what is the value of fasting, we can find the answer in the phrase, ‘UpavAsavatA Karyam JapahOmavarArchanaM.’ This means that the daily chanting, daily worship of God, or any other fast-related karma that we do, all lose their value if there is no fasting. That is, all our value-based karmas, yajna, dana and fasting, are only valuable if there is fasting. In fact, the main karma among the three karmas is fasting. There are very few recent records of an official day, time, or thought that has been perfectly done on this. Therefore, in order to make people feel comfortable about it, it is necessary to study it in depth and with a wide perspective.

I congratulate Yogeendra Bhat for his efforts to promote it in India and abroad to reach more people and to give a Scientific and Theoretical critique. May his efforts be successful and may it reach the people easily with the special grace of the Mukhyaprana and Lord Shri Krishna, and may the readers also be part of His grace.

Mahamahopadhyaya, Shatāvdhāni,

Dr. Ramanatha Acharya Udupi

1. The Rationale for Fasting

‘Langhanam Paramaushadham,’ Fasting (langhanam) is said to be a wonderful medicine (parama aushadham) that can cure all diseases. If we completely abstain from food and water for a day, we will not suffer any loss, yet there are immense benefits in terms of health. While fasting, many germs are destroyed, and there are even many examples of people who, by fasting regularly on Ekādashi, rid themselves of many diseases, such as diabetes, inflammation (vata), indigestion, as well as other hereditary diseases, and thereby enjoyed good health.

In most cases, when we feel hungry, it is our mind, not the body, that feels the need for food. The mind is like a small child: if we deny and refuse to give in, it will eventually become quiet. With time, it will learn discipline. If a child asks for chocolate repeatedly, won’t its health be ruined, if we keep providing? Therefore, we must control our mind for the sake of our body’s health.

Any machine, such as a car or a water pump, if used continuously and without rest, will quickly break down; but if we stop for a while and give it some rest, it will last a long time. Our digestive system is like a machine, and since birth, we have been giving it continuous work. Once we eat food, it has to work for many hours to digest it, and by that time, we would have

already eaten another meal. In short, our stomach never gets any rest. Ekādashi fasting is like the rest that we can give to our digestive system. We experience that when we empty our stomach for a day – much like emptying the water tank and cleaning it – it gets clean. The body becomes lighter, and mental illness also goes away.

The cause of many diseases, such as leg pain, hip pain, back pain, is the fat in our body. Of course, the only cure for it is to reduce body weight. There is no better way than fasting to burn unnecessary fat. If you want to live a good life with good health, then observe Ekādashi Vrata with devotion.

You may have noticed, dogs, cats, and cows also fast frequently for good health! Sometimes, even if you give them the food they like, they don't eat it! Fasting is a natural process.

2. Fasting as a Path to Mental Purification

Our body, which gets dirty again and again, can be purified by bathing. We can feel that we have become pure by washing it well in warm, clean water using gram flour, Shikakai powder, shampoo, soap, and the like. To keep our body feeling better and more comfortable, we can apply perfumes to our hands and body and apply sambrani fumes to our head and hair. But how can we cleanse the inside of our body, which is always full of feces, urine, pus, and germs? And more importantly, how can we cleanse our mind, which gets dirty again and again by wandering freely without any control and dwelling on disgusting and immoral things?

It is a traditional belief that if we take a holy bath with devotion in the pure waters of rivers endowed with divine power, such as the Ganges and the Kaveri, we become pure. It is said that even the dirt of our sins – which is not visible to the eye – is washed away. If we consume the Kalasha thirtha sanctified with Vedic mantras, and the Deva Tirtha of the Shalagrama and other idols that have been anointed, the inner part of our body becomes pure. If we collect the pure Panchagavya, mix it in the proper proportion, chant the appropriate mantras, and consume it along with a prayer to God, our body becomes

thoroughly pure. (It is not necessary to consume it in cupfuls; it is enough to hold in the right hand as much Tirtha as would submerge a lentil, pray with devotion and accept it once.)

Thus, whether it is worship of God, bathing in the punya tirthas (or holy rivers), offering a sacrifice, or any other process, if our mind is not pure, it will not yield full results. We will not be able to do any work properly with a disturbed mind. Therefore, from time to time, an effort must be made to purify our mind. Just like cleaning the floor of our house at least once a day; like sweeping the yard; like emptying the water container at least once a week and washing it thoroughly. But how is that possible? How can we possibly clean the mind, which is never seen by the eye nor touched by the hand?

Lord Krishna said that fasting is the only solution to purify the mind. In the Gita (Chapter 2, verse 59), **‘Vishaya Vinivartante Niraharasya Dehinaha’** “Our lustful desires (Vishaya) go away (Vinivartante) with fasting (Niraharasya). The mind, restrained by fasting, stops its excessive activity of thinking about unnecessary things.”

A kitten becomes mischievous after drinking too much milk. Even a monkey, which is famous for its mischief, displays its monkey behavior only after its stomach is full. Similarly, if we

want our mind to give up its free will and come under our control, we too should abstain from food regularly from time to time. Therefore, Ekādashi fasting should be observed with devotion.

You may have noticed that some people tame animals and birds and make them do many wonderful things. In places like Sea World in America, you can see that even the most restless aquatic animals like otters, sharks, whales, dolphins are tamed and are made to perform many wonderful shows. Now, you can even search for such videos on You-Tube. Interestingly, only after the show is over, they are fed the food they like. This is the secret. Through food restraint, we can tame any animal or bird. We can control it as we want. Similarly, those who decide to fast without water on Ekādashi also achieve control on their mind. We should not listen to what our mind says, rather our mind must follow the discipline that we have consciously decided. Then we will win.

Fasting on Ekādashi, which is done once in fifteen days as a prayer to God, also makes our mind practice discipline. It saves us from possible bad thoughts and sinful deeds.

3. Eligibility and Observance of the Ekādashi Fast

Not all actions are beneficial for everyone. It is for this reason that the scriptures prescribe certain duties and actions as mandatory according to one's knowledge, strength and ability. Similarly, some actions may also be prohibited for some. All of this is reasonable and meaningful. After all, won't disasters occur due to medicines given by someone who has no medical education? And similarly, how can a doctor who does not know the basics of construction give guidance on building a house?

Just as there are differences in strength, ability and age among women, men, infants, and the elderly, there are also differences in qualifications and social differences such as country, time, caste, etc. Our proficiency and experience in certain matters depend specifically on the family and environment in which we are born and brought-up. For example, the lifestyle and tastes of a person born and raised in a farming family in a village are different from those of a city dweller. Therefore, there are differences in the duties and deeds that are considered beneficial to them.

In the present time, most of the daily deeds of people undertaken for earning a living through various means depend on their own chosen wishes. Therefore, most of the caste

systems of the past and their related prohibitions can be said to be irrelevant to the present time.

However, the general rules, such as praying to God and observing fasts, are beneficial to everyone, at all times. These are the rules that the ancient scriptures insisted that all people should observe. Therefore, we are also carrying out our traditional religious beliefs and practices as per the tradition that our elders have observed. Although some of the rites and fasts are seen as optional and to be observed according to their faith and convenience, it is noted in our scriptures that the primary rules like praying to God daily and fasting on Ekādashi are mandatory.

Has God not blessed us with this human birth so that we can all be saved by diligently following the rules of the scriptures? If we had been born as some animal, bird, or a wild man in a dense forest, would we have had the opportunity to understand and carry out such valuable practices?

Even among the scriptures, many Purāṇas and Smṛiti Vakyas insist that everyone should observe the Ekādashi fast. They say that it is extremely beneficial for everyone, at all times, without any discrimination, be it women, children, the disabled, those affected by sutaka, etc.

Whether they are celibate, students, unmarried persons, householders, employed, or retired – people of all castes, people of all professions, the childless, widows, widowers, travelers, and those living in distant lands – all humans are eligible for the meritorious act of fasting on Ekādashi, regardless of caste or colour, as these words from Sri Madhvacharya's '**Sri Krishnamrutha Maharnava**' (Slokas 186 – 187) indicate!

Brahma-charee grihastho va vanaprastho yatisthatha |

Brahmanaha kshatriyo vaishyaha shudro bhartrumati tatha |

Abhartruka tathanaye va ustavaidehikādayaha |

Ekadashyam na bhunjeeta pakshayorubhayorapi ||

When viewed from the perspective of all humans, aren't we all the same? Aren't all of our body structures, internal blood, organs, digestive system, speech, and patterns of movement the same, right? Is it possible to say, "I belong to that caste, therefore I walk with my hands and not with my feet?" Is it possible to say, "I was born in this family, and therefore I eat with my nose and not with my mouth?!" Since we are all human beings, and since all of us have the same body for sadhana, shouldn't the goal to be achieved be the same? After all, since

there is only one God who created all of us, shouldn't we all go and join the same God in the end?

Therefore, we are all worthy of spiritual achievement and the acquisition of knowledge and punya. The differences in caste and status that have grown up within our society as a necessity only in the eyes of the social system, and the religious practices that we have to perform individually for the upliftment of our nature have nothing to do with it. In this world, one should accept and experience what has come his or her way. Children born in wealthy families have a luxurious lifestyle. That of the middle class is different. That of the poor is different still. Children born in the family of musicians can easily learn the art of music. Children of dancers may have the advantage of becoming proficient in the art of dance. Children of film stars may get ample opportunities in the film industry. Similarly, their homes, schools, vehicles, and places of entertainment may all be different according to their financial and natural advantages. But aren't births and deaths the same for everyone? Even though the hospital wards can be different, are there differences in the diseases that can occur?

Even though there are many differences and discriminations among us according to the system of the external world, the presence of God within us all remains the same. It is Sri Krishna Himself who said in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 5, Verse 18),

**Vidya-vinaya sampanne brahmane gavi hastini
shuni chaiva shwapake cha panditaha sama darshinaha**

Even though there are immense differences between a Brahmin who is well-versed in all knowledge and considered to be the best in the qualities of knowledge, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an uncultured, lowly man who lives by eating dog meat, it is the Lord alone who remains the same, standing as the inspirer and regulator within all of them!

Just as the thoughts, beliefs, and tastes that arise in everyone's mind – despite living in the same house and having the same type of food and drinks – are different, the spiritual wealth within us transcends all kinds of differences and distinctions in the social system. It is just as the shape and size of sugarcane stalks differ, but the sweetness inside remains the same.

Just as it is inevitable for all humans to eat and breathe in order to live on this earth, the ancient scriptures believe that it is equally inevitable for all of us to observe a holy fast like Ekādashī for the sake of our own self-improvement, for the sake of our worthiness of our life, and for the sake of pleasing God.

If we want to cure our illness, we should take medicine ourselves, and if we want to satisfy our hunger, we should take food ourselves. Similarly, everyone who has come to this earth

as a human being must observe Ekādāshi fast for the sake of the forgiveness of their own sins and for the sake of worthiness of their own birth. That way we can receive the grace of God. Otherwise, we cannot be sure of being born as humans in the future.

‘marali ee pari janumavu baruva bharavaseyantu illa |

hariye Jagadi neenobbanallade porevarinnāru illa valla | [3]

**hyange mādalaiyya krushna hoguthide āyushyā gopala
vittala.’**

From *Hyaange Maadalayya Krishna, Sri Gopala Dasaru*

4. Fasting as a Preventive Measure Against Disease

Moss grows only in places where water constantly falls. If we step on such a spot, we slip. And so, we walk very carefully during the rainy season. Similarly, many insects are found in leaves, flowers, fruits, and vegetables. We remove them carefully and wash the vegetables well before use. We also drink water only after filtering and boiling it properly. If we want good health and take such care over external aspects, should we not take internal matters equally seriously? So many terrible diseases grow inside us without our knowing, coming to light only later and afflicting us, do they not? Do we truly need to endure the extreme suffering of medical treatment and hospital stays? At the very least, for this reason, we should pay close attention to the cleanliness of our internal organs.

Visit, at least once in a while, those areas where it rains continuously for months. Those who wash and clean regularly have no moss growing in their yards, and their feet do not slip. In the yards of those who neglect this out of indifference, not only moss, but other weeds will take hold. If you merely touch some of them, they lead to itching and make you scratch, and through continuous scratching, even if the skin peels, the

itching does not stop! But when water grows scarce in summer, these weeds disappear! The system inside our body works the same way. If we keep filling it with food and drink, diseases will surely come and afflict us very soon. Just as the scorching summer follows the rainy season to keep nature in balance, so too must we stop the continuous supply of food for a time, to restore the balance of our body's nature. We must observe regular fasts with devotion.

Our bodies harbor many harmful toxins. Some arise from our genetics, while others enter with our food. Still other microscopic organisms inhabit the places we move through and enter our bodies via our orifices, without our awareness. They use the food we eat to multiply and grow.

If we empty a sugar container and wash it thoroughly, will ants appear there? Similarly, if we bring discipline to our irregular eating habits and fast regularly, we can rid our bodies of the unnecessary organisms thriving within us! A good, nutritious diet combined with the discipline of fasting offers real protection to our physical health.

The 2016 Nobel Prize in Medicine was awarded to a Japanese researcher, Dr. Yoshinori Ohsumi. What he discovered was none other than our Ekādashi fast, which has existed since time

immemorial! Even though he did not officially acknowledge it, in principle it is precisely the same as our own Ekādashi!

Many unwanted cells in our bodies are constantly causing trouble. Cancer and other deadly diseases are not caused by viruses or bacteria; rather, they arise from our own damaged or useless cells! It is as though our own companions were stabbing us in the back — harming us from within! If we fast regularly for at least once in every fifteen days, we can rid ourselves of such harmful cells. Otherwise, it is simply not possible to separate them from our body. It is much like how, if we stop extending favors to those among our own people who do us no good, they will slowly drift away from us, will they not?

Our healthy cells, which rely on the food we eat to grow each day, continue searching for food even when we fast! If we go without food or water for more than twenty-four hours, those healthy cells will recycle and consume the useless, damaged cells! When unwanted viruses and bacteria attack our body, these cells fight back and raise our body temperature, causing fever. Similarly, due to the conflict between these cells, we may notice that our body runs warm even during fasting!

In recent years, a form of extended fasting called ‘intermittent fasting’ has grown very popular in foreign countries. Some people eat only once in twenty-four hours, while others take light meals every eight or twelve hours. Clearly, people abroad are now eager to reap the benefits of fasting in various ways. In our country too, many have taken an interest in guided fasting, with practitioners saying, ‘We will guide you and solve your health problems.’ Many people have freed themselves from long-term chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure through such strict practices! They have even stopped medications they had been taking for years and have become healthy! They feel lighter and happier, having shed the unnecessary burden of excess body fat.

Isn’t it better to follow the most scientific and practical of our ancient practices — such as the Ekādashi fast — throughout our lives, rather than suffer through someone else’s experiments? Is it not far better?

There is certainly no better practice in the world than the twice-monthly Ekādashi fast — eating a light meal on the evening of the tenth day (Dashami), fasting completely the next day (Ekādashi), and breaking the fast the following morning (Dwadashi) with a light meal! After all, every new regimen carries the risk of new problems. Our elders were not fools. We

are the fools — those of us who ignore what has been practiced in our country for thousands of years, carefully researched and proven beneficial, and turn instead to new foreign experiments.

5. The Psychological Foundations of Ekādashi

As we all know, we have great significance for our birth star and zodiac sign. These can be called our religious or spiritual identifiers — our special identity, the one through which we introduce ourselves to the divine power during prayer, thereby connecting ourselves to God. They are also the medium through which we enter the wonderful world of astrology, to which we turn in order to address our natural curiosity and anxiety about the future. We determine our star and zodiac sign through precise calculations as directed by our most ancient astrological tradition. As soon as a child is born, we consult scholars who instruct us to give the child a name using letters corresponding to their birth star and zodiac sign. Our ancestors firmly believed that even if the constellation and star are forgotten over time, they can be recovered through the name — and that such a fitting name can secure a bright future for the child.

It is our belief and longstanding tradition that everyone should remember their constellation and star, drawing from them solutions, guidance, and peace during the unexpected difficulties of life. Behind the ancient texts that explain the calculation of constellations, eclipses, planetary movements,

and more, lie deep layers of study, research, and psychological insight left by our ancestors. Our ancient system — capable of accurately identifying the movements of the sun, moon, planets, and countless stars, and of precisely declaring in advance the events that will unfold in the sky — has a remarkable history spanning thousands of years!

Astrology, one of the six principal branches of the Vedas, is primarily concerned with identifying auspicious times. Determining the right muhurtha — the precise moment at which an action is most likely to bear fruit — is no small thing. It is, in fact, the key to success. Don't farmers succeed by knowing which crops to grow and when? Don't traders consider where and when to invest for the best returns? In the same spirit, we still follow the practice of finding the right day and time for every important undertaking, such as marriage or a housewarming. When we begin at the right time and in the right muhurtha, the belief that all will proceed auspiciously brings great peace of mind and a fearless enthusiasm for life's journey.

Birth stars and zodiac signs are, at their core, an identity determined by the position of the moon at the moment of our birth. The ancients divided the vast sky into twelve parts, naming them Meshadi Rasis. They also grouped the innumerable stars into twenty-seven constellations, named

Ashwini and so on. The constellation in which the moon falls at the moment of birth determines one's zodiac sign. But do those born during the day have no zodiac sign or star? Not at all. Our astrology can precisely calculate the moon's position even when the moon and stars are invisible in the bright light of the sun. Just as modern technology accurately predicts the arrival times of trains and planes, our ancient system does the same for celestial movements. Let us now explore the psychological dimension of astrology.

Our life depends primarily on the sun, not the moon! Each of our days begins with sunrise. Beyond this, the principal planets — Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn — also play an important role in our daily lives. All the planets matter in calculating appropriate times, constructing horoscopes, and predicting our future. The Sun, Mars, and other planets also appear in different constellations from day to day. Yet why is the star and constellation associated with the Moon given priority? Why is the Moon accorded such importance while the Sun and other planets seem to be set aside?

The answer is that the Moon acts as a regulator of our mind! Our ancestors recognized a profound relationship between the Moon and the human mind. How can the Moon, so far away, affect our earth? The answer lies in the fluctuations of sea waves

observed during the full moon and new moon. Similarly, we can observe the anomalies and disturbances in the mental state of those who suffer from mental disorders at the turning points of the lunar cycle. For this reason, the Tithis — arising according to the waxing and waning of the moon from new moon to full moon and back — are the most significant days for us. Accordingly, all our festivals and celebrations are timed to the lunar calendar. Sri Madhvacharya too affirmed this with his instruction ‘Chāndrenaiva Samāchareth.’

That is why the Shastras have identified Ekādashi as a day on which fasting is necessary. Although references to many fasts appear throughout the Purāṇas, all of them are optional — those who are interested may observe them according to their ability and devotion. But regarding the Ekādashi fast alone, all the Purāṇas give unanimous and strict instruction! Perhaps on Ekādashi, our mind and body are most fully attuned to the practice of fasting.

Fasting is a remarkable psychological process. It dispels the mind’s fear that something is beyond our capacity. It cultivates self-control and sharpens mental concentration. Most importantly, it teaches the restless mind — which craves everything — the discipline of patience and tolerance. The Ekādashi fast can be called the practical embodiment of our

ancestors' teaching: that one who is able to control oneself can conquer everything in life and face any situation with courage.

Our physical capacities — weight control, the proper assimilation of nutrients and medicines, immunity, and more — depend entirely on the mind. Without faith, no medicine will benefit us; proteins and vitamins will not lead to desired results. Weight control is no different. It cannot be achieved through exercise and food restriction alone. Only the disciplined practice of fasting — the *vrata* — can truly be called the 'perfect treatment' and the 'disciplined practice for good health.'

The weight of the body can, to a certain degree, be controlled through diet, exercise, and fasting with dedicated effort. But how does one reduce the weight of the mind? That is precisely why fasting rituals like *Ekādashi* have come into existence. On *Dashami*, *Ekādashi*, and *Dwadashi* — collectively called *Haridina* — we have the opportunity to surrender all our worries and sorrows to God. On *Dashami* we make the *sankalpa*, on *Ekādashi* we fast, and on *Dwadashi* we offer our dedication. Through these three steps, we purify ourselves in preparation for the approaching new moon or full moon. Our minds, which may be vulnerable at that time, are steadied by the assurance that we have fasted for God's sake and that His

grace will be upon us.

Sometimes we may feel hesitant when turning to God in prayer. What have I done for God? What have I offered? Do I have the right to keep asking for what I need? Those who observe the Ekādashi fast continuously and with devotion never feel this hesitation. Is it not only the student who has not studied or completed their homework who fears the teacher? The knowledge that one has fasted and renounced pleasures for God's sake, as the scriptures command, brings deep peace. More importantly, it brings the peace of mind that comes from having expressed gratitude, in this meaningful way, to God who has given us everything in this life.

