

26. Parama Ekadasi - Adik Maas

Sri Yudhishtira Maharaja said, Oh Supreme Lord, what is the name and character of that Ekadasi that occurs during the dark fortnight (krishna paksha) of the extra, leap year month of Purushottama. Also, Oh master of all the universes, what is the process for observing it properly? Kindly narrate all of this to me? The Supreme Lord, Lord Sri Krishna, replied, Oh Yudhishtira, this meritorious day is called Parama Ekadasi. It bestows the great benediction of an enjoyable life and ultimate liberation, release from birth and death.

The process for observing it is similar to that for observing the Ekadasi that occurs during the light part of this month of Kartika. That is to say, on this Ekadasi one should worship Me – Lord Narotram, the best of all living beings, with full love and devotion. In this connection I will now tell you a wonderful history, just as I heard it from the great sage in the city of Kampilya. Once a very pious Brahmin named Sumedha resided in Kampilya with his wife, Pavitra, who was extremely chaste and devoted to her husband. On account of having committed some sin in his previous life, Sumedha was without any money or food grains, and even though he begged many people for food, he could not obtain any substantial amount. He hardly had adequate food, clothing, or shelter for himself and his beautiful young wife, who was of such excellent character that she continued to serve Sumedha faithfully despite their poverty.

When guests would come to their home, Pavitra mataji would give them her own food, and although she often went hungry, her beautiful, lotuslike face never faded. This fasting made her weak, but her affection for Sumedha remained unbreakable. Seeing all this, and lamenting his bad luck, Sumedha one day said to Pavitra, My dear wife, Oh most beautiful one, I beg alms from the rich but receive scarcely a scrap. What am I to do? What possible relief is there for our plight? Where should I go for relief? Oh most obedient and loving wife, without enough wealth, household affairs is never successful.

Therefore please permit me to go abroad and attain some wealth. If I make such an effort, I shall certainly obtain whatever fortune I am destined to enjoy. Without making some endeavor a person cannot satisfy his desires or meet his needs. Thus

wise men have said that enthusiastic endeavor is always auspicious. One who endeavors enthusiastically will certainly attain success, but one who merely says 'I accept my lot in life' is a lazy man. Upon hearing this from her husband as he spoke these words, Pavitra joined her palms and, her eyes brimming with tears, spoke to him with great respect and affection: 'I think there is no one greater or more learned than you, my dear. One who, though in misery, is interested in the welfare of others speaks just as you have. However, the scriptures state that whatever wealth a person attains in his life is due to his having given charity in previous lives, and that if one has not given charity in previous lives, then even though he may sit atop a mound of gold as big as Mount Sumeru, he will still remain poor. Transcendental knowledge, spiritual education, satisfying wealth, and pleasing family members are acquired by a person who has given profuse charity. Whatever good a person does returns to him many folds.

Whatever is predestined by Viddhata, the fortune-maker, will surely happen. One's so called good education, skill, and enthusiasm will not necessarily guarantee to bring one success." Whatever charity a person gives in the form of education, money, fertile land and the like is returned to him in a future lifetime. We gain what we have given, when given with a good heart.

Indeed, whatever the Lord of destiny, the creator, has written as one's fortune will certainly come to pass. No one attains any wealth without having given in charity in his previous life. Oh best of the Brahmins, since we are now poor, in our previous lives neither you nor I must have given any/sufficient charity to worthy persons. Therefore, Oh gracious husband, you should remain here with me. Without you I cannot live even a moment. Bereft of her husband, a woman is not welcomed by her father, mother, brother, father-in-law, or any other family members. Everyone will say, 'You have lost your husband; you are bad luck/fortune personified!' In this way I shall be criticized severely! A chaste woman always thinks that pleasing her spiritually situated husband is her heavenly pleasure, utmost duty, and greatest austerity.

Whatever is destined, we shall obtain in due course of time and enjoy here in perfect happiness.' Hearing these plaintive words from his wife, Sumedha decided to remain in their native village. One day the great sage Kaundinya arrived at their place, and upon seeing him the Brahmin Sumedha and his wife stood up before

him and then offered him their respectful obeisance. With his head bowed, Sumedha welcomed him: 'We are very fortunate to behold you here today, Oh wisest of sages. My life has become successful, and I am much obliged to you. Sumedha offered Kaundinya Muni a comfortable seat and highly praised his austerities and learning. "Just by having your darshan today," said Sumedha, "I have become very fortunate." The poor Brahmin couple fed the sage as sumptuously as they could afford to according to their means, and afterwards Pavitra asked the mendicant, 'Oh most learned one, what process can we follow to be relieved of our poverty? How can a person who has not given anything in charity in his previous life get a good family, much wealth, and a fine education in this life? My husband wants to leave me here and go abroad to beg alms, but I have earnestly prayed to him to stay here with me.

