



What Is Ekadasi?

Today, science has proved that every atom in the human body is actually transacting with the whole cosmic space every moment. So how does the cosmos influence our lives? Does astrology work? Does it matter whether it is a Pournami or Amavasya night? This month Sadhguru Juggie Vasudev explains the importance of Ekadasi and fasting.

Photography: Praveen Padmanabhan

The human physiology goes through a cycle, called a mandala, approximately every 40 to 48 days. In this cycle, three specific days, which may be different from person to person and need not come with equal spacing, will arise when the body does not demand food. If you identify those days in your life and not give the body food – because it is not asking – a lot of your health issues will be handled by that simple pattern.

This cycle in the system is something that most people can identify if they take away the nonsense of 'so many calories, so much protein and so much mineral should be eaten.' If they listen to the body, these three days can be easily identified by most human beings. So it was told that three times in those 48 days, you should not eat. This was said because somebody observed his own system, and from that he expressed this. But then people did not have the awareness so they fixed the Ekadesi for not eating. If you look, there are three Ekadesis in 48 days. It goes well.

Ekadesi means the 11th day after the full moon and the 11th day after the new moon. The reason is because the planet itself is in a certain state on that day, so if we keep our body light and available, our awareness will turn inward. The possibility of opening the door within is more on that day. If you have a full stomach, and you are unaware and dull, you will not notice it. So to stay alert and also to purify the body, you go without food on that day – you ate dinner the previous day and the next thing you eat is dinner on Ekadesi. If you are unable to go without food – because your activity levels are such, and you do not have the sadhana to support you – you can go on phalahara, or fruit diet, which is light on the stomach so that your inner doors will open. Forceful denial of food is not the point. The point is to make everything into a conscious process. We do not want to compulsively eat like this, we choose.

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In some Indian languages 'phal' means 'fruit,' but 'pal' also means 'many.' So today in South India this has happened that on Ekadesi, 'phalahara' means a lot of people have interpreted it as, you do not eat your normal rice and sambar or whatever on that day. Instead, that day you eat many varieties of food, mostly fried food. That was the day you are supposed to give it a break. Because you could not fast and are not aware, it was said, 'Okay, at least eat fruit.' Now, because the same word in the language exists in a different meaning, people are eating the worst type of food on that day.

Another aspect of the Ekadesi fasting is that when one is on the spiritual path, people usually fall off at the slightest discomfort. So fasting is one simple way of training yourself so that outside situations will not make you go off the track; when you are hungry, instead of going and sleeping, you remain alert and in activity. When you are very hungry, still remaining alert and keeping your focus on the sadhana is a very important part of the training to ensure that outside situations do not take you off the track.

While fasting, if you feel thirsty, drink water. If you feel tired, add a few drops of honey or put a little bit of lemon into the water you are drinking; it will take care of it. Fasting for 24 hours is not very difficult for the body. If your body does not have that much capability, there is something seriously wrong with your system. Any healthy body can forsake food for this period. If the body – not the mind – is going through enormous trouble, then you need a medical check-up. Maybe you are not physically healthy or something is wrong, but if you have mental struggles and vadas and bondas are coming and hitting like asteroids, then you must fast.