What, after all, can we truly achieve by exercising the unbridled freedom of eating and doing whatever we please, wherever and whenever we like — the way an animal does — with an attitude of 'who is there to question me'? A far greater happiness, peace, and satisfaction comes when we fast completely on Ekādashi and then take that first sip of water on Dwadashi, because Ekādashi fasting is deeply personal. It is a remarkable vow that we undertake wholeheartedly and of our own free will!

To observe Ekādashi fasting, we need nothing else and no one else. All we need is our own mind!

6. The Virtues of Frugality Through Fasting

It was the year 1965 — a very difficult time for independent India. The war with Pakistan had badly damaged our country's economy. A devastating famine added further hardship. Food shortages and poverty were bleeding the nation dry, disrupting the livelihoods of its people. On top of this, political tensions with countries like America had cut off the import of wheat and other essential food items. Leading the country through this crisis as Prime Minister was Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri — perhaps the most honest leader India has ever known. His deepest wish was to uphold the dignity of the country without bending before any other nation and somehow find a way through the crisis. And then the idea of 'fasting' dawned on him!

The Honorable Shastri, who loved the people of the country more than his own family, chose to begin this experiment with food sacrifice at home. Everyone in the family readily agreed to his request that they skip dinner for a few days and see how much they could save. Convinced by his own experience of the benefits of fasting, the Prime Minister then appealed to the entire nation through the radio to give up eating rice. As crores of people faithfully followed his advice, tons of food grain were

saved. And so, self-respecting India found its way through hardship with dignity — simply by skipping one meal a day!

You must have heard your elders speak of the poverty and food shortages of that era. Every morsel of rice was spent with great care. Most people had very little money. As wages for their labor, they would collect measured portions of rice from the household — counted out in traditional measures called seru, pāvu, or padis — and live on that. Entire families would cook the rice that the breadwinner brought home and eat together. Some could not afford oil, vegetables, or pulses, and lived on salted porridge alone. And some did not even have enough of that. In such times, they filled their stomachs with whatever was locally available — mangoes, sweet potatoes, and water. Hunger and poverty taught people to use whatever food they had wisely, without wasting a single morsel.

By the grace of God, there is no such famine in our time. The economic situation of our homes and our country have improved greatly. We live better than our elders did, and almost all parents work hard to provide their children with more than they themselves had. But do our children today truly understand what hunger and poverty mean? However much we try to explain it, it will remain fleeting information — like the story of Chandamama — rather than a tangible experience. It simply does not sink in. Only by going without food and water

for a day can one truly understand thirst and hunger, appreciate the poverty that still exists in the world, and feel generous enough to respond to the suffering of others. Through this experience, one comes to value the happiness and comfort one enjoys, understand the effort behind a parent's hard work, and use money and food wisely rather than squandering them.

On average, every Indian spends about Rs. 100 on food per day. If all one hundred and forty crore Indians were to fast on Ekādashi, the country would save Rs. 1,40,00,00,00,000 — every fortnight!

What fasting saves is not only money and food, but also time and effort. In an average household, about six hours are spent each day preparing and cleaning up after meals! And it is impossible to put a price on the labor of the woman of the house. Would it not be wonderful if every household, on Ekādashi, devoted this time instead to chanting the names of God, meditating, singing devotional songs, studying, gaining knowledge, calming the mind, resting, or sharing meaningful conversations with one another? Along with divine blessings, we would also gain mental richness and inner wealth. Through this, the health and longevity of all family members could grow as well.

7. Fasting on Ekādāshi as an Awakening of Inner Wisdom

There are about eight billion people in the world today — and more than seven thousand distinct languages! Yet for most of them, all communication remains confined to external affairs alone. Those who pause to reflect inwardly — asking where they came from, where they are going, and why they are here at all — are exceedingly rare. One in a thousand, perhaps. **‘Manushyānām sahasreshu kashchit yatati siddhaye.’**

This is the degree to which the veil of ignorance enveloped us all. The sole goals of our life have become satisfying our hunger, acquiring comfort through earning money, and having fun. Thoughts of death — and what lies beyond — do not even cross our minds. By the time we reach adulthood, the only things on most minds are: work, earning money, and being happy. Meanwhile, for most seekers of happiness, deeper truths — God, Dharma, sin, and merit — become important only when unexpected difficulties strike. As the saying goes, **‘Sankata bandāga venkataramana.’**

This verse from the Nārada Purāṇa subtly warns us not to limit this precious human life to such superficial pursuits — not to

remain blind in the pit of darkness, but to try to open our eyes even a little. ‘**Ajnana-timirandhasya vratena-anena keshava prasIdha sumukho Nātha Jnana-drishti-prado bhava**’— this instructs us to observe the Ekādashi fast faithfully and to pray to God to open our inner eye and remind us of the true purpose of this life.

What is the connection between the Ekādashi fast and the opening of the inner eye — the ‘vision of knowledge’? The Rigveda has already answered this for those who ask: ‘**Ataptatanor-natadamo ashnute.**’ That is, if we wish to go beyond this sorrowful and impermanent world — the endless cycle of birth and rebirth — and attain true happiness, we must punish this body! We must follow the strict practice of fasting.

Just as the butter hidden within curd emerges only when we churn it with effort, so too do our senses turn inward only when we faithfully observe fasting. Otherwise, just as that curd turns sour and spoils if left untended, our precious life is wasted in vain, consumed by external attractions and worldly temptations. As the Vedas themselves teach — ‘**surabhino mukhakarāt prāṇa āyoomśi tharishat**’— we must always pray to the Omnipresent Supreme Being to rescue this life, which is passing by aimlessly, and make it worthy through righteous

achievement.

Can a piece of hard iron be bent as it is? Only when placed in fire and heated until red-hot can it be shaped as we wish. In the same way, our body gets used to daily eating and a repetitive lifestyle. A strict fast like Ekādashi, observed regularly, strengthens not only the body but the mind as well, and brings both under control. Lord Krishna himself confirms that fasting restrains the senses that otherwise rush ceaselessly toward pleasure: **‘Vishaya vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinah.’**

But is it not enough to simply fast, exercise, and practice discipline? Have you not yourself said that these things lead to good health and a mind filled with pure thoughts? If so, why must we specifically fast on Ekādashi? Why wrap it in religion? Why bring God into it at all? Are not most people in the world today turning to yoga, the gym, meditation, workouts, diets, and intermittent fasting — all for the sake of physical health and beauty?

As Sri Krishna teaches, engaging in voluntary exercises and fasting without any thought of God or dharma — without scriptural grounding — is considered mere physical punishment and ‘tamasic practice, or demonic tendency.’ From such practices, only imbalance can arise; no genuine benefit is

obtained. **‘Karshayantah shareerastham bhuta-grāmam-achetasaha mamchaiva-antah sharerastham tām vidhyāsura nishchayān.’**

It is not truly our choice to accept or reject the God who created us and governs everything. If we do not accept God, we cannot claim to be superior to or independent of all power. Since we have no real control over anything in this life — from birth to death — is it not wiser to simply accept God, as our ancestors and scriptures have always suggested, and order all our actions accordingly as God’s will?

Similarly, by observing strict fasts, we come to understand the hardships of those unfortunate souls who struggle without easy access to food and water. We also gain a deeper appreciation for all the blessings and nourishment we receive in this life. If we were to walk around blindfolded for even a short while, we would instantly realize how precious our eyesight truly is.

Therefore, to know the inner essence — the ultimate truth — and to open the inner eye, we must close the outer one. If we make no effort to open the inner eye, our life will simply be wasted in vain. What use is it to hold a mango merely because its outer skin is pleasant to look at? If we want the sweet,

nectar-like water inside a coconut, must we not first cut through the shell? Just as juice comes from squeezing a lemon, and milk from the udder of a cow, so must we discipline our bodies with wisdom. We must observe fasting. Through this, we must attain control of the senses and strive to perceive God hidden within our innermost being. That is precisely what Sri Purandara Dasa warned us in his verse, ‘**Kanninolage nodo** Sri Hariya.’ Sri Vyasa Rayaru too declared: ‘**Antharangadalli hariya kānadava huttu kurudanu.**’ He who makes no effort to open the inner eye lives out his life in darkness.

Therefore, let us all observe the fast on Ekādashi. And let us pray that God may grant us the vision of knowledge.

8. Ekādashi Under Scientific Scrutiny

It can safely be said that Ekādashi is the one fasting practice that has been observed consistently since ancient times. Ask any elder in your home — there is certainly no one in India, going back through generations, who has not heard of Ekādashi! Although hundreds of fasts — such as Chandrayana, Vishnu Panchaka, Dharana Parana, and Payovrata — are found in our scriptures, and though there are examples of our ancestors observing them occasionally, none were sustained faithfully and consistently throughout a lifetime. Nor is that possible. Because the Ekādashi fast falls only once in fifteen days, it is very easy to implement. It places no undue burden on the body or mind, and by observing it diligently, we reap many benefits with no ill effects.

Our Purāṇas convey the importance of fasting through a wealth of stories. Including the twenty-four Ekādashis in a regular year and the two additional Ekādashis of the Adhika Māsa, a total of twenty-six Ekādashi fasts have each been individually named! The stories describing their significance and the many ways in which they benefit our lives are truly inspiring. Overall, our ancestors did not merely preach that Ekādashi should be observed — it is also well known that they conducted extensive research into its benefits.

In the field of modern medicine as well, a great deal of research has been conducted on Ekādashi. Is it not what we call science when there is honest research backed by adequate documentation? And science itself rests on firm belief — in method, in evidence, in results. The allopathic and homeopathic medicines, electronic devices, vehicles, machines, and all the modern tools we use with confidence in daily life have reached us only after passing through rigorous scientific experiments, tests, and approval processes. Similarly, many ancient practices like Ekādashi — which have undergone deep scientific study, reflection, and careful analysis of benefits and harms — have been embraced by us with equal pride and confidence.

A great deal of research has been done on the physical health benefits of the complete Ekādashi fast. Researchers abroad have also observed this disciplined and regular fasting practice, conducted numerous experiments, and documented its importance. They refer to Ekādashi fasting as ‘Ancient Intermittent Fasting.’ There is little doubt that Ekādashi is the original source of what is now known as Intermittent Fasting, which has now become popular in foreign countries, as there is no other fasting system in the world that is so standardized, so ancient, and so practically sound.

If we eat continuously throughout our lives without pause, our metabolic system will grow sluggish and stagnant. Fasting for about thirty-six hours during Ekādashi gives new vigor to the digestive organs within our body. Research confirms that this Ekādashi fast — beginning on Dashami and concluding on Dwadashi — is highly scientific in its design. If one were to fast abruptly and then eat excessively, the body may not be able to handle the transition and may suffer. It is much like a plant: it flourishes only when watered and nurtured regularly. If one dumps a pile of fertilizer all at once, or leaves the plant unwatered for too long, it will only wither. Our body is the same. That is precisely why a light meal is eaten on Dashami, and the complete fast begins that evening and continues until sunrise on Dwadashi. Just see how scientific this three-day Ekādashi Upavasa is — with its carefully prescribed rules of moderation on Dashami and Dwadashi framing the complete fast in between!

Regular and disciplined Ekādashi fasting also brings immense benefits to the cellular system within our body. During fasting, the shift in our metabolic system causes the body to digest the fats and carbohydrates that otherwise create excess sugar and obesity. At the same time, the body naturally strengthens its immune response by entering what is known as the ‘Ketogenic state.’ It also repairs the damaged cells within us — the very

cells that are the root cause of deadly diseases like cancer. And the process of reducing body weight and restoring physical fitness also unfolds naturally as a result.

In recent times, some alternative diets that produce quick weight loss have become popular — the so-called ‘Keto Diet.’ Ready-made keto ingredients in the form of powders and flour are also available in the market, and many of our young people, driven by the desire for a good physique, have fallen for their appeal. This modern dietary experiment consists of roughly 70% fat, 25% protein, and only 5% carbohydrates. Its consumption suppresses hunger and brings about rapid weight loss. But being an unnatural regimen, it carries many side effects — and research indicates that such abnormal diets are a contributing cause of heart attacks and other tragedies increasingly seen in recent times. What need is there for such artificial experiments when our bodies naturally receive regular ‘Ketogenic’ treatment through a disciplined traditional diet combined with the strict Ekādashi fast?

Ekādashi fasting also helps reduce oxidative stress within our body. Modern research shows that good health depends on the proper functioning of the ROS (Reactive Oxygen Species) system — that is, maintaining the right balance of oxygen in the body. Regular Ekādashi fasting supports this balance and also

aids in managing conditions like asthma. Due to factors such as population density, air pollution, radiation, and smoking, defects and fluctuations in the ROS system have been observed everywhere in recent times. As a result, the body's nutritional absorption declines while vulnerability to viral and bacterial infections increases — which is why many people fall ill with colds and fevers four or five times a year. In this environment, it is only through wholesome food, disciplined living, pranayama, and fasting that we can strengthen our health and keep these imbalances in check.

Ekādashi fasting also benefits heart function in several important ways. A complete fast of thirty-six hours, observed once a fortnight, burns a significant number of calories, thereby helping to reduce blood pressure. Fasting is, in fact, the only non-pharmacological means of eliminating LDL — the harmful cholesterol that accumulates in blood vessels and obstructs circulation. Ekādashi fasting can therefore be considered a highly effective means of preventing and managing heart-related disease.

The benefits of Ekādashi fasting for our intestinal systems and digestive tract are also very significant. The food we eat is converted into cells, fueling the body's growth, and the digestive system is the primary vehicle for the body's

maintenance through glucose, insulin, and related processes. All of this must function properly with the support of beneficial bacteria and the liver. Only then can we live in true health. The waterless fast observed on each Ekādashi regulates glucose metabolism and improves insulin sensitivity within this system. Just as a courtyard is thoroughly cleansed by pouring water with force, the thirty-six-hour Ekādashi fast flushes out toxic matter that has accumulated in the intestines. With proper regulation of glucose and insulin, even deadly diseases like Type-2 Diabetes can be brought under control. I have personally seen and spoken with many people who, simply by observing disciplined fasting, have completely managed their long-standing diabetes — some having suffered from it for decades — and now live without any medication at all.

Ekādashi fasting also benefits brain health. Our brain — filled mostly with fluids and countless tiny neurons — is nothing short of a miracle! I recently had the opportunity to closely observe a patient in a hospital in England who had contracted a viral brain infection. That infection had severely affected his memory. Extreme diabetes had weakened his body and destroyed his immune system — a fact the doctors themselves confirmed. Had this man not yielded to his cravings but instead observed disciplined fasts and kept his diabetes in check, he would never have reached such a desperate state. For any viral

or bacterial infection does not stop at causing fever — it can travel through the spinal cord and reach the brain itself, where it may envelop the sensory nerves. The consequences then are beyond imagination. Must we come to a state where we are bedridden, suffering and making others suffer too? To prevent this, we must follow a disciplined lifestyle and diet alongside regular Ekādashi fasting, so as to maintain a strong immune system. Are not all the rules of vrata and fasting that our elders gave us ultimately for our own good?

Scientists have conducted research on the effects of fasting on people with kidney disease and conditions like high blood pressure and have clearly documented that all of these can be brought under control through fasting. When our physical ailments are in check, the mind too becomes calm and happy. Problems like tiredness, fatigue, and apathy are often rooted in our internal physical conditions. Through regular and disciplined fasting like Ekādashi, both body and mind are purified, and we gain the enthusiasm and courage to pursue meaningful deeds and accomplishments.

All research underscores that diet control is indispensable for good health. The rise in chronic diseases like diabetes and obesity — and even serious conditions like cancer — can be

attributed to the dramatic changes in our diet and lifestyle. It can be said that the primary cause of the difficulties we now face is our neglect of fasting practices like Ekādashi, which our ancestors observed diligently, and our abandonment of a disciplined diet and lifestyle. If we make no further efforts in this direction, we will truly face far greater problems in the future — and not only for ourselves. These cellular changes may be passed on through our genes to our children and grandchildren. Our future generations may be made to suffer even more than we do. Surely, we do not want them to inherit serious genetic diseases like cancer, or conditions causing disability. Therefore, preserving the ancient tradition of diligently observing the strict Ekādashi fast is the most valuable treasure we can leave for the generations to come.

9. Ekādashi: The Most Spiritually Auspicious Occasion

In our ancient tradition, there is a unique practice of identifying auspicious days, times, and moments for all pious undertakings. Our ancient scriptures contain precise astrological calculations that determine which deeds are most auspicious on which day and at what hour. The primary purpose of this is that God should be pleased with our pious efforts and that we receive their full fruit. But another important intention behind it is that the work we have planned should proceed smoothly, without obstacle or difficulty.

But are we, the people of Sanātana Dharma, the only ones who faithfully follow the rules of muhurta, Vastu, and the like? Do people of other religions and foreign nations have any such restrictions? And do we not see those very people — who proceed with major projects as they please, entirely unconcerned with such beliefs and calculations — achieving success easily and flourishing right before our eyes with wealth, fame, and prosperity? This question will naturally arise in our minds. But when we carefully observe many historical events and the accumulated experience of our ancestors, a clear answer does emerge.

A farmer who sows carelessly, without making the right decisions about which crop to plant and when, is inviting trouble. If heavy rains arrive just as the harvest is ready, everything is lost. Or if the rains stop precisely when the paddy is at its most critical growth stage, the losses are enormous. Of course, it does not always have to end in disaster. Sometimes our carelessness is overlooked and things proceed happily without any problem at all. But we cannot know when that luck will run out. A person who walks barefoot may or may not step on a thorn. But a person who walks with care, always wearing shoes, will most certainly be spared the pain.

If you observe closely, no one in the world embarks on important tasks without making sufficient calculations about the future. And in the minds of all who take on such great ventures, there is an unspoken fear and anxiety about what lies ahead. Each in their own way has turned to that invisible power for peace and courage. Their manner of practice may differ, but the source of faith is the same. It is worth noting that most of the world's wealthy and successful people are, in their personal lives, deeply religious. The fact that America — the world's big brother — has printed 'In God We Trust' on every dollar bill

stands as a shining testament to the faith in God that even the most modern and successful of people carry within them!

Some people appear to be successful and very wealthy even without following any such beliefs! But this cannot be called permanent victory. However prosperous they may be today, a moment of terrible tragedy invariably awaits them. Not only do the legendary examples of Ravana of Lanka, Kansa of Mathura, Jarasandha, Duryodhana, Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu, and others illustrate this truth — so too do modern stories. The downfall of immensely powerful men like Hitler and Saddam Hussein, who at their peak covered even their toilets with gold, are examples right before our eyes. On the other hand, those in the world who are devout and follow their traditions have nothing to lose through their faithful practices — and they do not become arrogant. Sustained by the unwavering belief that God exists and watches over them, they gain steady morale, peace of mind, and a quiet serenity. They remain, always, on the right path.

It is not right to measure success, happiness, and wealth solely through worldly possessions. Our elders had the wisdom to recognize things invisible to the naked eye — and even to the analytical mind — as the true treasures of life, and to show the right path toward acquiring them. Happiness and fortune are

not the fleeting pleasures that our restless minds perpetually crave. There is a distinction between lasting peace, tranquility, and genuine happiness. What becomes of the health of one who, trusting in his wealth and fearing no one, eats whatever he pleases wherever he goes? If such a person, succumbing to arrogance and harmful habits, meets an early end, who will enjoy the wealth he has amassed? Real success, happiness, and wealth must be something stable and enduring — something that grows. Good children, good companions, and good health cannot be purchased with money. For these, we must seek only the grace of God. All the efforts we make to find such happiness and to live in peace should be pleasing to Him. That is why our elders gifted us the tradition of seeking auspicious days and times — as determined by the scriptures — before embarking on all important and auspicious undertakings, and of following them with diligence.

Certain supremely auspicious times arising from rare planetary configurations hold a very important place in our rituals, precisely because such combinations of celestial bodies appear only once in a very long while. Among them, Mahodaya Yoga, Ardhodaya Yoga, Pushyarka, Gurupushya Yoga, Surya Grahan, Chandra Grahan, and Vyātipāta — and many more such special Yogas — are renowned in our tradition. Special days like Poornima, Amavasya, Akshaya Tritiya, Ugadi, and

Vijayadashami are equally significant. Our scriptures declare that virtuous deeds performed during such auspicious times — fasting, worship, charity, and more — yield infinite results. And we can see, even today, that devotees gather in great numbers to bathe in holy rivers and sacred places, and to seek the darshan of God during these rare moments. Such auspicious practices, performed at the right seasons, have a long history of fulfilling the wishes of our ancestors. That is why these unique timings and their associated practices have endured in our tradition with undiminished devotion from time immemorial to the present day.

These special auspicious times prescribed by astrology do come to us from time to time. But we need not struggle amidst the crowds that gather at such moments, striving to accumulate as much merit as possible. For even a single Ekādashi fast observed with sincere devotion will bring us greater merit than all the pious deeds performed during countless such auspicious seasons combined! Thousands of unique solar and lunar eclipses, ten thousand special Yogas like Vyātipāta, and millions of auspicious occasions like Amavasya — all of them together — are said to be only one-sixteenth as meritorious as the merit earned through one Ekādashi fast, followed by the Parana and Prasad of the Dwadashi! Such is the unparalleled greatness of the great fast called Ekādashi!

