

## Ekadashi Vrat

### 1. Introduction

Ekadashi is an auspicious day for austerities and worship dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The word Ekadashi means eleventh and refers to the “thithi” (Hindu date) on which it is observed. Each Hindu month has two “pakshas” comprising 15 thithis each. A thithi is similar to a day, however it does not necessarily begin at sunrise and end at sunset. The pakshas are called the Krishna Paksha (“dark fortnight”) and the Shukla Paksh (“bright fortnight”). We therefore have two ekadashis in every Hindu month, one in the dark fortnight and one in the bright fortnight on which devotees observe fast and worship Lord Vishnu. There are 24 Ekadashis in a year (and 26 ekadashis in a year in which there is Adhik Maas).

### 2. Names of the Ekadashis The table below shows the Hindu Month (Lunar Month) and the name of the corresponding Ekadashi:

<b>Month: Krishna Paksha (dark fortnight)</b>	<i>Name</i>	<b>Shukla Paksha (bright fortnight)</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>Maargshirsha</b>	<i>Uthpanna Ekadashi</i>	<b>Maargshirsha</b>	Mokshada Ekadashi
<b>Pausha</b>	<i>Saphala Ekadashi</i>	<b>Pausha</b>	Putrada Ekadashi
<b>Maagha</b>	<i>Shat-thila Ekadashi</i>	<b>Maagha</b>	Jaya Ekadashi
<b>Phalgun</b>	<i>Vijaya Ekadashi</i>	<b>Phalgun</b>	Aamalki Ekadashi
<b>Chaitra</b>	<i>Paapmochini Ekadashi</i>	<b>Chaitra</b>	Kaamada Ekadashi
<b>Vaishaakh</b>	<i>Varuthini Ekadashi</i>	<b>Vaishaakh</b>	Mohini Ekadashi
<b>Jyesta</b>	<i>Aparaa Ekadashi</i>	<b>Jyesta</b>	Nirjala Ekadashi
<b>Aashaadh</b>	<i>Yogini Ekadashi</i>	<b>Aashaadh</b>	Devashayini Ekadashi
<b>Shraavan</b>	<i>Kaamika Ekadashi</i>	<b>Shraavan</b>	Putradaa Ekadashi
<b>Bhaadrapada</b>	<i>Ajaa Ekadashi</i>	<b>Bhaadrapada</b>	Padmaa Ekadashi
<b>Ashwin</b>	<i>Indiraa Ekadashi</i>	<b>Ashwin</b>	Paashankusha Ekadashi
<b>Karthik</b>	<i>Ramaa Ekadashi</i>	<b>Karthik</b>	Prabodhini Ekadashi
<b>Adikmaas</b>	<i>Padmini Ekadashi</i>	<b>Adikmaas</b>	Parama Ekadashi

### 3. Day/date of observance and who should observe the fast: There are various rules for determining the date of observance, depending on whether one is a Vaishnava ( often described as one who has been given diksha of a Vaishnava) or a Smartha. The general rule is that ekadashi should not be observed on a day when the tenth (dashmi) thithi rules at sunrise. The ekadashi dates are reflected in the panchang (Hindu almanac) and specify whether the date is in respect of Smartas or in respect of Vaishnavas. Quite often the dates are the same for both Smartas as well as for

Vaishnavas, however the date of observance is sometimes a day later for Vaishnavas. Dr P V Kane (History of Dharamsastra) summarises as follows: “In the case of Vaishnavas, if dashmi thithi extends on a civil day beyond 56 ghatikas from sunrise, then ekadashi follows and continues for the whole of the next civil day, there is then what is called Arunodavedha and Vaishnavas cannot observe fast on such an Ekadashi. The same result follows if dashmi persists till the exact time when the sun rises and then ekadashi starts.” (this does not apply to Smarthas). In such cases Vaishnavas should observe the fast on dvadashi (twelfth thithi).

All those who observe the fast sincerely, whether they are Vaishnavas, Smarthas, householders, men, women - including widows will benefit from the observance.

4. How is the fast observed

4.1 The fast commences on the dashmi (tenth) thithi – only one meal is taken on this day. That night one should sleep alone on a mat of kusa.

