

## 15. Ashadha-Krishna Ekadasi, or Yogini Ekadasi

Yudhisthira Maharaj said, I wish to hear from You about the shuddha Ekadasi that occurs during the dark fortnight of the month of Ashadha (June - July). Kindly describe to me all about it in detail. The Supreme Lord, Sri Krishna, then replied, "Oh king, I shall indeed tell you about the best of all fasting days, the Ekadasi that comes during the dark part of the month of Ashadha. Famous as Yogini Ekadasi, it removes all kinds of sinful reactions and awards supreme liberation. Oh best of kings, this Ekadasi delivers people who are drowning in the vast ocean of material existence and transports them to the shore of the spiritual world. In all the three worlds, it is the chief of all sacred fasting days.

I shall now reveal this truth to you by narrating a history recounted in the Puranas. "The king of Alakapuri - Kuvera, was ruling the kingdom. He employed a servant named Hemamali as his personal gardener. Hemamali, was very lustfully attracted to his gorgeous wife, Vishal lakshi. Hemamali's daily duty was to visit Manasarovara Lake and bring back flowers for his master, Kuvera, with which he would use them in the puja offerings to lord Shiva. One day, after picking the flowers, Hemamali went to his wife instead of returning directly to his master and fulfilling his duty by bringing the flowers for the puja. Absorbed in loving affairs of a bodily nature with his wife, he forgot to return to the abode of Kuvera.

When at midday their gardener had not brought the flowers for worship. The lack of such an important item (*upachara*) angered the great Koshad-yaksha (treasurer of the devas) even more, and the king asked a messenger, 'why the gardener had not come with the flowers to find out the exact reason and report back to him in person.' The Sevak returned and told Kuvera, Oh dear lord, Hemamali has become lost in freely enjoying coitus with his wife. Kuvera became extremely angry when he heard this and at once summoned lowly Hemamali before him, approached his master in great fear.

The gardener first paid his obeisance and then stood before his lord, whose eyes had become red with anger and whose lips trembled in rage. So enraged, Kuvera cried out to Hemamali, Oh you sinful rascal! Oh destroyer of religious principles! You are a walking offense to Shiva! I therefore curse you to suffer from leprosy and to become separated from your beloved wife! Only great suffering is deservedly yours! Oh lowborn fool, leave this place immediately and betake yourself to the lower planets to suffer!' And so Hemamali fell at once from grace in Alakapuri and became ill with the terrible affliction of leprosy. He awoke in a

dense and fearful forest, where there was nothing to eat or drink. Thus he passed his days in misery, unable to sleep at night due to pain. He suffered in both winter and summer season, but because he continued to worship Lord Shiva himself with faith, his consciousness remained purely fixed and steady. Although implicated by great sin and its attendant reactions, he remembered his past life because of his piety. After wandering for some time here and there, over mountains and across plains, Hemamali eventually came upon the vast expanse of the Himalayan mountain ranges.

There he had the wonderful good fortune to come in contact with the great saintly soul Markann Deya Rishi, the best of ascetics, whose ashram looked like the hall of Brahma. Hemamali went there and fell at his feet. Markan Deya Rishi was seated peacefully at his Ashrama, looking as effulgent as a second Brahma. Markan Deya Rishi saw the leper and called him near, "Oh you, what sort of sinful deeds have you done to earn this dreadful affliction?" Hearing this, Hemamali painfully and ashamed replied, 'Dear sir, I am a servant of lord Kuvera, and my name is Hemamali. It was my daily service to pick the flowers from the Manasarovara lake for my master's worship of lord Shiva, but one day I was negligent and was late in returning with the offering because I had become overwhelmed with lusty passion for enjoying bodily pleasures with my wife. When my master discovered why I was late, he cursed me in great anger to be as I am before you. Thus I am now bereft of my home, my wife, and my service. But fortunately I have come upon you, and now I hope to receive from you an auspicious benediction.' Softhearted Markan Deya Rishi replied, 'Because you have told me the truth, I shall tell you about a fast day that will benefit you greatly. If you fast on the Ekadasi that comes during the dark fortnight of the month of Ashadha, you will surely be freed of this terrible curse.' Hemamali fell to the ground in complete gratitude and offered him his humble obeisances again and again. Thus, as the sage had instructed him, Hemamali dutifully observed the Ekadasi fast, and by its influence he again became a handsome Yaksha. Then he returned home, where he lived very happily with his wife.

Lord Sri Krishna concluded, so, you can readily see, Oh king fasting on Yogini Ekadasi is very powerful and auspicious. Whatever merit one obtains by feeding eighty-eight thousand Brahmins is also obtained simply by observing a strict fast on Yogini Ekadasi. For one who fasts on this sacred Ekadasi, she (Ekadasi Devi), destroys heaps of past sinful reactions and makes him most pious. Oh King, thus I have explained to you the purity of Yogini Ekadasi.

Thus ends the narration of the glories of Ashadha-krishna Ekadasi, or Yogini Ekadasi, from the Brahma-vaivarta Purana.