’uparāga sahasrāni vyateepāta-ayuthāni cha |
amā-laksham tu dwadashyaha Kalām Nārhanti Shodasheem’

10. Ekādashi as a Teacher of Discipline and Restraint

Many young people in the world today are behaving recklessly, as if to say, ‘My life, my choice — no one should question me.’ They have invented their own unfounded justifications for the undisciplined eating habits, outings, customs, and thoughts they follow. Adding to this, certain self-proclaimed ‘experts’ who supposedly ‘know everything’ are now proliferating on social media, creating a situation where the lifestyle of young people — who have already lost their way — is being pushed into even greater confusion.

Many undisciplined behaviors among young people — staying up all night, sleeping until noon, eating whenever hunger strikes with no regard for timing — are now treated as perfectly normal in most households. When elders try to speak about it or offer guidance, do these young people have the patience to listen? ‘Everyone does this now — why are you singling me out?’ they retort, silencing the elders. Sometimes we even hear parents and grandparents venting their distress over the conduct of their grown children to relatives and friends. But the real reason for all this is no one’s fault but our own. The excessive freedom granted by parents out of blind love and

indulgence is what makes children undisciplined. The greatest mistake we have made is that we have lost our own identity by being swept away by modern education and lifestyle. Had we followed our rituals, fasts, and rules diligently as our ancestors did, there would have been no room for such tragedies.

It is not only the youth who are going astray — this relentless rush of modernity is leading all of us off course. Selfishness pervades our current lifestyle. Traditional sattvic values are fading away from us. The concern for environmental cleanliness, social harmony, and collective health that we once held has all but vanished. Traders are driven solely by profit at any cost, while consumers demand everything cheaply and delivered to their doorstep. The greed of producers and the indifference of consumers have thus reached an alarming peak. We no longer even pause to think about the harm that our everyday choices cause to our health and to the environment around us.

Even the responsible departments of government — those overseeing science, health, and social welfare — are behaving as though blind, forgetting their ethical duty. And this is not confined to India alone; it is equally true of advanced nations like America. Everyone in the corporate world is consumed by the pursuit of profit. As a result, instead of curbing deadly vices

like smoking and alcoholism, we now live in an era where governments openly and officially stand in support of these very vices!

Nearly everything we use daily has become toxic. The environment surrounding us has been saturated with plastic. Do we know where our rice, fruits, greens, and vegetables come from — and what pesticides and insecticides were used to grow and preserve them? Setting everything else aside, even cow's milk — which we have venerated as sacred since ancient times — has now become poisonous! A couple of decades ago, cows in towns had the freedom to roam forests and graze on whatever grass and leaves they desired. Now there are no forests, and we lack the infrastructure to raise cows properly. Yet the dairy business continues uninterrupted — and more milk is being produced today than ever before! But if we seek the pure milk of a cow that feeds only on clean green grass, that is something we can hardly find even in a village today.

Such is the state of our current lifestyle and diet — and alongside it, the destructive habit of wasting the natural wealth and food that God has given us has also taken firm hold. In the past, if a child left even a few grains of rice on the plate, the elders would scold them sharply! We may not face such poverty

today, but we seem blind to the fact that millions of people in various parts of the world are still dying without a morsel of food. In recent times, more good food is ending up in the garbage bin than on people's plates! According to recent surveys, India alone wastes and spoils approximately seventy-four million tons of food every year — nearly forty percent of all food produced. The monetary value of this wastage amounts to roughly ninety-two thousand crore rupees annually — all of it going to the garbage bin! What a grave injustice. **Na devāya na dharmāya!**

Generally, hard-working people and older adults do not throw food away carelessly. It is mostly children and young people who make this mistake. The reason is plain enough: they have never truly experienced hardship or hunger. For this very reason, they should be made to fast. When they go without food and water for a day, they will come to understand firsthand what hunger really means — and will also gain the capacity to understand the hardship of others.

‘Annam na nindyāt tad vratam’ — respecting food is itself a vrata. We must help our children understand the Vedic injunction that warns us against the sin of throwing away and wasting food. Fasting is the only way to truly experience hunger and grasp the value of food in a practical, lived sense. That is

precisely why our ancient Shruti, Smriti, and Purāṇas have made the Ekādāshi vrata mandatory. It is the neglect of invaluable fasts like Ekādāshi, amidst the noise and rush of modern life, that lies at the root of the food indiscipline and misconduct we see in the younger generation today. Let us wake up once more. Let us observe the Ekādāshi fast with devotion, together as a family. Through this, let us help our children understand the true value of food and the discipline that life requires of us all.

11. The 'Lakshmi-prada' Fast of Ekādashi

Who on this earth does not desire Lakshmikataksha? Everyone in every country and at all times desires wealth and prosperity. The desire for wealth, happiness, health, and other benefits considered essential for peaceful living is the root cause of our enthusiasm for life. Otherwise, where would we find the inspiration for our many daily activities?

Some people wish to earn money, own a home, and acquire good food, clothing, and other comforts. Some desire children and good company. Above all, good health is essential for everyone. Thus, the forms of wealth we desire throughout life may differ, and our efforts to earn them may also vary. Yet all living beings on this earth — whether animals or birds — need the grace of Lakshmi to experience peace. **'Shareera-yātrāpi cha te na prasidhyet-akarmanaha'** — 'As long as you live, you must work to sustain your body,' as God Himself has said in the Gita. Even sannyasis who renounce all associations must still struggle for good food if they wish to maintain their bodies and health. They must seek alms from others with the cry of **'Bhikshām-dehi'**! This is the law of nature!

What is the relationship between Lakshmi's gracious gaze and the acquisition of the wealth we desire? It is an inseparable one! Without the grace of Goddess Mahalakshmi, the sustainer of all living nature, wealth will not come to us. We will not find peace. We should always pray to Her to grant us children, good fortune, material comforts, food and drink, and Her protection.

‘shreemat-sowbhāgya jananeem

staumi lakshmeem sanātaneem

sarvakāma phalāvapti

sādhanaikassukhāvahām’

‘putra pautra dhanam dhānyam hastyashvādi gaveratham

arājānām bhavasi mātā āyushmantam karotu mām’

— Her glory is praised in the Vedas!

This is not merely our imagination or belief — it is our direct experience as well. What do we truly call our own, having come to this earth empty-handed? Only if we access the facilities provided by nature can our life be blissful. But none of that is within our control. No matter how deep we dig a well, what can we do if we find no water? What can we do if we are healthy but do not have a long life? Even those with great wealth cannot purchase longevity and good health. Even an experienced farmer, after cultivating his field, looks up to the sky helplessly — he simply waits. If the crop grows, it grows; if not, he cannot

do anything. Are the natural processes of timely rain and abundant harvest under his control? Nature itself decides which land will face drought, where cyclones will strike, who will prosper and who will suffer. Should we then, in our helplessness, surrender to this great nature?

And nature must also grant us the long life and good health needed to carry out our efforts. We can only wish for a good family, income, good company, children, good fortune, and all the worldly comforts — we can only pray. It is according to the will of nature and the Supreme Being that He bestows His grace. God Himself declared this in the Gita: **‘maya-adhyakshena prakrutihi suyate sacharsscharam hetuānena kaunteya jagad-viparivartate’** and **‘aham suve pitaramasya mama yoni-rapsu antah samudre.’** ‘My karnika, which gives all the grace to everyone in the world, is controlled by the Supreme God, everything happens according to His will,’ Mahalakshmi herself tells us in the Rigveda that she acts only by the command of the Supreme God.

In the seventh chapter of the Gita, Shri Krishna, who gives a detailed explanation on this subject, says, **‘bhumir-āponalo vāyuhu kham mano buddhireva cha ahamkāra iteeyam me bhinnah prakrutirasthadhā.’** He names the eight main divisions of inert material nature — earth, water, fire, air, sky, mind, intellect, and ego — and then speaks of the special nature

of His subordinate, Mahalakshmi, who governs all of them:

**‘apareyam-itastvanyām prakrutim viddhi me param
jeevabhūtām mahābāho yayedam dharyathe jagat.’**

That is, all living beings like you and me, born into this world, strive throughout our lives yearning for happiness and peace, dependent on this inert nature. Is not this inert nature the medium for all our cherished relationships — our very bodies, food, mother, father, wife, children, animals, and vehicles? We live believing that this body, home, and food made of the five elements belong to us. But if the ‘mind’ and ‘ego’ within this inert body did not inspire us — ‘This is me, this is mine, this is what I want’ — there could be no enthusiasm in life.

If this is the importance of the inert nature we encounter every day, then the subtle nature called Mahalakshmi, working within it unseen, is even more remarkable. For example, is it not invisible to our sight that a small seed grows into a great tree, that grass and water fed to a cow turn into milk, and that a sour green mango ripens into sweet yellow fruit? Similarly, the food we eat nourishes our body, medicines restore our health, and our spouse and children live with us in virtue and goodwill. The one who bestows all these blessings is Mahalakshmi, the subtle nature!

Is it enough that the cow we raise is affectionate? Should it not also give us milk? Should it not stay healthy and remain with us for a long time without showing any ill will? All our relationships and possessions are the same — it is not enough that they merely exist; they must also serve us well. Most importantly, we must have the fortune and karma to receive their blessings. Only through our past karma and God's grace will Mahalakshmi bestow all that wealth upon us!

That being said, what do we know about our past karma and God's will? Does not everyone strive with ambition, even without knowing whether they will succeed? Likewise, if Mahalakshmi is the one who grants wealth, then if we desire happiness and prosperity, we must pray to Her. Who knows? She may also bless us with mercy by entreating God to absolve our sins. Is she not the great mother who has borne and carried us all? Does she not have the heart of a compassionate mother? Therefore, we should call upon Her first: **'eeshwareem sarvabhūtānām tām-ihopahahwaye shriyām.'**

As the Vedas themselves declare, those who believe in Her and surrender to Her will be blessed by God through Her influence and will certainly attain infinite wealth and happiness: **'ananta nityasukhinaha tvad-bhaktaha tvat-parayanaha iti veda Pramānād-hi devi tvām sharanam vraje.'**

However, winning Her over is not easy. **‘klesho adhikatarasteshām Avyaktā sakta chetasām avyaktā hi gathirduhkhām dehavadbhiravāpyate.’** In the twelfth chapter of the Gita, Shri Krishna himself has said that the path to winning Lakshmi’s favour is very difficult and steep. There is a reason for this. Those who study hard, write exams, and pass directly earn good jobs through merit — is it fair to receive them without effort or qualification? Additionally, can any mother easily overlook the great mistakes of her children? The burden of our past sins, which have caused the sufferings that continue to plague us, may be very great: **‘doshānām cha na me mitihi.’**

Be that as it may, we are very hungry now. When will we plow the fields ourselves, sow seeds, grow crops, and then eat? For now, we must fill our stomachs even if it means begging. We should take shelter from hardship for the present and vow to walk the righteous path with firm determination hereafter. Then the heart of the mother may forgive us. In time, along with the righteous path, she can bless us with good intelligence, good opportunities, good fortune, and rescue us!

So what is an easy way to win over that great Mahalakshmi? Should we worship Her on Friday, Her sacred day? Should we chant Her mantras from the Sri Suktam? Should we observe the Varamahalakshmi Vrata? Beyond all of these, the Padma Mahā

Purāna shows us the most fruitful and accessible solution — to fast with devotion on Ekādashi!

Do you know why? Ekādashi is the most beloved day of Sri Mahalakshmi — it is Her very birthday! It is the auspicious day when the Sura-Asuras gathered and churned the ocean. First, poison emerged, and all were filled with fear and despair. Then, with pure fasting, pure minds, and pure hearts, the Gods and sages prayed earnestly to Lakshmi Narayana. Along with the nectar that arose, Sri Mahalakshmi also appeared and blessed them forever, removing the misfortunes of all virtuous souls and bestowing wealth upon them!

ekādashyām tu shudhāyām mathyamāne mahāmbudhau|

uposhya rushayaha sarve jepuhu shreemantram-uttamam |

Kānkshyamānāha shriyo janma lakshmeenārāyanam harim ||

Likewise, fasting on Ekādashi may seem difficult and demanding at first, but in time it bestows upon us eternal contentment, peace, and wealth that are as sweet as nectar.

Moreover, if we observe a total fast on Ekādashi, Mahalakshmi Herself becomes pleased even before Narayana! She looks upon us with compassion and showers us with her blessings. Do you know why? Does not every mother in the world rush to feed and comfort her hungry child? Would Mahalakshmi, the great

mother of this world, leave us unattended? This is the secret of the Atharva Veda.

yathā hi putravātsalyāt Jananee prasnutastanee

Vatsam twaritamāgatya sampreenayati vatsalā ||

12. The Significance of Ekādashi in the Context of Pilgrimage

This entire earth is God's creation, and there is no place where the all-pervading Supreme God is absent. **'antarbahishcha tatsarvam vyāpya nārāyaṇaḥ sthitaḥ.'** God is present in all countries and at all times. Therefore, wherever we perform devotional worship and prayer, God is present and protects us.

However, this land of India is especially dear to God. That is why the places of God's incarnation are found only in this Bharata khanda. Many holy places mentioned in the Purāṇas are in India alone — Chatur dhams, Sapta Mokshadayaka Kshetras, Dwadasha Jyotirlingas, and more. We have a unique and magnificent heritage of recognizing the sacred places of this land across many dimensions, and of believing in and worshipping them since time immemorial. We also hear of the many rivers, lakes, pilgrimage sites, and coastal regions that are symbols of holiness. It is our traditional belief that visiting such holy places, having darshan of God, serving God, and taking a holy bath washes away sins and grants us merit.

In the past, pilgrimages held great importance, for long journeys were neither as easy nor as safe as they are today. Traveling from south to north on foot could take years, and

there were no means of communication along the way. If a person returned safely without any misfortune, it was cause for celebration at home. Relatives and friends were called together, Kashi Samaradhana was performed, and gratitude was offered to God for the success of the journey. In our times, modern facilities have made travel far easier. We no longer face the hardships our ancestors endured, nor do we need to spend the same effort and time. The many food and rest facilities along the way have made modern pilgrimage far more comfortable.

Yet no matter how advanced today's facilities and systems are, our modern problems have grown in equal measure. Traffic congestion on roads and crowding at holy places have become major headaches. Many sacred rivers and legendary lakes have become polluted for various reasons. And since employees and students can visit these places only during holidays, pilgrimage has become a genuine challenge for all of us. Even after enduring a difficult journey there and back, the chances of returning with true satisfaction or peace are quite low.

Even so, we feel drawn to visit such holy places again and again — to take a sacred dip and have darshan of God. The main reason is an unspoken fear within us. Our elders have followed these practices diligently, and we worry about what might happen if we do not. We fear for our jobs, health, children's education, and future. Though we may be content today, we

wish to be free from the sins of past lives that could bring difficulties ahead. We hold a deep belief that the merit of visiting holy places brings happiness and peace in life.

But is pilgrimage truly accessible to everyone — to those without financial means, physical strength, family support, or adequate time? What are the rest to do? Is visiting holy places the only easy path to peace and relief from our present problems? Are there no other means for those who are not so fortunate?

Beyond this, there is another question worth asking. Who identified these places as holy pilgrimage sites? Who declared that visiting them would bring great merit, destroy sins, and ensure our well-being?

Our elders did not simply accept what others told them. As Shri Krishna himself told Arjuna, **‘tasmāt shāstram pramānam te kāryākārya vyavasthithou’** — our tradition is to follow only the righteous deeds prescribed in the scriptures with devotion. We have therefore accepted as sacred pilgrimage sites only those places mentioned in our ancient Purānas and historical texts. Those same Purānas have shown us not only pilgrimage sites for gaining punya, but also many other paths to earn merit — because not everyone is able to travel to distant sacred sites. And even for those fortunate enough to visit, regular pilgrimage

is not always possible. Therefore, the same scriptures have identified Ekādashi as an easy and highly meritorious practice, surpassing even the punya of visiting those holy places.

na kāshee na gayā gangā na revā na cha gautamee |

na chāpi kauravam kshetram samā bhupa harerdināt ||

According to this, no pilgrimage site on earth grants as much punya as the observance of the Ekādashi fast. No sacred bath can compare to it — not at Kashi, not at Gayakshetra, not at the Ganges, Narmada, or Godavari, not even at Kurukshetra. The merit we might gain by serving in such great places pales in comparison to the Ekādashi fast.

Moreover, to observe this Ekādashi fast, which comes twice a month, we need not travel anywhere or make any prior preparations. Even when ritual impurity such as Sutaka falls upon us — preventing us from performing Homas and pujas — there are no obstacles to observing the Ekādashi fast. Even those experiencing a monthly menstruation cycle or Sutaka can fast on Ekādashi and receive its full benefits and God’s grace!

13. Ekādashi as the Mahāyajna

We have all heard much about the importance of Yajna Yagas, and we hold them in great respect and devotion. They are unique rituals that have been practiced in our eternal tradition for thousands of years — truly worthwhile experiments that serve us in both this world and the next. They are wonderful means of securing divine grace and, through it, the fulfillment of desires and peace in this life. If they were merely foolish or useless rituals, they would certainly not have endured in our tradition for so many years.

The word Yajna carries a broad meaning. It refers to the sacrifice of various pleasures that we consciously offer to please the Lord. In the material sense, Yajna is the proper utilization of the precious resources made available to us by the grace of the Creator. In common usage today, it is primarily associated with the processes of Homa and Havan. As expressed in the definition ‘**devatoddeshena dravyatyāgah yāgaha**’ — ‘We offer special material into the fire before the deity with devotion, and it reaches the Gods as Ahuthi’ — the enduring fame of Yajna Yagas lies in the peace and grace that performing them brings.

**dravyayajnāstapoyajnā yogayajnāstahapare svadhyaya
jñānayajnāshcha....** Gitacharya Sri Krishna, who has described the many forms of Yajna, has declared that without adequate

effort through such Yajna, we have no right to enjoy happiness in this world, let alone the next. **‘nāyam lokostyayajnasya kutonyah kurusattama.’** After all, do not all the benefits we receive in this world come through our own deeds? Only by working do we earn a wage. Only by earning punya through good deeds do we enjoy true pleasures. Our sins and merits are the principal cause of our joys and sorrows, both in this world and in the one after.

These yajna and yaga processes were not invented by humans or our ancestors. At the time of creation, Lord Brahma brought forth the method of these yajnas along with us. If we wish to continually receive our desires throughout life, the process of yajna must be kept alive in this world. **‘saha yajnāha prajah srutsvā purovācha prajāpatihi anena prasavishyadhvam Esha vostvishta kāmadhuk.’** We must worship and honor the divine powers who, by His command, bestow upon us our bodies, lives, health, wealth, rain, crops, sunshine, wind, and water — none of which are within our control. The Creator gave us a sacred instruction from the very beginning: dedicate these material gifts to those divine powers through yajna and enjoy them only with their blessing. **‘parasparam bhāvayanthah shreyah paramvāpsyatha’ ‘ishtān bhogān hi vo devāh dāsyante yajnabhāvithaha.’** On the very first day of creation, we were taught that nothing is truly ours — only through a cultured,

righteous life and religious practice can we earn the favor of divine power and live peacefully.

In essence, this is what we must understand — without divine grace, we cannot live peacefully in this world. And there is no better way to earn that grace than through rituals like yajna yagas.

When we consider the essential definition of yajna, what stands out is the sacrifice of pleasures that we can offer according to our lifestyles. **‘Parasparam Bhāvayanthaha’** means that this world, as directed by God, runs through a sacred process of mutual support — a cycle of giving and receiving. To gain one thing, another must be given. Only those who work hard and invest their time earn a reward. Only those who sacrifice sleep and ease to pursue good education can secure a good livelihood. Similarly, if we desire the fulfillment that brings happiness in life, we must make some sacrifice of pleasure and earn the appropriate punya through good deeds, righteous giving, and the material sacrifices of yajna.

No other sacrifice can match the emotional peace that comes from the food sacrifice of ‘Ekādashi Upavāsa.’ Even donating a great portion of one’s wealth brings immense satisfaction in the moment — but over time, its impact fades and is forgotten. The same is true of material sacrifices performed through yajna;

opportunities to repeat them are rare. But since the sacrifice of Ekādāshi fasting comes every fortnight, this meaningful experience repeats itself regularly, bringing special satisfaction and renewed divine grace each time.

To make a donation, one must have sufficient wealth, and worthy recipients must be found at the right time. Not everyone has the authority to perform Homa and Havana — just as we would not entrust a child with lighting the stove, these processes require special knowledge and expertise. Therefore, not everyone is eligible. But for the sacrifice called fasting, all human beings are equal — children, adults, the learned and the unlettered alike. All that is required is the will.

Likewise, other sacrifices such as donation and fire offerings require the cooperation of others, and no matter how carefully we try, omissions are possible. The Ekādāshi fast, however — a voluntary sacrifice of food to please the Gods — involves none of these complications. Since no material things are needed, there is no prior preparation required. The primary observance is simply to remain completely fasting at the specified time, and nothing more is needed.