4.2 The next morning (ekadashi), having risen before sunrise and having completed personal routines and bathing, one should make a declaration (sankalp) of observing the fast. The ideal is not to take any food or even water throughout the day and night, to be truthful, and to give up activities relating to material desire, anger, pride and greed.

4.3 Perform Sandhya

4.4 During the day, assemble all the requirements for Shodasupchaar (16 offerings) Puja – which should be done during the evening/night.

4.5 The puja procedure is : ( this is according to the Brahmavaivarta-Mahapuraan - Krishna Janma Kaanda Ch 26)

- Chant swasthi Vachan
- Offer worship to Ganesh & Gaurie #
- Kalash & Varuna Puja #
- Surya & Naugraha Puja #
- Vishnu Puja #
- Shiva and Parvathi Puja #
- Agni Puja and Hawan #
- Chant the name of Sri Hari
- Meditate on Sri Krishna, chanting/listening to His Dhyaan Mantras (Verses 55 to 61)
- Perform Shodash upchaar puja to Sri Krishna (see Verses 62 to 80 for Mantras) #
- Prarthna to Sri Krishna (verses 82 to 87)
- Offer daan/Dakshina
- Remain awake throughout the night

- On dwadashi (twelfth) thithi one should break fast with food offered to the Lord (food left over from the yajna).

# It becomes clear from the above that there is not a restriction on puja and offerings (including Hawan) to Bhagwaan on Ekadashi.

5. Alternate ways of observance Depending on one's health, ability and circumstances, various authorities have suggested alternatives to the strict fast mentioned in point 4 above. However the alternatives do grant reduced benefits. The ideal fast is that in which no food (including roots, fruit and milk) is taken and this grants full benefits. The Narada Puraan states :

यानि कानि च पापानि ब्रह्महत्यासमानि च । अन्नमाश्रित्य तिष्ठन्ति संप्राप्ते  
हरिवासरे ॥ तानि पापान्यवाप्नोति मुञ्जानो हरिवासरे । रटन्तीह पुराणानि भूयो  
भूयो वरानने । न भोक्तव्यं न भोक्तव्यं संप्राप्ते हरिवासरे ॥

yāni kāni ca pāpāni brahmahatyāsamāni ca | annamāśritya tiṣṭhanti  
samprāpte harivāsare || tāni pāpānyavāpnoti muñjāno harivāsare | raṭantīha  
purāṇāni bhūyo bhūyo varānane | na bhoktavyaṁ na bhoktavyaṁ samprāpte  
harivāsare ||

“all sins....take resort to food on the day of Hari; one who partakes of food on Ekadasi incurs those sins....one should not eat food, one should not eat food, when the day of Hari comes.”

The other options (each with respectively reduced benefits) are:

- to have water only
- to have milk and water
- to have thil, milk and water
- to have fruit, thil, milk and water
- to have a meal at night

The ekadashi vrat can be of two types viz nitya (obligatory) or kamyā (observed to secure some desired object). In the Naradiya Puraan it is laid down that : those who are devoted to Vishnu and who look upon Vishnu as the highest goal should always fast on Ekadashi in each paksha (fortnight).”

In following one of these options, one needs to still guard against making elaborate preparations merely to satisfy one's senses.

It must be noted that the Brahma Vaivarta Puraan states that “Audhanam” – cooked rice is considered to be the abode of sin. However during Ekadashi all bhojan should be avoided.

Swami Sivananda, in his book entitled : “Hindu fasts and Festivals” states that devotees should fast on Ekadashi, observe night vigil throughout the night, do Japa, Hari Kirtan and meditation. Those who are unable to fast completely can take some light fruit and milk. Whatever happens, one should not take any rice.

1. Conclusion: Ekadashi is observed in various ways, however the common idea is to either engage in a complete fast, or abstain from eating rice/grains. Whatever method we observe, it is important that it is accompanied by offering worship to the Supreme Lord, chanting His names and reciting/listening to His kathas. We have summarised the information extracted from various sources in the hope that readers will observe the fast, irrespective of the branch of Hinduism that they follow.

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