

14. Jyeshtha-Shukla Ekadasi, or Bhimaseni-Nirjala Ekadasi

The Story of Pandava Nirjala Ekadasi: Pandava Nirjala Ekadasi - Jyeshtha-shukla Ekadasi - from Brahma-vaivarta Purana. Once Bhimasena, the younger brother of Maharaja Yudhisthira, asked the great sage Shрила Vyasadeva, the grandfather of the Pandavas, if it is possible to return to the spiritual world without having observed all the rules and regulations of the Ekadasi fasts. Bhimasena then spoke as follows, Oh greatly intelligent and learned grandfather, my brother Yudhisthira, my dear mother Kunti, and my beloved wife Draupadi, as well as Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, fast completely on each Ekadasi and strictly follow all the rules, guidelines and regulative injunctions of that sacred day. Being very religious, they always tell me that I should also fast on that day too.

But, Oh learned grandfather, I tell them that I cannot live without eating. I can give widely in charity and worship Lord Keshava properly ; I cannot but be asked to fast on Ekadasi. Please tell me how I can obtain the same merits result without fasting. Hearing these words, the grandsire of Bhima, Srila Vyasadeva said, "If you want to go to the heavenly planets and avoid the hellish planets, you should indeed observe a fast on both the light and dark Ekadasis." Bhima replied, "Oh great saintly intelligent grandfather, please listen to my plea. Oh greatest of munis, since I cannot live if I eat only once in a day, how can I possibly live if I fast completely? Within my stomach burns a special fire named Vrika, the fire of digestion." Only when I eat to my full satisfaction does the fire in my stomach become satisfied. Oh great sage, I might possibly be able to fast only once, so I beg that you tell me of an Ekadasi that is worthy of my fasting and that includes all other Ekadasis.

I shall faithfully observe that fast and hopefully still become eligible for liberation's release." Shрила Vyasadeva replied, Oh king, you have heard from me about the various kinds of occupational duties, such as elaborate Vedic ceremonies and pujas. Observing Ekadasi strictly is a great aid in that process, and here Shрила Vyasadeva is simply stressing to Bhima the importance of the Ekadasi vratam. "One who fasts on Ekadasis is saved from going to the hellish planets." Hearing Shрила Vyasadeva's words, the son of Vayu, Bhimasena, the strongest of all

warriors, became frightened and began to shake like a leaf. The frightened Bhimasena then said, "Oh grandfather, what should I do? I am completely unable and ill equipped to fast twice in a month throughout the year! Please tell me of the one fasting day that will bestow the greatest benefit upon me!" Vyasadeva replied, "Without drinking even water, you should fast on the Ekadasi that occurs during the light fortnight of the month of Jyeshtha (May-June) when the sun travels in the sign of Taurus (Vrishabh) and Gemini (Mithun). According to learned personalities, on this day one may bathe and perform Achamana for pratipokshana purification. But while performing Achamana one may drink only that amount of water equal to a drop of gold, or that amount it takes to immerse a single mustard seed. Only this amount of water should be placed in the right palm for sipping, which one should form to resemble a cow's ear.

One must certainly not eat anything, for if he does so he breaks his fast. This rigid fast is in effect from sunrise on the Ekadasi day to sunrise on the Dwadashii day. If a person endeavors to observe this great fast very strictly, he easily achieves the result of observing all twenty-four other Ekadasi fasts throughout the entire year. On Dwadashii the devotee should bathe early in the morning. Then, according to the prescribed rules, guidelines and regulative injunctions, and of course depending on his ability, he should give some charity and water to worthy Brahmanas. Finally, he should cheerfully honor prasadam with a Brahman. Oh Bhimasena, one who can fast on this special Ekadasi in this manner reaps the benefit of having fasted on every Ekadasi during the year. There is no doubt of this, nor should there be. Oh Bhima, now hear the specific merit one gets by fasting on this Ekadasi. The Supreme Lord Keshava, who personally told me, Everyone should take shelter of Me and follow My instructions. Then He told me that one who fasts on this Ekadasi, without taking even drinking water or eating, becomes free of all sinful reactions, and that one who observes the difficult Nirjala fast on Jyeshtha-shukla Ekadasi truly reaps the benefit of all other Ekadasi fasts.

Whoever fasts on this Ekadasi receives the merits of bathing in all the places of pilgrimage, giving all kinds of charities to worthy persons, and fasting on all the dark and light Ekadasis throughout the year, in one go. Of this there is no doubt. And at the fearful moment of death, the terrible Yamadutas, will refuse to approach him. Rather, such a faithful soul will at once be taken to the supreme abode of Lord Vishnu by the Vishnu-dutas, in Vishnu's vehicle to Heaven- who each hold a

disk, club, conch and lotus in their four hands, resembling Lord Vishnu. It is to gain all these benefits that one should certainly fast on this very auspicious and important Ekadasi, even from water. That day one should chant " OM NAMO BHAGVATE VASUDEVA" and do the charity of a cow. As per the instruction of Vyasji Bhimsen kept this fast and thus this Ekadasi is known as Bhimaseni or Pandava Ekadasi. Shrila Vyasadeva continued, You should pray to the Supreme Lord, Lord Sri Krishna in this way making your sankalpa declaration, Oh Lord of all the devas (demigods), Oh Supreme Lord, today I shall observe Ekadasi without taking any water. I shall break fast on the next day, Dwadashii. Thereafter, to remove all his sins, the devotee should honor this Ekadasi fast with full faith in the Lord and with full control over his senses. The sins that have been accumulated all become nullified and are burned to ashes. Such is the great power of this Ekadasi.

On this day, then he should give a qualified Brahman some cloth or a pot filled with water. Indeed, the merit achieved by giving water alone equals that gained by giving gold ten million times a day. Observance of this Ekadasi fast alone promotes one to the supreme abode of Sri Vishnu. Remember, whosoever eats any grains on Ekadasi becomes contaminated by sin and verily eats only sin. In effect, he has already become a dog-eater, and after death he suffers a hellish existence.

Observing this Ekadasi, which is merged with Dwadashii, frees one from the horrible sin of killing a Brahman, drinking liquor and wine, becoming envious of one's spiritual master and ignoring his instructions, and continually telling lies. Oh son of Kunti, with devotion any man or woman who observes this fast properly and worships the Supreme Lord (He who sleeps on the water), and who on the next day satisfies a qualified Brahman with nice sweets and a donation of cows and money - such a person certainly pleases the Supreme Lord Vasudeva. Indeed, one who observes this amazing Ekadasi rides on a glorious celestial airplane (vimana) to the Lord's abode. One who on this day gives a Brahman a waterpot, an umbrella, or shoes surely goes to the heavenly planets. Indeed, he who simply hears these glories also attains to the transcendental abode of the Supreme Lord, Shri Vishnu. But this same merit is achieved by him who simply hears this sacred narration - so powerful and so dear to the Lord is this Ekadasi.

Thus ends the narration of the glories of Jyeshtha-shukla Ekadasi, or Bhimaseni-Nirjala Ekadasi, from the Brahma-vaivarta Purana.