As Shri Krishna himself has taught, **‘vidhi heenam asrushtānannam’** — unless our fast meets the proper standard, it cannot be counted a fruitful **‘sāttvik yajna.’** Fasting whenever

we feel like it is therefore not considered a sāttvik Yajna. That is why the Shastras have identified Ekādashi as the most auspicious day for this special Yajna of fasting.

In the ordinary yagnas performed before fire, we ceremonially kindle the formal flame with mantras, stoke it with good fuel, and then offer the sacrifice into it. In this yajna called Ekādashi Vrata, we awaken the internal fire through fasting and then offer pure food on Dwādashi, the twelfth day. Our body is the temple of sacrifice; the stomach is the sacrificial kund. As the Gitacharya himself says in the words **‘aham vaishwānaro bhutsvā prāninām dehamāshritaha,’** it is as if Lord Krishna himself stands in our fire of sacrifice and accepts it in the name of **‘Vaishwānara,’** showering His grace upon us. What more could we ask for?

That is why Veda Vyasa proclaimed with great authority, **‘ashva-medha-sahasrāni vājapeya shatāni cha Ekādashi upavāsasya kalām nārhanti shodasheem’** — ‘One who fasts on a single Ekādashi gains sixteen times more punya than one who performs one thousand Ashvamedha yagas and one hundred vajpayas’!

14. Vaikuntha Ekādashi

In recent times, some of our religious rituals have gained renewed significance. Even observances like Vaikuntha Ekādashi, Akshaya Tṛitiya, and Varalakshmi have acquired a kind of ‘star value’ — thanks to television and social media.

In one sense, this is a welcome development. Even the prominent media, which for many years celebrated only Western practices, are now promoting indigenous culture and values. To that extent, it can be said that a genuine sense of cultural pride has grown among Indians. The times have changed — ancient rituals once dismissed as outdated traditions are now being celebrated with pride and joy.

Yet there is now an urgent need to share accurate information and clear guidance on how sacred rituals like Vaikuntha Ekādashi should be observed. For those who lack knowledge of ancient scriptures and proper understanding of the mythology are interpreting and presenting them as they see fit on social media, and most of the audience follows this blindly, believing it to be authentic and correct.

Vaikuntha Ekādashi is particularly significant. It is the auspicious day when the gates of Vaikuntha are said to open. Many people believe that on this day, one must visit a

Venkateswara temple, enter a specially constructed ‘Vaikuntha dwāra,’ and have darshan of God. Many are even promoting this belief. Whatever the merits of this practice, it is heartening to see people visiting a temple on the auspicious day of Ekādashi.

But what exactly is Vaikuntha Ekādashi? What is the significance of the Vaikuntha dwāra being opened on that day? What is the meaning behind constructing a temporary gate, calling it the Vaikuntha dwāra, and entering through it? Are there clear scriptural sources for such a practice? What do the Purānas say?

First, we need to understand what Ekādashi is. The eleventh day after the full moon and the new moon — the eleventh phase of the moon in the Shodash Kala — has been identified by the Shastras as Ekādashi. For many important reasons, this day has been deemed the most auspicious for observing a fast. Counting twenty-four Ekādashis in a year — two per month — plus two additional ones on account of the adhika masa, there is a total of twenty-six. All of these are considered highly auspicious and sacred. The Purānas and the Mahabharata describe the importance of these holy days in great detail, declaring that no day is as sacred as Ekādashi. **‘nedrusham pāvanam kinchat naranām bhuvi Vidyate.’**

Each Ekādashi has been given a unique name, and the Purānas contain interesting stories about the special qualities of each one. The clear intention of all the Purānas is that every Ekādashi be observed with a strict fast. **‘ratanti hi Purānani bhooyo bhooyo varānane na bhoktavyam na bhoktavyam samprāpte harivāsare’** — ‘All the Purānas repeatedly declare that one must not eat on Ekādashi’ — these words of Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvathi are recorded in the Padma Purāna. Not only the Purānas but also Vedic texts such as the Maitra-Varuna Upanishad, Paingī, Babhravya, and many Smṛiti Vakyas clearly enjoin fasting on Ekādashi.

Among all twenty-six Ekādashis described in the scriptures, the one that falls in the Shukla Paksha of the month of Dhanur is popularly known as **‘Vaikuntha Ekādashi.’** In some places, it is also called **‘mukkotī Ekādashi,’** meaning that three crore Gods are pleased by our fasting and grant our wishes. It bears different names according to the lunar cycle. Since the current year’s Ekādashi falls in the month of Pushyam, its original name is **‘Putrādā.’**

According to another well-known story in the Purāna, Srimannarayana slew the demons Madhu-Kaitabha and then, in response to a prayer, permitted the devotee to enter through the northern gate of Vaikuntha on this day, granting him sadgathi. This signifies that even those who have erred, if they

surrender fully to the Lord after atonement, attain good fortune — as if the special gate of Vaikuntha opens for them. Keeping this in mind, the practice of constructing a special *dwāra* on Vaikuntha Ekādashī and passing through it to have darshan of God has become prevalent in many places today.

This has now become a widespread practice in all Srinivasa temples and beyond. Devotees believe that by doing so, God forgives all their mistakes and opens a special door to His realm, granting them eternal happiness. It can also be understood as a ritual that celebrates, in advance, the great truth of our inevitable passing — an acceptance that we must one day leave this world and join God. **‘allide namma mane illiruvudu summane’** — ‘Our true home (mane) is there (allide); we merely reside here (illiruvudu) for a while.’

However, it is unclear who originated this practice or why it has become so widespread. There are no scriptural mandates requiring it to be celebrated in precisely this manner. Some may have intended such rituals to popularize the Ekādashī Vrata. But if we drift from its original purpose, no such ritual will carry any real significance.

The now-celebrated Vaikuntha Ekādashī seems, in most places, to have been reduced to a competition of decorative Vaikuntha *dwāra* entrances and a quick darshan of God. A handful of

devotees do observe the fast with sincere devotion. But the real tragedy is that on this very Vaikuntha Ekādashi, enormous quantities of prasadam are distributed in most temples — laddu prasadam, phalara, upahara, anna prasadam, and various other attractions. People are drawn in with the expectation of offerings and dakshinas. The original purpose of Ekādashi has been utterly betrayed. In place of punya, the process of freely accumulating sin — amidst huge crowds and noise — has taken hold.

There is no greater sin than eating on Ekādashi. To do so in the very presence of God? Innocent people who know nothing rush to the presence of God hoping to earn punya and find relief from their suffering. But what do they truly gain? Sins committed elsewhere are absolved in holy places — but what happens when sins are committed in holy places themselves? **‘anyakshetre krutam pāpam punyakshetre vinashyati, punyakshetre krutam pāpam vajralepo bhavishyati.’** (subhashita)

Consider this verse from the ancient Purāna and you will understand for yourself how grave a sin it is to eat on Ekādashi: **‘varam svamātru-gamanam varam gomāmsa bhakshanam varam hatyā surāpānam ekadashyam tu Bhojanāt.’**

Like all Ekādashis, Vaikuntha Ekādashī holds equal sanctity. Yet there are also verses that praise Vaikuntha Ekādashī in particular — declaring that fasting on this day earns the punya of fasting on all the Ekādashis of the year.

Such elevated descriptions carry a deeper meaning. This Ekādashī falls in winter, when our outer activities naturally slow down. Staying indoors, our appetite may sharpen and our taste buds may crave more. The temptation to sleep longer in the morning cold is stronger. This is precisely why the scriptures have enjoined that during the month of Dhanur, one must rise early, offer worship to the Gods before sunrise, and complete one's puja. Similarly, they have made this particular Ekādashī a little more special — not to excuse skipping the others. Just as a teacher says 'do not miss the chemistry class,' it does not give permission to skip all others. To score well, one must attend all classes. To receive the full grace of God, one must observe every Ekādashī without exception.

Fasting for one day is no great hardship — no one has ever died from a single day of fasting. True fasting means consuming nothing at all: no food or water. Taking milk, fruits, or snacks is equally a departure from the proper fast. The scriptures prescribe liquid or light food only for the most vulnerable —

pregnant women, nursing mothers, and those suffering from serious illness.

All in all, my sincere wish is that everyone observe all Ekādashis with devotion — and this Vaikuntha Ekādashī too. May it be auspicious for all.

15. Shri Krishna Jayanti: A Mandatory Fast like Ekādashī

You may have observed that all our religious practices fall into two broad categories — daily and periodic. While daily bathing, daily chanting, and daily worship are rituals we perform with discipline every day, there are also special observances performed periodically, such as weekly puja rules and vratas. Ekādashī is a fast that occurs once every two weeks and is thus called ‘fortnightly.’ Similarly, there are monthly rituals observed on full moon, Sankramana, and Amavasya. And there are many annual observances we follow without fail — Chauthi, Ashtami, Shivaratri, Navratri, Ugadi, Pitrushraddha, birthdays, and more.

In our tradition, observances that recur regularly from time to time are called ‘nityakarma,’ while fasts and rituals performed for specific occasions are called ‘naimittika.’ Examples of the latter include religious ceremonies for housewarming, marriage, Upanayana, and similar events. There are also special pujas, yagnas, and fasts performed as atonement when unexpected incidents or moral failures trouble our minds. Put simply — if the meals we eat every day are ‘nitya,’ then the medicines we are compelled to take when we fall ill are ‘naimittika.’

We must perform our regular rituals without fail. The Upanishad commands us: **‘deva pitru karyābhyam na pramaditavyam’** — attend to the duties owed to the Gods and ancestors as you would your daily rituals. **‘eesha ādeshaha yesha upadeshaha.’** We observe that even animals and birds, without the gift of intelligence, engage daily in searching for food, cleaning themselves, and protecting their families. If such creatures attend to their needs with such diligence, is it not all the more fitting that we, blessed with far greater intelligence, should also dedicate time beyond mere self-interest? Should we, who have received so much — from nature, and from the parents who toiled day and night for our upbringing — not honor these debts? Should we not diligently observe our religious rituals, which are meant to repay our debt to God, to our parents, to the five elements, and to the sages who enriched us with wisdom?

Among all the rituals we are called to observe, the Ekādashi fast and Sri Krishna Jayanti Vrata are foremost. This verse from the Ashvamedhika Parva of the Mahābhārata declares that fasting on Ekādashi is the means to free ourselves from all debts, attain the fruit of all yagnas, and ultimately reach liberation: **‘upavāsavratam kuryāt trikālam chārchayanstu mām sarvakratu phalam Labdhvā mama lokā maheeyate.’**

It is the law of the world that those who receive a favor must repay it in kind. Only when we return what we have received is the debt truly cleared. But how can we repay our debt to God, or to our ancestors? Do we truly possess anything of our own to give back? What can we offer to Mother Earth, who has carried us throughout our lives? Can we repay the debt of the life force that sustains us every moment, the very air we breathe? We must recognize that these debts are so great they can never be fully repaid — and in humble acknowledgment of this, we should at least express our gratitude through small acts of sacrifice. We cannot survive for long without air or land. But with a little effort, we can go without food and water for a single day. Therefore, if we are strong enough to reflect on all of this — beginning from our youth and continuing as long as our body has strength — and fast on every Ekādashi without fail as a gesture of gratitude, we can begin to become debt-free.

Thus, Ekādashi, which comes to us fortnightly, recurs twenty-four times a year — twice a month. The scriptures declare that we must observe all twenty-four fasts without exception. But they also command us to add a twenty-fifth. Do you know what that twenty-fifth is? It is the most sacred day that occurs only once a year — ‘Shri Krishna Jayanti!’ Let us reflect a little on its significance. But first, let us also explore the numerological meaning behind these twenty-four fasts and the twenty-fifth.

In the thirteenth chapter of the Gita, Lord Shri Krishna explains the twenty-four strong fences that surround us, saying,

‘mahābhutānyahankaro budhiravyaktameva cha indriyāni dashaika cha panchachendriya gocharāha.’ (sloka 6) These are the twenty-four fences that bind us to this world — the five elements, the ego principle, the great principle, the unmanifest principle, the five organs of action, the five organs of knowledge, and the five sense objects of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. We are the living beings surrounded by these twenty-four fences, burdened by our own actions, suffering continuously in this world. (We shall explore these in greater detail when the opportunity arises.)

The twenty-fifth, who transcends all these — who is never affected by them and who alone can deliver us from these twenty-four barriers — is our Lord, Shri Krishna Paramatma. May we, through all the twenty-four Ekādashi fasts we regularly observe throughout the year, be able to cross those twenty-four barriers and reach that twenty-fifth, our God! For this reason, we must also fast on Sri Krishna Jayanti as the twenty-fifth fast of the year. Through declarations such as **‘atosmi loke vede cha prathitah purushottamaha,’** (15.8) **‘māmeva ye prapadyante,’** (7.14) **‘māmekam sharanam vraja,’** (18.66) and **‘tamdhama paramam mama,’** (15.6) Shri Krishna himself has clearly established His supreme position as the twenty-fifth.

Many Smṛiti Vakyas prescribe that on Sri Krishna Jayanti, just as on Ekādashi, we must observe a complete fast and also refrain from Homa Havanas and Pitru Shraddha Tarpana. One such injunction from the ‘**Dattātreyā Samhita**’ reads: **‘aupāsanam tathā Shrādham brahma yajnādi panchakam na tatra vidhilopah-syāt jayantym harivāsare’** — clearly indicating that any birth anniversary, Shraddhathithi, or similar observance falling on that day should be celebrated on a different day. Just as we reschedule Shraddhathi when Sutaka occurs, so too we adjust on this most auspicious day.

Why is Sri Krishna Jayanti so uniquely significant? We also celebrate other auspicious days of the Lord’s incarnations — Sri Ram Navami, Narasimha Jayanti, and others. Why was mandatory fasting not prescribed for those days? As God Himself declares, **‘dharma sanshāpanārthāya sabhavāmi yuge yuge’** — are not all those incarnations of the same Supreme Lord? And as the Vedic verse **‘neha nānāsthi kinchana’** affirms, all incarnations of the Supreme Lord are one and the same — so why is Sri Krishna Jayanti alone accorded this special importance? Why not the others?

There are many reasons for that. The main reason is the most beautiful one, just note.

The uniqueness of Krishna's incarnation is truly extraordinary. Despite the many incarnations of God, the life and qualities of Sri Krishna have been described in countless verses across all the Purānas — and yet it seems that Sri Veda Vyasa, who is himself an incarnation of Narayana, could not finish speaking of him. Even after devoting all the chapters of the Mahabharata to the life of Sri Krishna, Veda Vyasa was not satisfied. He was compelled to create an entirely separate Purāna — the Bhagavata — for that very purpose. Furthermore, the stories of Lord Krishna appear throughout other Purānas such as the Harivamsha. And even in the Vedas: **‘vedaishcha sarvairi ahameva vedya.’** Understand for yourself, then, how profound and extraordinary the incarnation of Lord Krishna truly is.

But that is not the most important thing I wish to convey. Like Lord Krishna himself, the special qualities and characteristics of his Jayanti are equally remarkable. This connects not only to our Vedanta, religiosity, and rational traditions, but also to astrology and ancient science — dimensions that are compelling, practical, and deeply reasonable. Even modern mathematical scientists accept this with confidence. It comes down to three key elements that can only align simultaneously once a year: the birth date of Lord Krishna — the Ashtami tithi — combined with the Rohini star and the Sun in the Leo sign.

To explain this conjunction, Jagadguru Shri Madhvacharya himself wrote a work called Jayanti Nirnaya and made special mention of it in his Shri Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya — providing a definitive ruling on how to celebrate Lord Krishna Jayanti.

Just as Ekādashi is considered the most auspicious day for regular fasting based on cosmic principles, Lord Krishna Jayanti holds equal importance. The way in which his Jayanti is determined is quite remarkable. The decision of Sri Rama Navami, for instance, is straightforward — the Navami of the Shukla Paksha of Chaitra. Narasimha Jayanti falls on the Shukla Chaturdashi of Vaishakh. As Sriman Madhvacharya himself says, **‘chāndrenaiva samāchareth’** — all important festivals should be observed according to the lunar calendar. But is not Lord Krishna special in every way? Therefore, the celebration of his Jayanti is also unique. If we observed the sign of the fast simply on Krishna Ashtami of Shravan per the lunar calendar alone, the Rohini star would not always be visible on that day. We must therefore wait for the Ashtami of Krishna Paksha that occurs after the Sun enters Leo — whether it falls in the month of Shravan or Bhadrapad. But on that day, the combination of Rohini star and Ashtami tithi will always be perfectly aligned.

On Shri Rama Navami, the Punarvasu Nakshatra present at the time of his birth may not appear. On Narasimha Jayanti, the

Swati Nakshatra may be absent. On Hanuman Jayanti, the Chitra Nakshatra may not occur. But for Lord Krishna's Jayanti — observed according to the solar calendar — the Rohini Nakshatra invariably appears alongside the Ashtami Tithi. That is, the very same Ashtami Tithi and Rohini Nakshatra that were present when Lord Krishna incarnated on this earth five thousand years ago return every year in the month of Simha. **‘rohinyām ardharātre tu yadā Kālāshtamee bhavet’** **‘ardharātre poojayet nanda-nandanam.’** That is why this is the truly sacred Sri Krishna Jayanti. If it were otherwise, why would Srimadacharya have composed that unique Nirnaya Granth and given it the distinct name **‘Jayanti Nirnaya’**? It could have simply been called Sri Krishna Ashtami — just one among the ten, like Sri Rama's Navami.

That is why the scriptures have described Sri Krishna Jayanti as the most auspicious day for fasting among all the incarnation days — a sacred moment when the twenty-four fences that bind us are released, as if a lock has been opened. Since this day carries the same weight as Ekādashi and must never be missed, Srimadacharya — to ensure that no confusion arose regarding the months of Shravan, Bhadrapada, and others — has given us a clear and definitive ruling that the Jayanti of Shri Krishna should be celebrated while the Sun is in Leo. And to leave absolutely no room for doubt, he directly mentions the word

**‘Bhādrapada’ in his other Nirṇaya Granth: ‘yasminnabdhe
bhādrapade sa māse.’**

16. Ekādāshi Fasting as a Means of Rectifying Spiritual Shortcomings

As human beings, we all carry various defects and limitations. Our physical shortcomings are beyond our control — they are, in a sense, given to us by God. In truth, defects in our body or limbs are not a serious obstacle to the journey of life. Just as dents and scratches do not prevent a car from being driven, physical imperfections do not prevent us from living meaningfully. We see people in the world — those who are short, who limp, who cannot see or hear or walk — and many of them live peacefully, unburdened by their limitations. What is the use of grieving over defects that have no remedy? None of us are here forever. We should simply be content with what we have and live happily for as long as we are here. Even those who pride themselves on their youth and good looks must, with the passage of time, grow old and one day pass away.

Due to karma, various defects and shortcomings may appear in a person's life — in some to a small degree, in others to a greater one. Yet the very God who created the spirit to endure such limitations also shows mercy. In those who lack eyesight, for example, other senses often develop special capacities beyond those of ordinary people. And has God not also bestowed upon them the support of relatives, friends, and an environment that

sustains them in every way? Therefore, even those with significant defects, if they retain the will to live, do not find life in this world to be a burden.

While some defects are visible to the world, those of others remain hidden. Only the individual knows the true nature of their inner struggles, even if they appear healthy and attractive on the outside. Some people fall asleep easily, while others toss and turn without rest. Some digest their food well and build their strength, while the same food makes others ill and bedridden. Even those in good health can fall suddenly ill and suffer. In short, there is no one on this earth who is entirely without flaw.

The inner faults that affect us are countless. More importantly, the thoughts that arise in our minds are not within our control. The peace we all seek in life is rooted in the mind. Life is truly blissful only for those who have the wisdom to accept what they have with contentment, without constantly craving more. But we all suffer because we have not yet found the key to that peace.

In reality, we rarely live for ourselves. The clothes we wear, the way we speak, the business we conduct — all of it is colored by concern for how others perceive us. We compare our circumstances to the outward comfort and lifestyle of those

around us and feel needlessly diminished. Quietly, competition takes hold — from cars and homes to children’s clothing and education, and the urge to appear better than others simmers beneath the surface, making life far more stressful than it needs to be.

The flaws in our habits, thoughts, and lifestyles often creep in quietly and gradually. Most of the problems and sorrows we face stem from these very flaws. If we set our minds to it, we can always correct them. But first we must learn to recognize the mistakes that have crept into our lives without our awareness. For that, we need a pause — a break. Just as a machine must sometimes be stopped to identify and fix its faults, so too does our life need a deliberate halt.

It is for this very reason that the Bhavishyottara Purāna offers us a beautiful remedy — it advises us to fast on Ekādashi.