I humbly told him that if one lacks wealth in the present life, it is because of not having given sufficient charity in previous lifetimes. And so he has consented to remain here. It is only due to my great fortune that you have so mercifully come here today. Now we are certain to see the end of our poverty very soon.' Oh best of the Brahmans, please tell us how we can be free of this perpetual misery brought on by poverty. Oh merciful one, kindly describes some means - a place of pilgrimage we may visit, a day of fasting we may observe, or an austerity we may perform - by which our ill fortune will end forever. Hearing this sincere supplication from the patient lady, the great sage Kaundinya reflected silently for a moment and then said, There is a fast day very dear to the Supreme Lord, Lord Hari. Fasting on this day nullifies all kinds of sins and removes all miseries caused by poverty. This fast day, which occurs during the dark part (Krishna paksha) of the extra, leap-year month, is known as Parama Ekadasi. It is the topmost day of Lord Vishnu, hence the name Parama.

This extra month (Purushottam Maas), dark fortnight Ekadasi bestows all the necessities of life, such as money and food grains, and at last gives liberation/release. When the evening of this day comes, one should begin singing the glories of the Lord and dancing in ecstasy, and one should continue through the entire night. This holy fast was once observed faithfully by Lord Kuvera (the treasurer of the devas). Also, king Harishchandra fasted on this Ekadasi after his dear wife and son had been sold, and the king was able to get them back. Thereafter he ruled his kingdom with no further impediments. Therefore, Oh

broad-eyed lady, you also should observe the sacred fast of Parama Ekadasi, following all the appropriate rules and regulations and remaining awake all night." Lord Sri Krishna continued, Oh Yudhishtira, son of Pandu, in this way Kaundinya Muni mercifully and affectionately instructed Pavitra about the Parama Ekadasi fast. Then he said to Sumedha, 'On the Dvadasii, the day after Ekadasi, you should vow to observe Pancharatriki fasting according to all the rules and regulations. After taking a bath early in the morning, you and your good wife, along with both your parents and hers, should fast for five days according to your ability. Then you will all become eligible to return home, to the abode of Lord Vishnu. A person who simply makes use of only one seat during these five days goes to the heavenly planets. Whoever feeds qualified Brahmins nicely on these five days has in effect fed all the demigods, all human beings, and even all the demons. Whoever donates a pot of drinking water to a twice born Brahmin during this five-day period will gain merit equal to that gained by donating the entire planet in charity.

Anyone who gives a learned person a pot filled with sesame seeds resides in heaven for as many years as there are seeds in the pot. One who donates a pot filled with golden ghee will surely go to the abode of the sun god after fully enjoying the pleasures of this earthly planet. Whoever remains celibate during these five-days will attain celestial happiness and enjoy with the maidens of Indraloka. Therefore both of you - Sumedha and Pavitra- should fast during these five days of Pancharatrika in order to be rewarded with ample grains and wealth for the rest of your lives on this planet. The spiritual world will be your abode thereafter. Hearing this sublime advice, the Brahmin couple, Sumedha and Pavitra, properly observed the Parama Ekadasi and the fast of Pancharatrika, and very soon thereafter they beheld a handsome prince approaching them from the royal palace. On the orders of Lord Brahma, the prince gave them a beautiful, exquisitely furnished house and invited them to live in it. Praising their austerity and patience, he also gave them an entire village for their livelihood. Then he returned to the palace.

Thus Sumedha and his wife enjoyed all kinds of facilities in this world and at last went to the abode of Lord Vishnu. Anyone who observes a fast on Parama Ekadasi and also the fast of Pancharatrika is freed from all his sins, and after enjoying life he returns to Vishnuloka, as did the Brahmin Sumedha and his faithful wife, Pavitra. It is impossible, Oh Yudhishtira, to calculate the extent of the merit one

obtains by fasting on Parama Ekadasi, for such an observance is equal to bathing in places of pilgrimage such as Pushkara Lake and the Ganges river, giving cows in charity, and performing all sorts of other religious activities. One who fasts on this day has also completed the offerings of oblations to his forefathers in Gaya. He has, in effect, fasted on all other auspicious days. As in the social order the Brahmin are considered the best, as amongst four-legged creatures the cow is best, and as among demigods Lord Indradev is the best, so among all months the extra month of leap-year is the best. The Pancharatrika fast - the fast of five days (panch = five, ratri = nights) in the extra, leap year month - is said to remove all kinds of abominable sins. But the Pancharatriki fast, together with the fasts of Parama and Paramai Ekadasi, destroys all a person's sins. If a person is unable to fast on these days, he should observe the fasts during the extra month according to his ability.

A person who, having received a human birth, does not take a proper bath during this extra month and then observes these Ekadasis, which are very dear to Lord Hari, commits suicide and suffers. The rare human birth is meant for accumulating merit and at last achieving liberating release from this material world. Therefore one should by all means observe fasting on this auspicious Parama Ekadasi. Lord Sri Krishna concluded, Oh sinless Yudhishtira, as you have requested, I have described to you the wonderful merit one can attain by fasting on the Ekadasi named Parama, which occurs during the dark part of the extra, leap-year month. You should observe this fast if at all possible. Whoever, after taking a proper bath, observes a fast on these two extra-month Ekadasis will go to heaven and finally attain to the abode of Sri Vishnu, and as he travels there he will be praised and prayed to by all the demigods.

Thus ends the narration of the glories of Parama Ekadasi, the Ekadasi that occurs during the dark fortnight of the extra, leap-year month, from the Skanda Purana.