‘upāvruttastu pāpebhyaha vaāso yasya gunaih saha|

upavāsah sa vijneyah sarvabhoga-vivarjitaha’||

The day of Ekādashi, which comes once every two weeks, should be set aside for inner purification. On that day, we should not merely fast — our activities and rhythms should be consciously different from the usual. We must free ourselves from the grip of bad habits and compulsions. For example, the belief that our day cannot begin without tea or coffee — that we

will get a headache without it — these are the kinds of bonds that hold us. When we travel to an unfamiliar place and our usual comforts are unavailable, we suffer unnecessarily because of these attachments. We must therefore practice living with peace and enthusiasm even in their absence. We must shed the needless discomforts that arise from tying ourselves to rigid conditions — that we can only sleep in a particular bed, eat only certain things, bathe only in hot water, or work only at a proper desk and chair. We must cultivate the will and readiness to live fully and productively regardless of circumstances.

On Ekādashi, therefore, along with fasting, we should set aside all unnecessary habits, hobbies, and indulgences and devote the entire day primarily to sattvic thoughts, the chanting of God's name, prayer, and spiritual study. We should also take a brief respite from stressful worldly activities on that day. In doing so, we free ourselves from the habits that seek to govern us. We become free. We become more whole.

17. The Observance of Ekādashi by the Devathās and Ancestors

Go to any corner of the world and you will find people who believe in God. From tribal communities still living in forests far from modernity, to those dwelling in the high-rise apartments of great cities, most human beings are theists. According to their traditions, they believe in and worship God in their own ways, and they observe vratas and fasts.

Theism can be said to be a defining feature of humanity, for it is a reality that only those capable of deep, intelligent thought can truly understand and embrace. Nothing in this world happens on its own. There is a great power — a superpower — far greater than ourselves that has set this world in motion and continues to govern all of it. The truth that one must surrender to it is something most people come to recognize through the experiences of daily life. Our ancient heritage has explored this truth from many angles, and theism has grown out of that exploration, taking a deep and lasting root.

No other religious tradition has explored this world, its living beings, and the nature of God with the depth and breadth found in our Sanatan heritage. This is because the freedom to think freely, to question, and to practice what one believes is right

exists nowhere as fully as it does in our Sanatan religion. Hundreds of scriptures and diverse practices that bear witness to this uniqueness survive to this day — a treasure found nowhere else on earth.

In our tradition, the worship of many Gods and the veneration of ancestors both hold great importance. One might ask: even after accepting that there is only one Supreme Creator, why are so many Gods worshipped? As Shri Krishna himself has indicated in the Gita: **‘parasparam bhāvayanthah shreyah paramvāpsyatha’** — the emotional connections and interactions between divine powers and humans guide our lives toward goodness. This is the very nature of the world. We engage with many people in many capacities, each relationship serving its own purpose. How much closeness might we share with our father, the head of the household? Yet for food, we go to our mother. And for play and learning, we need our brothers and sisters.

After creating the physical world, God also created many deities to govern it and gave both humans and deities this instruction: **‘devān bhāvayathānena te devāh bhāvayantu vaha.’** As Lord Krishna implies — in this material world, which sustains our life through rain, crops, and all of nature’s provisions, we should honor and worship the deities who carry out these duties by God’s command. Let the deities be pleased in return, and grant

us the further comforts needed for a happy and peaceful life. This is the spirit behind the many forms of God and Goddess worship found in our tradition.

It is something like a school with teachers and students. Each year new children arrive and others graduate and leave — but the teachers remain. Teachers serve according to the rules and guidelines of the governing authority. Similarly, all humans born into this world are like students. The many Gods and Goddesses who oversee this material world serve as teachers, operating by God's command. Our sadhanas — our spiritual practices — are the work we must undertake while we are here, through devotion and mutual exchange with the divine. We must pass with sufficient merit — enough punya — and leave this world well. Continuing our sadhana across many births, we must finally earn the degree called moksha.

Thus, our theistic tradition — nurtured through long centuries of thought, belief, and scripture — encompasses many diverse practices with many regional variations. Our ancestors have faithfully observed the worship of Gods, Nagas, Bhootas, and ancestors on daily, fortnightly, monthly, and annual schedules. We have continued that same tradition, rendering service to the best of our ability and finding happiness and peace in the process.

Yet we must not forget that there are extensive scriptural rules behind this sacred service — this service to the divine and to our ancestors. We should periodically revisit those scriptures and verify that we are following them correctly. Is it not our duty to preserve the foundations on which our practice rests, and to follow them faithfully? Is it not wrong to alter them for our own convenience?

The rituals we perform with devotion on a monthly and annual basis must be offered on the correct auspicious days. Otherwise, they will not reach their intended recipients — they will be intercepted by others. Our offerings should be made only on the days when the Gods, ancestors, and deities are present to receive them with joy. If offered on the wrong day, those offerings will be claimed instead by demonic powers and evil spirits. Consider: if you set out food on plantain leaves before the guests arrive, and the guests do not come — who else might consume it? Similarly, if food and offerings in a household are not properly preserved and maintained, rats, cockroaches, ants, and snakes will find their way in. In the same manner, worship, food offerings, and tarpanas performed on forbidden days attract evil spirits, bringing misfortune to the household and to the world.

The most important point is this: on Ekādashi, all the devatas, ancestors, and even God himself do not accept food. Therefore,

any service, worship, food offerings, Shraddha, or other rituals performed on Ekādāshi are not only fruitless but actually harmful — our sincere offerings are surrendered to evil spirits, yielding tragic results instead of blessings. This is recorded clearly in our ancient Purānas and scriptures, and it is a practice our elders have faithfully upheld. If a special occasion falls on Ekādāshi, the day must be changed — Shraddha and puja falling on Ekādāshi must be observed on Dwādāshi instead. Just as we reschedule Shraddhathi when Sutaka occurs, the same principle applies here.

**‘harishcha devatāḥ sarvāḥ pitarashcha maharshayah |
 nāshnanti garhitānnaṁ tu samprāpte harivāsare |
 na shrāddham tatra kurveeta na homam na cha tarpanam |
 yadi mohat prakurveeta vrata-hānirbhavet dhruvam ||**

18. Ekādashi: The One Fast That Gratifies All Devathās and Ancestors

We lack the patience and restraint that our ancestors possessed. We all want things quickly and easily — none of us are prepared to wait or to endure difficulty. Our current physical and mental condition leaves much to be desired. The physical strength and mental capacity our ancestors have diminished greatly in our times, while the pressures of life have grown exponentially. We have no time for anything. We want quick, simple, and straightforward solutions for everything. Rather than visiting different stores for different goods, we want to do all our shopping in one large mall — no matter how long it takes or how much more it costs. Even the modern ‘GenZ’ generation has taken this further: they want everything immediately — work, banking, shopping, negotiations, communication, friendship, and even love — all of it ‘online.’ Now even horoscopes, astrology, remedies, pujas, and rituals are available as ‘online services.’

We who are so often consumed by worldly affairs and life’s pressures sometimes turn to spiritual remedies when things spiral out of control. When work does not go as planned, when hardship and loss strike, when our health declines — we remember God. The number of people seeking solace in

supernatural powers is growing every day. Any temple that has gained fame on television or social media draws enormous crowds. New gurus, miracle workers, and self-proclaimed incarnations appear everywhere, and as soon as they emerge, they amass large followings. But after some time, when no miracles materialize and money and time have been wasted, people eventually step away — only to fall prey to the next attraction. In the end, they find peace nowhere.

Do you know why such confusion and deception are so widespread today? We have abandoned the precious solutions that are right before us and have run after other attractions instead. Our tendency to ignore our parents, teachers, and elders — who stand right in front of us — and instead place our trust in untrustworthy strangers, inevitably ends in disappointment. **‘svādheenam samatikramya mātaram pitaram gurum asvādheenam katham daivam prakārairabhirādhyate.’**

Our ancestors thought deeply about the well-being of future generations and recorded the finest solutions they discovered in the form of scriptures. If we follow them with devotion, we can live happily. These scriptures address not only the challenges we face today but also those that may arise in the future. The most important and effective solution among them is the Ekādashi vrata — it is said to dissolve all our sins and

attract the grace of all the ancestors and Gods. **‘haridina pātakaparihāra divijara karunakke kārana nambelo manuja,’** as Sri Vyasaraaja, the guru of Sri Purandara and Sri Kanakadi Dasavarenyas, has clearly stated in one of his works.

The Ekādashi fast is an easy pathway out of all our troubles. For those who have no time to go from place to place obtaining different remedies, would it not simplify life greatly to have everything available in one place, like a grand shopping mall? Rather than worshipping Ganapati, Durga, Shiva, Subrahmanya, Navagraha, and so many other deities separately to obtain health, beauty, happiness, wealth, children, success, and fame, there is a single fast that pleases all the deities at once — and that is Ekādashi. The Ekādashi fast not only draws the grace of Anantavatari Shrimannarayana but also that of the Ekadash Rudras, Dwadashadityas, Ashta Vasus, Marudganas, Indra, all the deities, and all the ancestors. There are no Gods who remain displeased when we faithfully observe a waterless, foodless fast on every Ekādashi. And if we fail to fast on Ekādashi, the Gods will be displeased. Should anyone offer food or drink on that day, none of the Gods will accept it — and the offerings will instead be claimed by evil spirits, bringing misfortune to the world. **‘Garhyānam Na Chāshnanti Pitarashcha DivaukasaHa.’** (Padma Purāna)

You have likely heard of Pitru Dosha — the belief that ‘**Pitru Badhe**’ can be the root cause of many troubles, obstacles, and hardships in our lives. But why would our ancestors trouble us? Were not our parents and grandparents always our well-wishers? The inner meaning here is different.

Just as we work hard for our children, preserve wealth for them, and make every sacrifice for their happiness — so too did our ancestors labor with love for future generations. Even after their passing, they continue to wish us well. But do even the most loving parents not sometimes punish children who go astray? Similarly, if we abandon a sacred practice like Ekādashi, which our ancestors observed with great devotion, and fall instead into non-belief, would they be pleased? But if we live a life devoted to dharma — with sincere fasts and good rituals like Ekādashi — our ancestors in the higher realms would rejoice and bless us wholeheartedly with the finest blessings.

āspotayanti pitaraha nanrutayanti pitāmahaha

vaishnavosmat kule jātah sa nah santārayishyati. (Garuda Purāna)

If, instead of fasting on the auspicious day of Ekādashi, we not only eat but also offer food to our ancestors, will they accept it? Will they not be angered and curse us? Since the ancestors also fast on Ekādashi, the Padma Purāna and Skanda Purāna clearly

instruct that Shraddha and Tarpanadi falling on that day must be performed the following day.

**Ekādashyām yadā rāma shrādhm naimittikam bhavet
taddinanthu parityajya dvādashyām shrādhmācharet
ekādashyām tu prāptāyām māthāpitrormrutāhani
dvādashyām tat pradatavyam nopavāsadine**

(Padma Purāna)

**Ekādashyām yadā shrādhm nityam naimittikam bhavet
upavāsam thada kuryāt dvādashyām shrādhmācharet
(Skanda Purāna)**

In sum, for the well-being of our lives and the peace we all seek, we absolutely need the blessings of all the deities and our ancestors. No other practice is as effective at winning the favour of all of them at once as the Ekādashi fast. Let us therefore observe it with sincere devotion on every Ekādashi, without fail. May we be blessed by all the Gods and ancestors.

19. The Glory of Ekādashī Vrata in the Works of Sri Purandaradāsa

There is hardly a Kannadiga who does not know Sri Purandara Dasa, regarded as the greatest among the Dasas. All Kannadigas have heard at least some of his thousands of works — considered the most wonderful of their kind — and have been moved by them. His works do not merely praise God or express devotion; they also carry the rare merit of explaining the most profound spiritual and Vedic ideas from the Vedas, Upanishads, Purānas, and Brahma Sūtras in our beloved dialect, Savigannada, in a way that common people can understand. Works such as ‘**kanninolage nodo hariya**’ and ‘**hyānge bareditto prācheenadalli hānge irabeku samsārādalli**’ are among the many compositions for which Sri Purandaradasa — like so many other Dasavarenyas — is revered.

He also composed pillari songs such as ‘**Lambodara Lakumikara,**’ laying the most favorable foundational framework for elementary music study — earning him lasting fame in the world of music as the Father of Carnatic Music. Compositions like ‘**āchāra villada nalige,**’ ‘**yāthara latāpāti ondu dina hogatiddi Latāpāti,**’ and ‘**narajanma bandāga nālige iddāga krishna yenabārade**’ are timely teachings and life lessons conveyed through his works, reminding us of the value

of this human life and the eternal path of righteousness. All his works are therefore considered exemplary guides for living well, practicing good deeds, and cultivating noble thoughts — and remain as relevant today as ever.

Sri Purandara Dasa was praised by his own guru Sri Vyasarajaru as ‘**dāsarendare Purandara dāsaraīyya.**’ He is truly an incarnation of Sri Narada, and Sri Vijayadasaru described him as ‘**nāradare ee rooupadindali chāru darushana thorida.**’ Sri Purandara Dasa has explained many profound truths in ways that touch the heart and mind. Among his most valuable teachings is the importance of Ekādashi fasting. In the works available to us today, two complete verses are devoted to describing the importance and glory of this sacred fast.

According to Sri Purandara Dasaru, a sacred fast like Ekādashi is not accessible to all — it is simply not given to everyone. To understand and observe it, one requires both the will and the grace of God. If we are not born into a traditional, God-fearing family, how would we even come to know of such precious practices? Therefore, everything — from being born in a well-cultured family to having the knowledge and the opportunity to practice good deeds like Ekādashi fasting — is a gift from God to those He has chosen to bless. Does God bestow such blessings on any but His true devotees?

**harivāsaradupavāsada bhāgyavu kanda-kandavarige
dorakuvude?**

**hiridu janmagalinda hariyanerādhipa parama
bhāghavathabhaktarigallade**

– Sri Purandara Dasa.

Sri Purandara Dasa explains in the verse below how the Ekādashi fast purifies us and removes all sin.

**snāna sandhyāvandana modalāda karma-nyoonada
pāparāshi**

henu iruve nona modalāda prānihimseya pāpagalu

heenatvadali thuchhara kaili hidida durdānada pāpagalu

bhānubimbava kanda himadante tholaguva

ānanda-nandana-vratake sariyennabahude?

It is a great sin not to remember God in the evening hours — the God who has given us this life and all its blessings. In pursuit of our own pleasures, we rush about this earth, crushing small creatures like ants underfoot. Can we even count the sins we accumulate by ignoring and destroying life around us? And how great a debt do we carry for the wrongs we have committed — done without reflection — in our blind pursuit of easy happiness? The sole remedy for all such sins is the Ekādashi

fast. Just as the blazing sun melts solid snow with its heat, the fast on Haridina dissolves our accumulated heap of sins. Sri Purandara Das goes on to list many other transgressions that the Ekādashi fast can cleanse.

parasatiyara nodi manavittapāpavu paradooshaneyā pāpavu |

parahimseya mādi avara vastugalannu apaharisida pāpavu |

paramātmana pogaluva nāligeyalli nārara pogaluva pāpavu |

hariya moreya kanda kariya sanghagalante

duritakotigalannu pariharisuvantha |

āduva anruta vakyagalinda sambhavavāguva pāpangalu |

ādabārada dinagalalli streegohtianādida pāpangalu |

bedabāradhantha varava kodu yendu bedida pāpangalu |

kādukichhannu kanda khaga-mruga-tatianta

odisuttiruvantha

uttamavratavu ||

In the following lines, Sri Purandara Dasa explains the rules we must observe during this three-day yajna — which includes a complete fast on Ekādashi and single meals on Dashami and Dwādashi.

**toruva dashami dwādashiya samputakāradindoppuva
haridīnavu |**

moorudinda vrata nālkuhottina āhāravu varjitavu |

oorudārigalannu nadeyabāradu tāmbulavu varjitavu |

**nārāyanana dāsara sanghadodane jāgara mādi sheehariya
kondāduva||**

On the day of Ekādashi, we not only fast, but also abstain strictly from Pitru Shraddha, Tarpana, worship of Gods and Goddesses, Homa-Yajnas, and all other worldly pleasures. Sri Purandara Dasa explains these strict rules as commanded by the Shastras.

atishaya dinadalli deva rushi pitrutarpanavarjithavu |

**pratavarushadali ācharisuva tāytande thithigalellavu
varjyavu |**

satatavu māduva yajnapurushanigāhutigalellavu varjyavu |

**itaravāda Bhogadāsegelella varjisutali
veeravratavanācharisuva ||**

The other benefits of fasting on Ekādashi are spoken in the following words,

ottibaruva pāpangaligella inthiha paksha prāyaschittavu |

uttamavāda halavu vratagaliginta uttamavāgihudu |

chittashudhiyanittu jnānavairāgyādi sādhanaveevudu |

muktige sopana, tarana bhavābdhige,

hariya sannidhige hedhāriya toruva ||

He makes clear that no other fast or meritorious deed carries the benefit of the Ekādashi fast.

halavu Purāna galodi shastrangala kelidarenu |

halavu punyateertha nada nadigalalli snānamādidarenu |

halavu vratangalācharisi dānangala tilidu mādidarenu |

halavu daivagalodeya purandara vittalana olumeya

vratake sariyennabahude? ||

In another of his poems, Sri Purandara Dasa reinforces this teaching through further examples. He also describes what the Vedas and Purānas say about the misfortune that awaits those who disregard Ekādashi and instead indulge in earthly pleasures and elaborate feasting.

haridinadi unda nararige ghora naraka

tappadu yendu shrutiyu sārutalide |

gova konda pāpa sāvira viprarajeevahatyeya mādida pāpavu |

bhāvajanayyana dinadali undavarige

keevinolage hāki kudisuvanu yamanu |

ondondu agulige Koti Koti Krimi
andina annavu maāyīmāmsavu |

mandhara-dharana indadali undavarānu
handiya suduvante sudisuvānu yamanu |

anna udaka tāmbula darpanagalu
chinna vastrgalella varjitavu |

tanna satiya sanga māduva manujana
bennali karula-tegesuva yamanu |

Along with that, the fruits of the vigil on that day are also described here.

jāvada jāgara kratu nālkusāvira
jāvanālkara phalake mitiyillavu |

devadevana dinadi nidregaidare
hurigāvalinolu hāki hurisuva yamanu |

intu ekādashi upavāsa jāgara
santata ksheerābdhi-shayanana pooje |

santhoshadali mādida Janarige
ananta phalavāneeva purandaravittala ||

This is the worship of the goddess Ksheerabdhishayana during the fast. To those who do it with joy, the infinite fruits are given by Purandaravithala.

Thus, Shri Nārāḁavatara, Shri Purandara Dāsa, has explained in simple and accessible Kannada — a language dear to us — the immense importance of Ekādashī for our salvation. If we still do not observe it, who among us could be more unfortunate?

20. The Benefits of the Ekādashi Fast for Non-Vegetarians

Compared to the pious souls born in the Krita, Treta, and Dwapara yugas, those born in the Kali Yuga face far greater challenges. Chief among these is our weak body — one that lives entirely on food and cannot sustain itself for long without it. In earlier yugas, our ancestors could endure years without food. We have no such capacity. Our body is like a leaky vessel — it empties no matter how many times it is filled. When we examine the remarkable topic found in the Skanda Purāṇa, **‘Kalau Annagata Prānāh,’** many astonishing truths come to light.

Our body today is much like a vehicle. For a vehicle to run, it must be regularly supplied with fuel. Similarly, our life’s journey can continue peacefully only when food is adequate and consistent. Without it, the journey stalls mid-course. Just as poor fuel reduces a vehicle’s efficiency and shortens its life, malnutrition and irregular eating diminish the efficiency and durability of the human body — **‘Lokaha Svalpāyushasthasthā.’** And just as different vehicles run on different fuels — petrol, diesel, kerosene, or gas — our diet too varies according to our body type, profession, inclination, and the geographical conditions of the land in which we live.

Currently, about 90% of people in the world are non-vegetarians. Even in our own country, India, the number of non-vegetarians is significant — only about 20% of the population follows a strictly vegetarian diet. Our Sanatan tradition does not impose a universal prohibition on non-vegetarian food. If our scriptures had declared such food forbidden for all, the devout followers of the Sanatan tradition — who have upheld so many other practices faithfully — would surely have abandoned it entirely. What is observed instead is that, in the Kali Yuga, only those who engage primarily in intellectual and knowledge-based work, with minimal physical exertion, are required to follow a strict vegetarian diet.

Non-vegetarians, who form the majority among followers of the Sanatan tradition, still observe traditional discipline in managing their food with care and devotion. They do not simply slaughter animals on a whim for the sake of taste. They follow clear rules about which animals may be used, how they should be treated, and which meats are strictly prohibited. The tradition of offering animals to the divine power they worship and accepting the meat as prasad has existed since ancient times. Similarly, in non-vegetarian households, separate vessels and cooking arrangements are maintained for meat preparation. On festivals and holy days, meat is not consumed, and they faithfully observe the custom of not entering a temple

after eating meat, thereby maintaining the sanctity of the sacred places they revere.

There are many examples of non-vegetarians who live long, healthy, and devout lives, deeply committed to dharma and full of good deeds. Equally, vegetarians who abstain from meat are not exempt from natural ailments, old age, or life's challenges. Abstaining from meat alone does not grant longevity or freedom from suffering. Therefore, vegetarians cannot be considered inherently superior, nor non-vegetarians inferior. Respect and standing are earned through character, knowledge, sacrifice, and service to others — not merely through what one eats. The true religion of life is to follow the path of our elders, performing the karmas that benefit us with sincerity and devotion, while treating the customs and ways of others with equal respect.

When we consider this carefully, the food system that God has ordained for every living being on this earth is truly a marvel — one that defies full comprehension. From microscopic organisms invisible to the naked eye, to creatures as vast as elephants and whales, God has provided sufficient food to sustain every life. We alone have the capacity to think, to evaluate, to seek out and choose what is right for our bodies. Consider instead the countless animals, wild creatures, and aquatic beings — when their staple food is unavailable, do they

have the intelligence to seek alternatives? We cannot even imagine a tiger surviving on grass.

Using the wisdom that God has bestowed upon us, humans have — since the time of our earliest ancestors — been discovering and developing the means needed for a happy life on this earth. That exploration continues today, and our lives have grown richer and more comfortable as a result. Thousands of years of scientific inquiry have brought immense progress to our modern way of living. And yet, we have entirely failed to overcome our most fundamental natural limitations — our dependence on food, our vulnerability to disease, the inevitability of aging, and the certainty of death.

As the Skanda Purāṇa notes, no matter how much we may seem to advance in other areas, our physical strength and lifespan only diminish with time. The only path left to us is to surrender to the will of the Supreme Lord and the laws of nature, and to make wise and grateful use of this precious body for as long as it endures — just as one takes care of a newly purchased vehicle and uses it well for as long as it lasts.

Though our languages, body types, professions, dietary habits, and lifestyles may differ according to our time of birth, country, and family tradition, from the most essential vantage point — that we are all human beings — our purpose in life is the same.

The scripture's call to acquire knowledge and virtue through good deeds applies equally to all of us. We must therefore observe with devotion certain practices that are obligatory in our Sanatan tradition. Ekādashi fasting is one of the most important such practices, applicable to all.

In the eyes of our tradition, whatever our differences in caste, diet, or custom — are we not all part of the same Indian Sanatan Dharma? Are not the scriptures and the forms of worship we have inherited from our ancestors essentially the same? Then should we not all observe the Ekādashi fast, which our scriptures prescribe as mandatory for all — because it is certain to bring good health, mental peace, and the grace of God that every one of us needs in this life?

This verse from the Varaha Purāna says that Ekādashi is beneficial for everyone.

**māsham cha lavanam maāmsam yoshneeṣyāt tilamātrataha |
ekādashyam thathah sarvam vratham nishphalatām vrajet ||**

This means that none of us should consume even a morsel as small as a sesame seed on the auspicious day of Ekādashi. On other days, foods considered traditional — savoury dishes with lentils like urad, salt, and meat — may be consumed as appropriate to one's tradition. But on Ekādashi, these must be

strictly avoided. Eating on this day not only incurs sin but also destroys all the merit we have accumulated.

21. Ekādashi: A Sattvic Discipline of the Highest Order

You may have heard of the Aghoris and Naga Sadhus, who have recently gained immense popularity in the media. They are rarely seen in the south and are most commonly encountered at events like the Kumbh Mela, held regularly in North India. Their lifestyle and practices never fail to pique curiosity. They remain one of the principal attractions for foreign tourists visiting India.

We are often surprised when we observe their strange lifestyle and harsh penances. The question naturally arises in our minds whether we too must endure such hardship to please God. We instinctively feel cautious about these unusual people who smear crematorium ash all over their bodies, walk around naked, and go about with matted hair. And yet for some, there is a strange attraction to the powers and benefits associated with such practices — a curious thought: perhaps we could try this path ourselves?

Many such strange and unusual sects have come and gone through our ancient tradition spanning thousands of years. Some still survive from those ancient times. Their penance — including living in crematoriums, consuming the dead, and

using intoxicants — is certainly not sattvic. What they seek to achieve through such extreme means, without daily bathing or cleansing, and whether it is truly fruitful, remains deeply mysterious.

From the mythological stories told by our elders, we have also heard much about the severe penances performed by demons. It seems they followed such difficult paths in order to quickly win boons from Gods like Brahma, Rudra, and Indra. Later they would misuse those trivial boons, living as world-conquerors — and ultimately be destroyed by that same divine power.

As far as I know, however, the true Aghoris and Naga Sadhus are not hard-hearted people. They are not world-conquerors, but rather souls devoted to the welfare of all humanity — supreme devotees of Lord Shiva who undertake these difficult practices with liberation as their sole aim, sustaining themselves somehow along the way. They appear in public only occasionally, during holy seasons like the Kumbh Snana, at famous pilgrimage sites like Prayag Raj. Be that as it may.

But the lifestyle of such unusual sadhakas cannot be a model for us. As householders, citizens, and ordinary human beings, we have our own natural limitations. Neglecting proper bathing and sanitation under the pretext of continuous penance or long-term chanting can harm our health and spread illness to

our families. What do we truly gain by turning our backs on worldly responsibilities and wandering away from home? Above all, we must honestly examine the attractions, desires, and lures that make us curious about such extraordinary achievements.

There are always difficulties in everyone's life. It is true that desires for good things, better living, and an improved life exist in every mind. But very few have the patience to wait. We want everything at once. Yet we do not have the strength or ability to obtain what we want precisely as we wish it. The only recourse is to turn to God. For those seeking easy ways to please God and fulfill desires, such unusual paths of spiritual achievement appear attractive. In reality, they are not easy — and the results they yield are not permanent.

As Shri Krishna himself has described such practices — **‘karshayanthah sharecrastham bhoothagrāmam achetasaha mānchaiva antah sharecrastham pradvishantho abhyasooyakāha’** — unnecessary physical punishment and these strange, extreme austerities are not only tamasic or demonic paths; in a sense, they oppose the Lord who dwells within the heart. For this body is not truly ours alone — it is a gift from God, and also the temple where He resides. We must therefore treat this body with the same care we give a tender plant — nurturing it patiently, nourishing it well, and enjoying

its fruits and flowers in a good way. We must make good use of this body.

Only sadhana performed through scriptural and regular good deeds is considered sattvik. As Lord Krishna himself has shown us: **‘deva-dvija-guru-prājna-poojanam shaucham ārjavam brahmacharyam ahimsā cha shāreeram thapa uchyate’** — our rituals of keeping the body clean and worshipping God and the Gurus through righteous actions and words must be non-violent, free from doubt and confusion, and pleasing to God. If we water a plant constantly and pour fertilizer on it every day, it will not grow well — it may even wither. Similarly, an unbroken supply of food is not good for the body. Meaningful fasting, between regular meals, is also essential for good health.

By renouncing pleasures on the path of sattvic living, we too can easily perform penance. Among such simple and sattvic practices, fasting for the pleasure of God holds first place. As Lord Krishna has taught: **‘vishayā vinivartante nirahārasya dehinaha,’ ‘yuktāhāra vihārasya....yogo bhavati duhkhahā’** — controlling food in the right measure, that is, fasting regularly, is an easy path to resolving difficulties. Through these disciplined, healthy, and natural processes, we can control our mind and senses, develop concentration, and draw the grace of God through the modest meditation, chanting, bhajan, and worship we offer.

Is it not better to walk the well-known path of our Purāṇas than to wander into some strange path without a clear goal, experience, or purpose? We must convince ourselves again and again that there is no more effective penance and sadhana than the Ekādāshi fast, which is described in so many ways across so many Purāṇas. One who eats proper, nutritious food and leads a disciplined life is rarely afflicted by disease, and has little occasion to take spicy or bitter medicines. Similarly, one who faithfully observes the pure and austere sadhana of Ekādāshi fasting has no reason to fear hardship or disaster. In this beautiful life of ours, there is no need to seek out the difficult and extreme practices of the Aghoris.

22. The Supremacy of Ekādashī

Fasting Over Non-Violence, Charity, and Other Virtues

We have all grown up hearing from our teachers and elders that by practicing the virtues of not troubling anyone, speaking the truth, helping others, and giving generously, our lives become pure, merit is earned, and God's grace is attained. Most of us have had the experience of implementing such virtues to the best of our ability and finding genuine satisfaction and peace in doing so. We all aspire to teach our children these same values — and modern educational curricula are making efforts to embed such samskaras as well. For the construction of a well-cultured society, such values must be present everywhere. In short, this human dharma — which transcends caste and creed and applies to all — is a true adornment of life.

We can find scriptures that teach good deeds, noble thoughts, and virtues in many countries and languages across the world today. But the Indian religious scriptures — considered the most ancient and finest in the world — are different in character. They did not merely preach. Through timely examination, reflection, and many research-based refinements, they have grown into a living heritage applicable

to both the ancient and the modern world. The freedom to question and criticize, found only in our magnificent eternal tradition, has enabled our intellectual growth. Countless scholars and great minds have contributed their learning in books beyond number. Thus our community's treasury of knowledge has become vast and excellent.

The incomparable Vedas and their related Grihyasutras, Purānas, Mahabharata, Ramayana, and more can be said to be the eternal treasures of knowledge given to mankind through the grace of Veda Vyasa. And to help us understand them correctly and implement their principles in our lives according to the times, further authoritative texts emerged at different periods. Among those valued and followed in accordance with the systems and lifestyles of the time, Manusmriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, Vasishtha Smriti, Harita Smriti, and others remain well-known guides even today. It can be said with pride that no other language in the world possesses as many religious instructional texts as Sanskrit.

That said, none of our religious texts demand blind obedience. The generosity that grants us the power to question, criticize, and adopt only what we find well-reasoned can be called the true greatness of our scriptures. However, if we carefully examine and deliberate before following the righteous practices taught by our scriptures, we will not lose anything. For it is only

by choosing to receive the nectar offered by the great sages that we truly benefit — we will not suffer.

Let us now examine some of the practices mentioned in our religious scriptures and faithfully followed by our ancestors. The most well-known of these are four: non-violence, truthfulness, charity, and sense control. We have often heard the famous saying '**Ahimsā Paramam Dharmaha.**' By nature, most of us are non-violent — we do not wish to harm others and do not tolerate injustice being done to anyone through us. The only way we can truly practice non-violence is to remain vigilant in our daily activities and ensure that our work does not inadvertently cause harm to others. Almost all good people around the world live this way. Therefore, our non-violence cannot be called a great spiritual achievement.

The truth is not so simple, and there is real difficulty here. '**satyasya vachanam sheyaha, satyajnānam tu dushkaram**' — it is easy to declare that one will always speak the truth, but implementation is genuinely hard. We all likely stumble when deciding what 'truth' actually is in a given situation. Merely saying what is literally true is not always sufficient, for the implementation of truth is not limited to words alone. What matters equally is the effect on others. If our version of the truth unjustly harms or troubles another person, are we not responsible for that? Nevertheless, we should all reflect

carefully and do our best to keep our actions and words as pure as possible.

Truthfulness can be said to be a foundational law that every civilized society must observe. Just as the administrative system punishes those who break the law, those who lack truthfulness are regularly caught and penalized — whether tax evaders, dishonest shopkeepers, students who cheat in exams, or those who benefit through deception. It is a well-known truth that lies and fraud do not endure. Since truthfulness is a dharma that everyone in this world must follow, it cannot itself be claimed as a particularly great spiritual achievement.

Charity too can be examined from many angles. Charity done merely for recognition brings only temporary honour — the merit that could carry forward to future births is spent right there. As the scripture says, **‘Dharmah ksharati keertanāt’** — charity should always be done quietly. Otherwise, when we give publicly and receive praise from recipients, all our accumulated merit is discharged on the spot. Even if we resolve to give generously, should we not ask whether God has provided the means for it? It is God who must grant us the wisdom, the means, and the right people and circumstances for giving. **‘vāmano budhidāta cha dravyastho vāmanah smrutaha,’** says the Vamana Purāna. If we hoard our resources, share nothing, and take nothing with us at death — what becomes of us? If we

make good use of the opportunity given to us, we will be blessed. Otherwise, we face hardships in the next life. Therefore, using the wealth given by God for the benefit of others is the wisdom of life — and this too cannot be claimed as our personal great achievement.

The fourth is sense control. In truth, other living beings — animals and birds — often practice this better than we do. Almost all animals and birds use their senses in a limited, measured way, only as much as is needed to satisfy hunger and reproduce. They do not simply indulge whenever the mood strikes. And if we misuse our senses, we suffer the consequences in the form of disease and weakness. So if we want good health, self-reliance, and longevity, we must live a righteous and disciplined life. It is certainly our good fortune to be born as human beings. If we use our intelligence, exercise self-control, seek proper guidance, and make good use of this life, it becomes worthwhile. Otherwise, it is wasted. Just as school requires discipline and study after enrollment, self-control is one of the primary duties of our life — and we cannot claim special recognition for simply fulfilling it.

Therefore, even if we follow good deeds such as non-violence and the rest, we are merely fulfilling our basic duties — they cannot be called great personal achievements. That is why the saying from the *Shānti Parva* of the *Maha Bhārata* conveys the

message that the penance standing above all good deeds in life is the Ekādashi fast: **‘ahimsā satyavachanam dānam indria nigraha etebhyo hi mahārāja Ttapo nānashanat param.’**

Because the Ekādashi fast we regularly observe combines all of these virtues in one. Does not the Ekādashi fast give a respite from the violence we inflict on living beings for our food? By abstaining from food for roughly twenty-five days in a year, do we not also earn the merit of saving some natural resources and, in effect, donating food to other living beings? Sense control too is achieved through fasting — **‘vishayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ,’** as Sri Krishna himself taught in the Gita. And with regular, dedicated fasting, our minds become purer and our intellect sharper. May we have the fortune to discern real truth and remain loyal to it! Therefore, for the peace of our minds and the sattvic satisfaction of a good deed well done, we must observe a strict fast on every Ekādashi.

23. The Consequences of Neglecting the Ekādashi Fast

Time is passing so quickly that we are barely aware of the many changes unfolding in our lives. The childhood games of yesterday are gone without our even noticing. Our youthful energy has quietly faded, replaced by a settled seriousness. We do not even remember when the weight of worldly responsibilities began falling on us one by one, trapping us in this web of existence from which there seems to be no escape. And now, as grey creeps into our hair and our bodies weaken, we are confronted with the unsettling truth that half to three-quarters of our life has already passed, and we are drawing ever closer to death.

Seen in this light, it is indeed our great fortune to be born as human beings. God has endowed us with intellectual wealth that no other living being possesses. And yet, without reflecting deeply on this gift, we have somehow let the best years of our lives slip by. The time that has passed will never return. If we have recognized and fulfilled the true purpose of this sacred birth, we are among the most fortunate. Otherwise, only God knows what hardships await us in future lives.

We should live like bank managers in this life — settling each day's accounts by evening and going home without carrying them over. If left for tomorrow, they only grow more complicated, leading to problems that are harder to fix. Our duties and deeds should be treated the same way — we should regularly cleanse ourselves of known and unknown sins through fasting. If workers hired for a salary spend their time idly chatting, does not the master grow angry? Similarly, if we forget our main duty of earning punya and waste time needlessly, even the God who created us is displeased — and He will hold us accountable.

Just as we must clean the stove, utensils, and vegetables before cooking, we must cleanse ourselves of sins before we can truly earn punya. Who knows how many sinful deeds we may have carried from previous births? Can a stone wall stand on an unstable foundation? No matter how much punya you accumulate, if the burden of past sins is not removed, it will all be in vain — like performing a homa in cold ashes, mistaking them for fire.

Among the many sacred remedies for removing sin, none carries the importance or power of Ekādashi fasting. And yet it is surprising how many of us hesitate to practice it. Most people blindly follow what is easy and pleasant. When something seems even slightly demanding, they hesitate and raise dozens

of questions about its validity and effectiveness. One of the most common questions is: ‘What happens if we do not fast on Ekādashi?’

The ancient scriptures that have made fasting on Ekādashi mandatory have also given extensive explanations about what happens when we do not fast. These same scriptures that introduced us to the Gods and Goddesses we believe in and worship — and through which we find peace today — have also emphasized the importance of Ekādashi. Our culture, tradition, and lifestyle have been shaped by those ancient texts. They are the foundation for all the rituals our Gurus and elders have followed. The Vedas too have made fasting obligatory through many injunctions such as **‘atapta-tanoor-na-tadāmo ashnute.’**

If you accept one part, you must accept all of it. If you believe, you must believe it fully. It is inconsistent to say that you accept Ekādashi in principle but practice only what is convenient. That is like the misguided argument that only one end of the sugarcane is sweet. Our greatest misfortune is that we have lost our identity by being misled by foreign language and practices in the guise of modernity. The attitude of setting aside ancient texts and Sanskrit in favor of selective practice — keeping what is easy and discarding what is difficult — is not a path we should follow.

Asking questions is good. But finding the right answers — not avoiding them with vague objections — is true integrity. Wasting time without making any effort, and letting ancient virtues like Ekādashi slip away without practice, is also a kind of negligence. Our life is like an examination room: if we spend all our time turning over the question paper, the allotted time passes and we have nothing to show. We must write down what we know. Similarly, we should not endlessly criticize, but trust and follow. Our elders did not implement these practices blindly — they examined and deliberated. We must understand this and make our lives meaningful by practicing virtue before our time runs out.

Among the many scriptures that describe what happens when we do not fast on Ekādashi, the following are a few words drawn from the Varaha Purāna, Padma Purāna, and Krishnamruta Maharnava. Contemplate the rest for yourself.

If we fail to fast even once on Ekādashi in our entire life, we must endure terrible suffering in the most dreadful hell called Raurava for thirty-six thousand crore years. This is the punishment that follows from defying God’s command to fast on Ekādashi.

Even one who has received the blessing of good health by God’s grace, who has physical strength and ability, and yet neglects to

fast on Ekādashi — such a person is like the ultimate traitor. By defying the God who gave them everything, they descend into the most terrible hell.

If a father, mother, wife, son, or any close relative neither knows the importance of Ekādashi nor observes the fast, they are regarded in God's eyes as thieves — like criminals deserving punishment. When our children or loved ones go astray, we must stop them, guide them, and bring them back to the right path. We should inform them of the importance of observing Ekādashi and encourage them to fast.

ekadāpi cha yo hanyād vratametath narādhamah |
sa kalpamātram narake raurave patati dhruvam |
yadi shaktopi kurveeta vratahānim narādhamah |
mama droho bhaveth thasya narakam pratipadyate |
pithā vā yadi vā putro bhārya vāpi suhruth janah |
padmanābha dine bhunkte nigrāhyo dasyuvad-bhaves ||

24. The Spiritual Implications for Both Those Who Eat and Those Who Feed Others on Ekādashi

These days, there seem to be more people who discourage and mislead than those who encourage and support good deeds. Many among us will not practice something themselves, and cannot bear to see others do it. When their own loved ones set out to do a sadhana or good deed that they themselves cannot, a sourness stirs within them. Their contrary intellect springs into action — finding non-existent reasons to make them hesitate, casting doubt on the value of the practice, and unsettling them until they step back. There is a perverse satisfaction in this, quite different from the peace that comes from genuine abstention. What pettiness of mind! In short, the only aim is that no one should surpass them.

There are many who mislead us under the pretext of offering good advice and acting as our well-wishers. They are afraid that we will surpass them — and this hidden disease of jealousy recognizes no bonds of religion, devotion, or relationship. The mean attitude of the jealous is that what they do not have should not belong to others, and what they cannot obtain should not come to others either. Even those about to undertake a sacred

fast like Ekādashi are not left in peace by such people. They fear that if others fast on Ekādashi and receive God's grace, those people will be blessed and rise above them.

After all, those who fast on Ekādashi do receive real benefits — the grace of God, freedom from afflictions, good health, peace of mind, and harmony in the household. Everyone knows this, for Ekādashi fasting is not a recent practice — it has been well known since the time of our grandparents, and its unique benefits are widely recognized. Yet some people feel hesitation or embarrassment about fasting themselves. And when a relative or friend sets out to do it, they become uneasy. They themselves have the very same opportunity to fast sincerely and reap all those good fruits. But do they have the heart for it? Can they let go of their indifference and resistance? Faith, devotion, and the right inclination do not come easily to everyone — even that requires the grace of God.

Whatever one's state of mind, those who try to break another's good deed like Ekādashi fasting — through temptations or any other means — are sure to incur great sin. Our most ancient scripture '**Smṛiti Muktāvali**' speaks of this as follows,

**'bhunkshva bhunkshveti yo bruyāt yo bhunkte harivāsare|
thāuvbhau narakam Yāthah yaāvadābhoota samplavam' ||**

That is, whoever not only eats on Ekādashi but also encourages others to eat becomes a great sinner. And as a result of that sin, both the one who offered the food and the one who listened and ate on Ekādashi — both go to hell. There they experience unending sorrow, suffering terrible hardships until the great dissolution of this world, the Pralaya.

No matter what the scriptures say, there is no one alive on this earth who has seen the gates of heaven or hell. We see people who say, ‘let us eat and enjoy ourselves as long as we live — who needs all this fasting?’ Such voices are heard everywhere today. We need not engage with them. Intellectual debate with those who have already made up their minds and refuse to listen is simply a waste of time.

We should follow the path we believe is right, regardless of what others think. We need not worry about them. We should study deeply, listen to those who know, analyze what we hear, and then faithfully continue the fasts and rituals we have accepted in our hearts. Only those who lack clear knowledge or genuine faith in what they are doing fall prey to temptation. Those with clarity never go astray. So let us, like our ancestors, study sincerely about the Ekādashi fast and its benefits, and put that knowledge into practice. Let us fast diligently without yielding to any temptations — so that we receive God’s blessings along with the great fruit of good health.

25. Attaining Virtue Through the Observance of the Ekādashi Fast

Devotion to the Lord and a genuine interest in religious life do not simply come to anyone — it is a true treasure available only to the fortunate. As the Katho Upanishad clearly states: **‘yamaivesha vrunute tena Labhyah’** — it is not our choice! Only if God wills it do we develop the desire to strive for self-improvement, as though inspired to perform sadhana. Devotion to God is itself God’s gift. That is why, in today’s world, truly devoted religious seekers are very few. Finding one or two sincerely loyal people among a thousand would already be remarkable: **‘manushyānām sahasreshu kashchith yathathi siddhaye.’** The same holds in monasteries and temples — most people come for darshan, prasad, and entertainment. Even those who visit temples typically circle the deity a few times, ring the bell, bow, and leave. Only a few have the patience and interest to listen to religious discourses, observe vratas and fasts, or engage in meditation, chanting, and parayana.

As the Skanda Purāna says: **‘kalau sarve bhavishyanthi pāpakarma parāyanāḥ vedavidyā vihe enāshcha theshām sheyah katham bhaveth’** — this is the mark of the Kali Yuga. In the Kali Yuga, most people are inclined more toward sinful actions than toward the Vedic knowledge that shows the path

to salvation. They have little desire to perform good deeds. That is why people rush to see film celebrities even where there is no real merit in it. A cricket or football victory is enough for the youth to pour onto the streets in frenzied celebration — unrelated to those they cheer for, yet eager to join the festivities, the drinking, and the dancing. Even when people are killed in the resulting stampedes, the survivors rarely learn. Mourning lasts a few days, and the cycle of excitement resumes. Yet when invited to calm, sattvic, religious programs of genuine value, barely anyone shows up.

It seems the time must be right for people to be inspired toward good deeds. Past karma also plays a role. In general, when the moment arrives, God points us toward righteousness through some medium. For some, the company of good people or special circumstances may inspire them to fast on Ekādashi and perform good deeds. For others, difficulties in life may compel them toward such meaningful fasts for the purpose of relief. Just as parents who speak gently at first will scold and even threaten if a child still refuses to listen, God sometimes brings His worthy devotees to the path of righteousness through hardship — creating opportunities for diligent fasting and guiding them back to the right path: **‘yathathe cha tatho bhuyah samsidhau kurunandana.’**

If divine intention and divine inspiration are invisible forces beyond our control, then we must think practically about how to work within our own limits. We need to set aside philosophical debate for a moment and make an honest effort to improve our nature through tangible means. This is what Jagadguru Sri Madhvacharya has clearly taught us — to surrender all our burdens to God and humbly continue our duties and deeds without fail throughout our lives. And whatever comes — happiness or sorrow — we should accept it as it is, as the gift of God according to our own karma: **‘kuru bhunkshva cha karma nijam niyatham haripāda-vinamradhiyā sathatham.’**

Although it is an absolute truth that the Supreme Lord governs everything and that we have no ultimate freedom, most of us are not yet mature enough to grasp such deep Vedantic ideas or the full theory of karma. Therefore, we cannot simply blame God for our own carelessness, arguing that ‘God did not inspire me, so I did not observe Ekādashi.’ Our practice must be carried out according to what is possible and understandable at our level. If we do our duties with sincerity, we earn punya. If we understand that we receive only what we work for and eat only what we cook, we will be saved — otherwise, we head toward decline. This is what Lord Krishna taught in the Gita: **‘anātmanastū shatrutve vartethāthmaiva shathruvath.’**

Similarly, although God does inspire us and impel us toward good deeds like Ekādashī fasting, in practice we must act on our own will — performing good deeds as naturally and consistently as we do everyday activities like bathing and eating. This is like knowing the scientific truth that the earth rotates and the sun stands still, while still saying that the sun has risen and set. Or like a passenger in a vehicle who, though it is they who are moving, imagines the stationary cities passing by.

In all, Ekādashī fasting is a clear and definitive duty. There are many unmistakable statements in the Purāṇas that it must be included among our primary obligations. Until recently, many of us did not know much about Ekādashī. Now, by the grace of God, we have ample opportunity to understand its importance. We can no longer claim ignorance. If we continue to disregard it after knowing, the resulting sin is even greater. Are not officers who break the very rules they are sworn to uphold punished more severely than ordinary people?

Knowingly or unknowingly, even if we forget ourselves and eat on just one Ekādashī, great sins surround us. To atone for this, we must perform a hundred thousand prostrations, donate ten cows, or undergo ten rounds of the rigorous Prajapatiya penance. And if we do not, we face being reborn again and again across millions of births to experience the terrible consequences of that single transgression.

ajjnānādwa prāmādādwa yo ashnāthyannam harerdine |
 namaskārasya laksham thathprāyashchitam prakeerthitham

|

dasha gāvo athavā deyah prājāpatyāni vā dasha |
 yadi shakthopi kurveeta vratahāneem narādhmah |
 mamadhroho bhaveth thasya narakam pratipadyate ||

(Varāha Purāna)

26. Ekādashi as a Means of Great Atonement

It is probably impossible for any human being to live entirely without mistakes. There is always some degree of error in our daily actions — some happen unexpectedly, while most arise from our own negligence, carelessness, or indifference. It is also the highest truth that none of us are pure in word, deed, or thought. And we are the ones most fully aware of our own mistakes — we all possess the dishonest skill of concealing our faults from those around us.

It was our ancient tradition to acknowledge one's mistakes and perform the appropriate penance. Our ancestors had the honesty to openly confess their failings before Gurus and elders and to accept fitting punishment in the form of atonement. As a vestige of this, the practice of '**kruchrācharana**' — even if performed symbolically today — survives in special pujas, homas, and rituals such as Shashtyabdishanti, Upanayana, Samavartana, and marriage. '**Kruchrācharana**' involves the Guru, having heard a confession before the elders, prescribing a fast for a given number of days as penance. One observes it with devotion to purify oneself and shed one's sins. But in today's world, where can one find the atmosphere of true sincerity needed for such a practice? Even if we are ready to

confess, where do we find pure souls qualified to honestly examine those confessions and impose just penance?

Evil deeds and mistakes arise from human faults such as anger, impatience, hatred, jealousy, and greed. None of us are entirely exempt. In some people, such faults are more pronounced and lead to greater transgressions; in others, their influence may be minimal. But no one among human beings is completely free from fault. As Lord Krishna himself has said in the Gita: **‘sarvārambhā hi doshena dhoomena agniriva vrūtaḥ’** — just as smoldering embers are surrounded and dimmed by ash, all our actions carry some degree of imperfection.

Some mistakes are realized only too late. Without proper guidance and information, wrong habits can persist for many years. In the enthusiasm of youth, in the company of bad friends, driven by inner arrogance and mischief, we stumble more than once. Some things said or done in jest may have caused real pain to others — perhaps even genuine suffering. One day, when we recognize that all of this was wrong, we feel deep regret. Sometimes we manage to forget. But as we mature, those incidents resurface again and again, bringing sorrow with them. To whom can we now turn for forgiveness? How do we lighten the burden of the mind? Can the weight of past sins within us ever allow us true peace?

As Jagadguru Sri Madhvacharya has instructed in Sri Krishnamruta Maharnava: **‘KrutE PĀpE AnutApOyaM Yasya PumsaHa PrajĀyatE PrāyaschittE TadĀ Kuryat Hari SamsmaraNaM ParaM’** — the best method of confession and penance is the heartfelt remembrance of Hari. We should remember Shri Hari, who dwells within us, with all our heart — opening before Him the pain of our hearts that cannot be expressed elsewhere. We should honestly reveal the many wrongs we have hidden within our minds out of fear of worldly ridicule or for the sake of reputation. May our heartfelt, devotional apology and remembrance of Sriman Narayana — the all-pervading, omnipresent Supreme Being who resides in the hearts of all living beings — purify us.

**‘yasmareth pundareekāksham saabhāhya abhyantharah
shuchihi.’**

In other traditions too, people believe they are purified by confessing before their Gurus and Gods — what they call ‘confession.’ But only in our tradition is there the special practice of regularly observing strict fasts like Ekādashi alongside heartfelt prayer, with the aim that such mistakes not recur — combined with ongoing introspection.

The cooperation of our body is also essential for the pure mental act of remembering Hari. Without the body’s proper

participation, our mental process grows weak — and sometimes even meaningless. Though worshipping God is primarily an act of the mind, physical rituals such as visiting holy places, bathing in sacred rivers, wearing clean clothes, and partaking of naivedya prasadam are equally important. Is it enough to merely hold gratitude in our hearts for loved ones, or internally wish them well on their birthday? If we truly want them to feel our joy, we must express it — in words, in our smiling presence, and through our gifts.

To remember the Lord with a pure mind, we must purify ourselves not only through bathing but also through fasting. We have an ancient tradition of consuming nothing until we have bathed, performed worship, and taken the sacred thirtha of God each day. Similarly, our elders have taught us to purify the body by fasting completely on every Ekādashi. **‘Ekādashi samam kichith pāpatruānam na vidyate.’** The scriptures have made Ekādashi fasting obligatory as a penance for all the mistakes we have committed, knowingly or unknowingly. Even if it is difficult to endure hunger and thirst throughout the day in harsh weather, the peace that comes from bearing it all as penance for our wrongs is unlike anything else.

27. The Profound Merit of Observing and Encouraging the Ekādashi Fast

Among the most famous and highly praised fasts across the many Purāṇas is the Ekādashi fast. A powerful saying about its importance, recorded in a dialogue between Parvati and Parameshwara and also found in ‘**Krishnāmruta Mahārṇava**,’ is as follows: **‘yadādikrutam pāpam tadoordhwam yath karishyathi that sarvam vilayam yāthi pareshām upavāsanth’** — all the sins of those devotees who fast on every Ekādashi with devotion are destroyed. Not only that — those who inspire and enable others to fast on Ekādashi will have their future sins destroyed in advance as well!

But how remarkable this is! What does it mean that sins not yet committed are destroyed in advance? We can somehow accept that past sins will be erased — we have brought many such beliefs into our practice without examining them too closely. Offerings and services such as abhisheka to God, padayatras, pilgrimages, pradakshinas, prostrations, homas, havanas, and charity all form part of countless practices. And is not the main reason behind most of them the firm belief that through them we earn punya, receive God’s grace, and find relief from difficulties?

But our practices are not rooted in mere faith alone. Useless beliefs do not endure long. The direct experiences we have witnessed ourselves, and the testimonies of those closest to us, repeatedly confirm that many of these practices are not meaningless. They deepen our devotion and loyalty, encourage us to continue with commitment, and — through the visible results of our good deeds — inspire others to follow the same path, ensuring these practices will live on into the future.

At their core, these practices can be understood as an effort to free ourselves from past sins that are the root cause of our current difficulties. And beyond such worship and fasting, do we have any other means of finding hope and peace in life?

Let that be. Why should we fear sins that may happen to us in the future? More importantly, why commit sins at all, when we know that sinful deeds always lead to difficulty? Is it not better to remain vigilant so that we do not err on our own part? Let us carry out all our work carefully, with proper guidance, so that no sin arises going forward. Let us clear the debt of the past. And if we never take on debt again in the future, we will be at peace for the rest of our lives. Similarly, if we fast sincerely on every Ekādashī, all our sins are washed away. Is that not enough? Why need we be troubled by anything else?

But this is not as simple as it sounds. Lord Krishna has said so in the Bhagavad Gita through many expressions — **‘gahanā karmano gatihi,’ ‘nigrahaḥ kim karishyati,’ ‘prakṛitistvām niyokshyati’** — reminding us that ‘nothing happens as you think it will; you are not truly in control.’

Just as we cannot predict what will happen in the future, we have found time and again that things do not unfold as smoothly as we would like. We do not know what situation we will face at any given moment, or what state of mind we will be in. Every day, knowingly or unknowingly, some mistakes occur. There will be occasions when others experience pain because of us. As Jagadguru Srīman Madhwacharya noted in his Gita Tatparya, the actions of a single day can determine the course of our next ten births — meaning we may have to return ten times simply to settle the debt of sins and merits accumulated in one day.

In short, just as medicine is vital for treating illness, is it not equally important to take care not to fall ill in the first place? Just as nutritious food and proper exercises build immunity throughout the body, encouraging others to observe good fasts creates a virtuous atmosphere everywhere. When the number of those fasting with faith and devotion increases, the whole society is purified. Those who observe Ekādāshi faithfully are always on the right path, free from harmful habits and vices, and constantly protected by God’s grace. Moreover, those who

observe the Ekādashi fast and those who inspire others to observe it become equally dear to Lord Rudradeva and to Lord Sriman Narayana: **‘na cha thasmāth priyatamah keshavasya mamāpi vā.’**

28. Guidelines for Fasting Among Those With Physical Limitations

Fasting on Ekādashi is mandatory for everyone. No one may ever avoid this holy fast out of carelessness, apathy, ignorance, or neglect. Even eating on a single Ekādashi results in severe punishment in hell — for one Kalpa, approximately thirty-two thousand crore years. Such is the consequence for failing to observe even a single Ekādashi fast.

**‘EkadApi Cha YO HanyAd VratamEtannarADhaMaHa Sa
KalpamAtraM Narake RauravE Patati DhruvaM’||**

(Varaha Purāna)

What can we offer God in return for all that He has given us? What do our parents — who made so many sacrifices, worked so tirelessly, and labored unceasingly for our welfare — ask of us in return? If we follow their guidance faithfully, would they not be overjoyed? And conversely, if we go beyond their words and break their rules, how great is their pain? Similarly, if we ignore Ekādashi, which the Shruti Smruti declares to be the direct command and sacred obligation of the Supreme Lord — **‘shruthismruthee harājne’** — how grave a crime is that? What ingratitude?

A person with a strong body and healthy limbs, blessed with every ability, who ignores the Ekādashi fast out of arrogance — this is nothing less than a great betrayal of the Creator. God brought us into this world, wished the best for us, gave us a good family and society without our even asking — and we forgot Him and disregarded His guidance. God himself seems to be saying: ‘If you are able, but still do not fast on Ekādashi, you are betraying Me — and you will face the severe punishment of hell as a consequence.’

**‘yadi shaktopi kurveeta vratahānim narādhamah mama
droho bhavetthasya narakam pratipadyate||’**

(Krishnamruta Mahārnavā)

And the rule is the same for everyone — without exception. There is no exemption for father, son, or wife. Not even the Gods closest to the Lord — Lakshmi, Brahma, and Prana Rudra — are exempt. His wife, son, and grandson faithfully observe the Ekādashi fast. In such a situation, who are we to violate this mandatory rule and escape its consequences? If we eat on Ekādashi, we will be held accountable without question. A thief is called a thief and punished, regardless of any other qualities or relationships. Similarly, whoever does not fast on Ekādashi will certainly face the consequences.

**‘pita vā yadi vā putro bhārya vāpi suhrujjanah padmanābha
dine bhuunkte nigrāhyo dasyuvad-bhavet ||’**

(Krishnamruta Mahārnava)

Very well. We now understand that fasting on Ekādashi is mandatory for everyone, and we have resolved to do it sincerely and without compromise. We are strong by God’s grace. We are healthy. But what about those who are weak? There are people in this world suffering from diabetes, very young children, frail elderly people, pregnant women, and those with mental illness. What should those who understand the importance of Ekādashi do when they are physically unable to observe a complete fast?

The Padma Purāna offers a good solution for this. It provides a clear list of items acceptable on Ekādashi specifically for those who are not physically able to fast fully. And it makes clear that these items are not intended for those with able bodies. It also warns that even these permitted items are not for filling the stomach — they are only for sustaining the body. The list is as follows.

‘kharjooram nārikelam cha priyāla panasādikam

amram cha kadalee draksha khheeraMm dadhi ghrutam

thathā

anishiddāni moolāni thathav dandādikam cha yath

vinodakena yath pakwam dhānyam yacha ghrutādina

ethāni phala samjnāni yottha ashakto dine mama

pādashoshnāthi yastasthruptheh sapoornam thathphalam

labheth ||'

(Padma Purāna)

Dates, coconut water, coconut, apricot, jackfruit, mango, banana, grapes, etc., fruits; milk, curd and ghee. Also, non-prohibited roots like sweet potato and grains can be eaten without water, i.e. fried in ghee or baked as is. However it should not exceed one-fourth of the daily food intake.

Thus, even those who are weak and who diligently practice this just for the sake of sustaining the body will receive the benefits of a complete fast.

29. Ekādāshi as an Aid in Overcoming Illness and Adversity

Perhaps the fear of the future has not spared any human being in this world. Even when everything seems fine today, we all wonder what tomorrow will bring. Some people — proud of their youth, wealth, or power — convince themselves that they fear nothing, that there is no God, that fasting and vrata and worship are meaningless. But as time passes and life delivers its blows, even such people are shaken. There is no one in this world who has not been struck by the force of time. If not for themselves, there always comes a moment when one trembles for the loved ones held dearer than one's own life. In short, atheism does not last with anyone forever.

Seen in this light, we need not fear unexpected difficulties. We are sustained by the faith that by God's grace, we will not face what we cannot bear. The attitude of 'come what may — we will face it when it comes' sometimes brings a kind of peace. But it is the challenges we can foresee and anticipate that truly disturb us — like the anxiety of seeing a needle before an injection, or the dread of a student who has not studied while waiting for exam results.

Challenges at work, family problems, disagreements with relatives and friends, worries about children's education, careers, and marriages, concerns about home, property, and business — we are all too familiar with our limitations in these many areas. We have some sense of what difficulties lie ahead. We have come to the pragmatic understanding that even if what we receive is less than ideal, as long as it is not too difficult, it will do. And yet, despite our constant striving for the best in every area, one thing above all disturbs our peace: the fear of what might go wrong. The fear that haunts us most is the fear of bad luck — for we believe that misfortune lies behind the sorrows of our lives. And there is reason to believe this. Otherwise, no matter how hard we try, what other explanation is there when we do not get what we want?

Therefore, we always pray to God that the burden of 'Saturn' — which can bring a succession of difficulties in our lives: financial, social, and health-related — should not come to us. We have heard many stories from our elders about the misfortunes brought by unfavorable planetary alignments. We have seen some of these ourselves, and sometimes even experienced them firsthand.

Astrology is there to show us how planetary positions and our horoscope shape our experiences of happiness and sorrow. There are many ancient texts on this subject, such as

Varahamihiracharya's Brihajjataka, and many scholars who understand and can interpret this knowledge. And if not a scholar, the horoscope drawn up by our parents at the time of our birth is with us at home. Modern astrology software can generate a birth chart in seconds given the place, date, and time of birth. Overall, we now have many ways to know about our planetary alignment — which may sometimes cause more worry, though equal efforts exist to find remedies for its effects.

Whatever the case. If our burden of sin is heavy, what is the use of blaming Saturn, Rahu, or anyone else? They are only guides and instruments — not the cause of our suffering. **‘naādathe kasyachith pāpam nachaiva sukratham vibhuh.’** The root cause of our suffering is our own sinful deeds. We must bear their fruits ourselves. And if we wish to be free from suffering, we must dissolve that burden of sin. If we want happiness, we must do good deeds.

Our sinful deeds do not limit their effects to this life alone. They do not leave us even after death — they make us stand in humiliation before Yama and endure terrible punishment in hell. The suffering of hell described in detail in the Garuda Purāna is difficult even to imagine.

In short, whatever we call our misfortune — fate, ill omens, bad timing — the root cause is our own sinful deeds. Until we climb

out of this pit of sin, we cannot find lasting happiness. But it is not impossible. Our ancient tradition offers many means of destroying sin and accumulating punya. And among all of them, no remedy for sin is as effective as fasting on Ekādashi, and no karma yields as much punya. Even those who fast on Ekādashi unknowingly or due to unavoidable circumstances have all their sins washed away and receive God's grace. Can there be any limit to the blessings awaiting those who fast with full knowledge and devotion?

Saturn never troubles those who fast faithfully on every Ekādashi. Not only Shanikata — no other affliction will disturb such a person either. One who fasts on Ekādashi continuously will never have to face Yama after death. Vishnu's own messengers will come and take them directly to Vaikuntha.

Ekādashee samam kinchith Pāpatrānam na vidyate|

vyājenāpi kruthā rājan na darshayathi bhāskarim ||

30. Ekādashi and the Principles of Physical Science

We are now seeing self-proclaimed rationalists everywhere who mock and question our religious and traditional practices. Their argument is that our ancient practices and rituals are meaningless, based solely on superstition and have no scientific basis. But our counter-argument is that our ancestors were not fools — they did a great deal of research and analysis before passing down these unique practices to our cultural heritage.

Even the youngest child in our house knows that pressing a switch on the wall makes the bulb light up. But most adults don't know how it works or the science behind it. Can their belief in turning on a light by simply pressing a switch be called superstition?

There are crores of people in the world who ride motorbikes and bicycles. How many of them know the physics behind how a cycle runs? So each of the well-known elements of our practical life does not require a lengthy explanation. For our daily activities, it is enough to have a strong belief that they work and are beneficial. If such practices were useless, no one

would follow them — let alone their having endured for thousands of years and remaining in practice even today!

There are still many opportunities for study for those who are interested and curious. This applies equally to our traditional religious practices and vratas. But what can we do if the wisdom, research, and scientific thought of our ancients remain tainted to people's jaundiced eyes? For the sake of our curiosity and greater devotion, let us move forward by conducting a little study and contemplation on these matters.

The sun is the main support for our survival on this earth, as created by God. Similarly, the moon is also very close to us. Our ancestors believed in it as a mind controller. All our daily rituals are based on the sighting of the moon, and its sixteen phases are identified as tithis. If modern physics calls the sun a star and the moon a satellite, we have no quarrel with that. What is in a name? Aren't we proud that our country possesses the most ancient tradition of physics and astrology — one that can predict the specific and unique functions, positions, and special conditions of the sun and moon well in advance, as expressed in **'thapinee pāchinee chaiva shoshanee cha prakāshinee'**?

We can see that the fluctuations of sea waves vary greatly depending on the full moon and new moon conditions in the

sky. The reason for this is the heightened atmospheric pressure that occurs at that time — a time when the pull of gravity is strong. Similarly, there are subtle differences in our physical strength and mental state during these periods. That is why special rules have been set for many of our rituals on the days of full moon and new moon, and some activities are strictly prohibited.

We cannot control the anomalies that occur in this physical system. But through extensive research, our wise ancient scientists identified those special situations in advance and gave guidance on the precautionary measures we should take. Because of this, even today we are able to protect ourselves and our families in the event of earthquakes, cyclones, meteorites, snowfall, storms, lightning, excessive rain, solar eclipses, and more. Likewise, it is our wise ancestors who have given us valuable advice on how to maintain our physical and mental health through proper diet. Just as the weather influences our state of mind, so too does the food we consume cause fluctuations in our mental state. That is what Lord Krishna described as **‘yukthāhāra-vihārasya yuktha cheshtasya karmasu’** — a yoga practice we should follow through proper management of food, recreation, and thoughts.

For the food we consume, the process of digestion takes three to four days to slowly reflect its effects in our brain. This means that the food restriction we observe on Ekādashi reaches our brain after three days, giving a positive stimulus to our mind and body on the full moon or new moon day. Moreover, the atmospheric pressure on Ekādashi is very low compared to other days, so fasting causes little harm to our body. The amount of energy required to maintain our body on Ekādashi is also lower than on other days. And when we observe a pure fast on Ekādashi, our body undergoes a process of detoxification, protecting us from diseases that can arise from our daily diet.

The food system of today is flawed. Where do we find grains, fruits, and vegetables grown without chemicals and pesticides? What do we truly know about the origin of sugar, jaggery, oil, milk, and ghee? Overall, it appears that the only reliable way to achieve physical health and a strong positive effect on the five senses and mind is to fast completely on Ekādashi and regularly detoxify our body.

31. Sankrānti and Ekādashi: Direct Embodiment of Cosmic Perfection

A pleasant little break in the continuous flow of time's never-ending cycle. A day of celebration! That is Sankranti — another beautiful reason to rejoice in our journey of life. Like a pleasant weekend after stressful weekdays. Like exciting holidays after long school days for children. And so a festive atmosphere prevails everywhere on Sankranti day.

In the month of Pushya/Magha, a beautiful sun rises from a clear, cloudless sky, and the darkness that had surrounded us begins to dissipate. Likewise, our troubles give way to happier times — a direct example from nature that strengthens our optimism that life is changing for the better. This Makara Sankranti is a sign of that change. It is the Sun's 'Gift' to us!

Sankranti is also a symbol of perfection. The vast sky has been divided into twelve parts, named Mesha, Vrishabha, and so on, as identified by Vedic astrologers. The Sun stays in each of these twelve zodiac signs for one month. Thus, completing the discipline of its stay — not a moment more or less — the Sun steps into another house. That beautiful moment is Sankranti. If this is the rotation of the Sun as we perceive it, the physical science behind it is even more astonishing! Let us reflect a little,

keeping in mind the Vedic exclamation ‘**Bheeshodethi Suryah**’, which praises the creative power of God in its perfect contemplation.

This earth, rotating at a speed of about one thousand miles per hour, is a wonder! When we stand and look, it seems as if the Sun rises in the eastern horizon every day and sinks into the western ocean. The sun, too, is a wonder — it is also rotating in its orbit! The time it takes to complete one rotation is equivalent to our 25 days! And the sun needs about 230 million years to complete one round of its entire galactic orbit along with its family! The speed of this rotation is about five hundred thousand miles per hour! All the planets and satellites of the solar system are always in motion, revolving around that sun as their center! Our earth is one of them — a wonderful system that keeps revolving around the sun. The time it takes for the earth to complete one such round, at about sixty-seven thousand miles per hour, is one year of our solar system.

Half of the year is called ‘**Ayana**’ in our scriptures. The sun, which appears in the east every day from June to December, seems to be moving from our right to our left — that is, towards the south. So the name for that six-month period is Dakshinayana. From December to June, the sun’s path appears to move northward, from our left to our right. That is

Uttarayana. The precise turning points fall on December 21 and June 21. If December 21 is the day with the longest night and shortest day of the year, then June 21 has the longest day and shortest night. On that darkest day of December 21, when the sun begins its northward movement and is fully visible in Capricorn at sunrise, Makara Sankranti is celebrated — the day the sun is fully situated in the zodiac sign of Capricorn, Makara. As per the English Calendar, this usually falls on January 14th. From that day onward, darkness decreases day by day and the light grows.

Having reflected a little on the reality of Sankranti, the next important consideration is its observance. Now we need the moon alongside the sun. In our life, the sun is a kind of hardware, and the moon is software. We need the grace of both for a beautiful life — we must work well during the day and sleep peacefully at night, after all.

Although our day is ushered in by the sun, the **‘tithis’** are determined according to the changing shape of the moon from new moon to full moon. The full moon — Poornima — is the symbol of **‘Sampurna,’** or completion. On Amavasya, the new moon, the moon is entirely gone and invisible — a zero. Our lunar calendar system is built on this reckoning. Solar and Lunar are like our two eyes: only when we look with both do we

achieve clear vision. So we need both, and we should celebrate both – Sauramana and Chandramana.

So what should we do if Ekādashī falls on the occasion of Sankranti? Is it a festival with a grand meal, or is it a fast? If we analyze the matter, the answer is clear: it is mandatory to fast on that day. And the unanimous conclusion and clear order of many scriptures is that the celebration of Sankranti should be moved to the next day!

As the famous scripture says, ‘**sarve vidhi-nisheddhāsyuh ethayoreva kinkararāḥ smarthavyaḥ sathatham vishnuh,**’ the ultimate purpose of all rituals is to please the Supreme Lord, who created everything and sustains us. Is not the manner of performing all such rituals — to seek His grace — also prescribed in those very same scriptures? Therefore, the final word of the scriptures for us is ‘**Thasmāth śāsthram pramānam the kāryākārya vyavasthithau**’ — the order of Lord Shri Krishna!

Consider: on special days like Sankranti, we must worship, serve, and offer Naivedya to God — a tradition your ancestors have observed with devotion for hundreds of years — and the day is not changed even in the face of obstacles like Sūta (birth or death in the family). Similarly, if Sankranti falls on

Ekādāshi, it should be observed the next day, and the obligatory fast of that day must not be skipped. Therefore, offering food (annadāna) on the day of Sankranti when it coincides with Ekādāshi is a violation of the Shastra and becomes sinful. Instead of receiving the grace of the Gods, one would invite their displeasure.

Another thing: there is no Perfect Yajna as great as Ekādāshi. Think about it practically. Even in the great puja, homa, and donation (dāna) we perform on auspicious days like Sankranti, perfection remains elusive! Do you know why? No matter what we do, we cannot shake the feeling that we could have done it better. We could have performed the puja with grander arrangements and offered more in the homa. We could have donated more, fed more people, offered more dishes — and so on. When it comes to acts of devotion, the possibility of doing more never truly ends! But the question of ‘more’ simply does not arise for one who fasts completely in the ‘Fasting Yajna’ of Ekādāshi. What more can a person who fasts the entire day without even drinking water do? That is the maximum — the very best in the Yajna of fasting, is it not?

So if Ekādāshi falls on the auspicious day of Sankranti, there is no more auspicious time, no more auspicious season than this. There is no Yajna, charity, or worship greater than fasting.

When a luxurious helicopter stands ready to carry us safely, what can one say to those who insist on taking a local bus through all its hardships? Your life, your choice.

32. The Universal Dimension of Fasting

The greatest personal wealth of our life is our body, is it not? Apart from this body — the primary representation of our identity, our sense of ‘I’ — what else do we truly possess that is entirely our own? The health of the body is the foremost goal of every living being in this creation. Only when the body is strong can we enjoy pleasures and acquire wealth. Only when we are physically strong can we have homes, friends, relatives, and the capacity for righteous deeds. This is precisely what the great poet Kalidasa described in his masterpiece Kumāra Sambhava (5–33) as **‘sharerāmādyam khalu dharma sādhanam’** — ‘This body is the primary instrument for the acquisition of all human values.’ And this very principle continues to be promoted by our prestigious medical institute, AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences, akin to Johns Hopkins of the USA), which has made it its motto even today!

It can be said that our lifestyle today has grown in many dimensions by making physical health its central objective. Likewise, the many studies, research, and labors of our ancestors — pursued with the same aim — have made our lifestyle today comparatively simple and happy. Is it not, after

all, the main goal of every development project in every country in the world — geographical, medical, educational, economic, religious, and social — to ensure the well-being of its citizens? When we consider things from that angle, the secret of our physical health, ‘regular fasting,’ can be seen as a very effective developmental practice. For no matter how economically and scientifically advanced we become, it is not possible to extend our lifespan by even a single moment, is it? Only through time-honored methods like fasting, inherited from our ancient heritage, can we achieve good health and ward off premature death. It can therefore be clearly stated that there are no alternatives to ‘yoga practice’ and ‘Fasting’ as the primary means of our physical well-being.

Sri Adi Shankarācharya, in his famous ‘**Bhajagovindam**,’ expressed this as ‘**udara nimittham bahukrutaveshah**’ — all our clothing and activities ultimately serve the purpose of feeding our stomachs. And as mentioned in the Revākhandā of the Skānda Purāna, ‘**kalau annagatha prānah lokah swalpāuushsthathā**’: our life is primarily dependent on food. So when we wake up each day, do we not all work, struggle, and worry — to feed ourselves and our loved ones? That is precisely what Sri Kanakadasa expressed in his work: ‘Everyone does it for their stomachs, for clothes, for food.’

From the world's most ancient medical texts — from our Ayurveda and the Sushruta Samhita to allopathy, homeopathy, and beyond — there is no remedy for good health more consistent than regular fasting. All medical texts and research repeatedly affirm what Sri Krishna said in the Gita: **‘yukthāhāravihārasya yuktha cheshatsya karmasu’** — ‘Regulation of food and proper conduct make our path to success easier.’ It is therefore clear that the surest way for us to live a healthy and long life is to observe our fasts in the right order.

Those who seek financial prosperity must first cultivate self-control. For example, those who spend more than they earn can never achieve financial stability. Likewise, only by cutting down on unnecessary expenses can one save appropriately and make real progress. Those who regularly observe fasting have a clear experience of this principle. Just as easy money creates inflation and devalues currency, damaging a country's economy, consuming more than necessary harms one's body, bringing disease and shortening life. It is therefore not difficult for those who understand the body's limitations, control their needs and desires, and attain physical health to also maintain mental and financial balance. I believe, thus, that fasting makes a unique contribution to the development of our economy.

We cannot live peacefully in the present world without achieving social harmony. But how do we achieve a sense of equality in a world of different languages, costumes, professions, and food habits? Fasting offers a unique solution. If non-vegetarians also observe fasts like Ekādashī, would it not create a feeling of equality for that day? Is hunger not the same for all? Does it not affect non-vegetarians and vegetarians alike? Only those who have experienced hunger can truly understand the pain of others — and help them in times of difficulty. By observing regular fasts, everyone can curb unnecessary food wastage and make a valuable contribution to the country's prosperity. In this way, surplus food can be distributed to the poor and hungry, and all can live with greater happiness.

Many studies have shown that mental restraint comes more easily to those who observe fasting with devotion. The greatest problem in the world today is mental bias. Wherever you look, hatred, jealousy, arrogance, and other evils are rampant. The root cause is selfishness. To overcome greed, the minds of all must first be purified. Fasting is a wonderful means for this. As Sri Krishna taught in the Gita, **‘VishayA VinivartantE NirĀhārasyaĀ DEhinaHa,’** when everyone observes regular fasting vows, the senses are restrained and the cravings for pleasure are curbed. Virtues like love and friendship will grow, and a peaceful life will come to prevail throughout the world.

From a religious perspective, there is no greater remedy than fasting. Fasting holds a place of high regard in many religions of the world — among Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists, and others. There is, in fact, no religious tradition in the world that does not give importance to fasting. Just as there are many fasting rituals among Hindus, fasting is practiced among Christians as **‘Lent,’** among Muslims as **‘Ramzan,’** among Jains as **‘Sallekhana’** and **‘Paryushana,’** and among Buddhists as **‘Upostha,’** among others. All religions that believe in God have recognized fasting as an effective means of achieving physical and mental purity and drawing closer to the divine. Fasting has also always been acceptable to atheists who do not believe in God, for reasons of physical fitness and health.

For those who believe in God, sin, and reincarnation, there is no remedy more powerful than fasting. Many scriptures describe the same concept in various ways, and this becomes clear when we examine them. Does not atonement mean making amends for a wrong done? Is it not atonement to bear pain and hardship in return for the sorrow we have knowingly or unknowingly caused to others? In that spirit, all scriptures describe the process of self-purification through strict fasting and abstinence as a means of releasing one’s sins.

Similarly, if we look at many branches of modern science, we find research on the movements of the solar system, the earth, and the moon, and their impact on our lives. The study of astrology, begun by our ancients thousands of years ago, also points to suitable days like Ekādashi on which fasting may be observed. Through both ancient and modern research, we can thus appreciate the contributions of unique scientific thought that can improve our physical and mental balance through fasting.

Overall, the practice of fasting can be a constant support in establishing social balance and harmony amid the many faiths, beliefs, and practices of the modern world. Many studies have shown that those who deliberately seek to control their appetite and practice self-control enjoy abundant opportunities to gain divine grace, good health, and harmony in family and society.

33. A Call for Deeper Research Into All Aspects of Ekādashi

It can be said that a great deal of research has been done on the noble practice of fasting since time immemorial. Looking at verses like ‘**sa thapo tapyatha Sa thapastapthvā**’ in the Thaitthareeya Upanishad, or sentences like ‘**athaptha-thanoor -na-thadāmo ashnuthe**’ in the Rigveda, we can see references to penances such as fasting that foster self-control throughout the Vedic literature. More research should be conducted on the passages that encourage fasting scattered through these Vedic discourses. New research should shed light on the Vedic principles of penance and fasting in ways that can be applied to modern lifestyles.

The Ramayana, Pancharatra, Purānas, and the Mahabharata — considered the fifth Veda — also contain direct and clear references to the daily and obligatory observance of Ekādashi fasting. Among these, the Varaha and Padma Purānas identify each Ekādashi separately by special name and describe its significance in detail. The individual stories connected to each Ekādashi and the descriptions of their fruits are equally compelling. Research should be conducted on these as well — exploring why those names were given and what meanings the

associated stories carry. The story of Bhakta Ambarisha in the Bhāgavata Purāna is clearly well-suited to illustrating the glory of Ekādashi. Studies should also examine the ideas presented there regarding the importance of Ekādashi fasting and the Sadhana Dwadashi Parana. Not only should one fast on Ekādashi, but clear guidance should also be provided on how to perform one's daily duties — such as welcoming guests — without lapse, including the karmic practices that must be followed alongside one's personal observances and the laws of the world.

Many stories in the Purānas describe how even demons appeased the gods and obtained boons through strict fasts — and how their downfall followed from the misuse of those boons. Studies should be conducted on these particular themes. The message that anyone can observe Ekādashi and obtain desired results may attract even the unworthy toward such powerful fasts, leading to misuse. Or the arrogance that sometimes accompanies strict fasting may cause one to look down on or humiliate others, making fasting's importance secondary in people's minds and inviting outright rejection. Studies and critical analyses should therefore also address what sattvik fasting truly is, and what its common misunderstandings and potential side effects are.

Similarly, studies should explore how our traditional fasts can be adapted to the modern lifestyle. Tragedies are occurring everywhere as modern youth blindly follow the advice of others — pursuing gym regimens, slim diets — and waste their physical resources. Under the pretext of losing weight, they accept chemical-laden substances marketed as diet food, gradually harming their health. Research-based reviews on the benefits of fasting, supported by accurate statistics, should therefore be presented in a form that modern youth can readily accept. Only then will the next generation embrace wholesome practices like fasting and attain both good health and spiritual blessings.

Medically, research on how fasting can help prevent major diseases like cancer has gained worldwide recognition. Similarly, studies should be conducted on how many more diseases can be addressed through fasting alone. Further scientific research should be carried out on how fasting can contribute to a long life with good health.

A study can be conducted on the similarities between fasting practices across all religions and sects, and on why Ekādashi stands as the finest fasting practice. One can also examine the shortcomings of other fasting traditions in comparison.

An in-depth study can also be conducted on the national benefits if every citizen were to fast on Ekādashi, which occurs once a fortnight. The resulting savings in food and resources, as well as the health stability of the community, can all be valuable subjects of study. Similarly, research can be conducted comparing those who have observed Ekādashi and other fasts with devotion against those who live without any such practice. Clear data on the benefits and drawbacks of fasting should be made available through genetic, DNA, and related tests.

More importantly, studies related to physics and astrology should be done. How to clearly determine the Ekādashi days related to fasting and how our ancestors specifically understood it can also be a subject of research. And how to determine the timing of Ekādashi fasts according to the current time should also be clear. Because there is already a lot of confusion about this. Many Panchagas like Aryabhata, Drugganita, Surya Siddhanta etc. are giving different opinions and directions for determining the days of Ekādashi observations. Controversies have arisen about observing Ekādashi on different days in different places. Astrology has to come up with a single decision. It is impossible for everything to be correct, right? Therefore, deep and clear research and study on this should be done and it should be facilitated to carry

out the same kind of celebrations that are acceptable to all the satvik people.

Furthermore, a proper direction is also needed for determining the days and times of obligatory fasts such as Harivasara, Atirikta Upavasa, Krishna Janmashtami etc. There are ample opportunities to conduct separate studies on each of these topics and write research papers.

Similarly, research can also be done on the differences between those who have been observing Ekādashi etc. Fasts with devotion and those who live as they please without knowing anything about it. Thus, clear data on the benefits and drawbacks should be available through genetic, DNA etc. tests.

Overall, it is clear that many more types of research can and should be undertaken on the subject of fasting alone. If interested parties come forward and devote their efforts to this, our young people too can be inspired to incorporate fasting into their lives. Through this, our future generations can make their lives even more meaningful by achieving better health, peace, and happiness.

Books Published by the Author So Far

In English

1. The Bright Light of Hope
2. Colors of Life
3. Life The Moonlight

In Kannada

1. Stutitatti
2. Shri Shri Shagunadarpana
3. Bharavaseya Belaku
4. Baalu Beladingalu
5. Badukina Bannagalu
6. Raajovaacha
7. Vishwagunadarsha
8. Ekadashi: Upavasada Upayogagalu

Our Greatest Gift to the Future



Research confirms that diet control is indispensable for good health. The rise in chronic diseases like diabetes, obesity, and even cancer can be attributed to the dramatic changes in our diet and lifestyle. If we continue on this path, the consequences will not be ours alone to bear.



Therefore, preserving the ancient tradition of diligently observing the strict **Ekādashi** fast is perhaps the most valuable treasure we can leave for the generations to come.



Dr. Yogeendra Bhat Uli

