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Nirjala Ekadasi

Hare Krishna. I am very happy to be here with all of you here in the Southern part of Switzerland called Locarno next to Lake Maggiore, it runs between Switzerland and Italy, a very large lake, a beautiful place by the side of the lake, surrounded by the mountains. A very big film festival takes place here also so this is quite a famous place Locarno. Today we are going to speak on Nirjala Ekadasi and then we will go into the topic of Ekadasi. So first let us start with Nirjala Ekadasi. There are twenty six Ekadasis, each month has two Ekadasis, so twelve months have twenty four Ekadasis but *Purusotama* month which is like the leap year according to Vedic calculation, one extra month which has two extra Ekadasis so together there are twenty six Ekadasis. Out of that the fourteenth one is Nirjala. This actually begins from November/December. The Vedic months actually begin from the middle of the English month therefore it goes into two months, November/December and from that the Ekadasi is counted so accordingly, fourteenth Ekadasi is Nirjala which comes in June/July and it's the hot season, summer in India. So those of you in India can well imagine how hot it can be. Even in

Switzerland a very cold country we are feeling the heat of the summer the weather is quite hot actually. In the middle of summer this is Nirjala Ekadasi Nirjala means Ekadasi that is meant to be fasted without even drinking water, Ekadasi should be generally fasted like that, without food and without water but in ISKCON Prabhupada did not set such a lofty and austere standard because Prabhupada was dealing with mostly Westerners who are not really accustomed to austerities therefore Prabhupada's standard was very liberal. Prabhupada's general attitude was very compassionate so therefore Prabhupada made it a point that devotees can take prasadam but fast from grains and beans. I will come to that why it is important to fast from grains and beans. Now to go to the Nirjala Ekadasi. Although every Ekadasi is meant to be fasted without even drinking water but this particular one that we fast from completely even from water.

↓ The story of Nirjala Ekadasi

The story goes like that Bhima had difficulty observing Ekadasi because another name of Bhima is *Brikodar*, *Brika* means wolf and *odar* means belly. The wolves are famous for being hungry so Bhima is very famous for his appetite, ravenous appetite like a wolf. Bhima when they were in disguise and they were hiding in Ekachakra dhama as wondering Brahmanas, they used to maintain themselves by begging and when they would collect the food half of it used to go to Bhima and the rest shared by all the other brothers and Mother Kunti. So Bhima is very fond of eating therefore Bhima used to find it difficult to observe Ekadasi like most of us. He asked Vyasadev what should he do, then Vyasadev actually gave this consideration to Bhima that at least one Ekadasi this Nirjala Ekadasi you fast and by fasting this Nirjala Ekadasi you get the benefit of fasting all the other Ekadasis. Just one Ekadasi a year will give you the benefit of fasting all the Ekadasis in a year. Even one should do achaman very carefully even *ācamana* can be a drinking water so one should very careful just taking a few drops of water on the palm and doing the *ācamana*. *Caritāmāta* also be should take just a few drops like the point is one should not take advantage of doing *ācamana* to drink water or like drink a glass full of *caritāmāta* and saying well we taking *caritāmāta*. So that is the Nirjala Ekadasi. The way Ekadasi is meant to be fasted or observed is as I said one should abstain from even water and food, fasting completely. So when one fasts for the twenty four hours like that from sunrise to sunrise or from Brahma murat to Brahma Murat then one gets the full benefit. When one fasts for the whole day and eats something after sunset he gets half the benefit of Ekadasi. When one eats at midday one gets quarter of the benefit of Ekadasi. We should be very careful Ekadasi is the arrangement of the Supreme Personality of Godhead to free us from our sinful reactions so we should make it a point to take full advantage of this opportunity that the Lord has created for us, so this is the special purpose of observing Nirjala Ekadasi. *Nir* means no and *jala* means water so Nirjala means fasting even from water so that is the way one is meant to fast.

↓ Ekadasi is the eleventh day of the movement of the moon

Now I will go to the Ekadasi in general. See Ekadasi means eleventh so the eleventh day of the movement of the moon. Vedic calculation is according to the movement of the moon whereas the western calculation is according to movement of the sun. So according to Vedic calculation the moon goes from full moon to new moon and then again from new moon to full moon. These are known as two *pakshas* or two wings or sections of the movement of the moon. It goes from new moon, it begins from first day, second day, third day. Its counted like *pratma* or *pratipad*, *ditiya*, *tritiya*, *caturti*, *panchami*, *sasti*, *saktami*, *asmi*, *naumi*, *dasami*, *dasami* means ten, *Ekadasi*, Ekadasi means eleven, *Dwadasi*, *Triyodasi* and *Caturdasi*, the fourteenth day. Then it comes to the full moon *purnima*. So, in this way fifteen days waxing period of the moon and fifteen days waning period of the moon so in this way a month is consisting of thirty days. So thirty days a month divided into two *pakshas* consisting of fifteen days each and the eleventh day is called Ekadasi. So there are two narrations of the appearance of Ekadasi.

↓ The story of Ekadasi *Brahma-vaivarta Purana*

The one narration is from *Brahma-vaivarta Purana* so this goes like when the Lord created, along with creation also came sin people started to act in a wrong way and as a result of that they would accrue sin so with all the sin a personality appeared, all the sins personified in the form of *Papapurusa* so this *Papapurusa* is the personality who is responsible for giving punishment or miseries afflicting living entities with the sinful activities. The body of the *Papapurusa* is generated from different types of sinful activities. Like a killing of a brahmana causes the head of the *Papapurusa*, taking intoxication causes the eyes of *Papapurusa*, stealing gold causes the mouth of *Papapurusa*, having sexual intercourse with the wife of the guru causes the ears of *Papapurusa*, killing of one's wife cause the nose of *Papapurusa*, killing cows causes the arms of *Papapurusa*, stealing wealth cause the neck of *Papapurusa* and abortion causes the chest of *Papapurusa*. So in this way you can see how the different sinful activities are giving rise to the body of *Papapurusa*. Along with that Krishna also created Yamarāja. Yamarāja is meant to charge living entities according to their sinful and pious activities. So when the living entity dies according to his sinful activities he is judged by Yamarāja. The Yamadūtas takes the living entity there, the gross body dies but the subtle body remains and the subtle body is the embodiment of one's karmic reactions. The way we act that gives shape to our subtle body. So at the time of death the living entities who are very sinful and attached to their gross body to their material existence they do not want to leave their body then the Yamadutas comes with noose and whips in their hands and put the noose around the neck of the subtle body of the living entity and drag him out of the body. He doesn't want to come out of the body so they whip him. In one hand they are putting a noose around his neck, they pull him and they beat him with the whip. So this is how they drag the subtle body out of the gross body. The living entities who were very attached. Devotees don't have to worry about that because the devotees have taken shelter of Krishna the Yamadutas won't come to them. Yamaraja advises the Yamadutas that they should never go near the devotees. Even if

Yamadūtas come and even if devotees are taken to Yamaraja, to the abode of Yamaraja, the devotees will not be afraid because the devotees will be delighted to see Yamaraja one of the twelve Mahajanas so devotees will be delighted to have the darshan of Yamaraja and offer obeisances to him and naturally Yamaraja will also treat them in a different way. Generally living entities are dragged out of their material gross body and taken to the abode of Yamaraja and Yamaraja there judges the living entities according to their activities. Yamaraja has a clerk his name is Chitrugupta and he records all the activities of all the living entities. Apparently it may seem impossible how can one person keep record of all the activities of all the living entities. But nowadays we have seen the activities of people are being recorded in computers databases and all their details are there. Like if a simple computer where a human being can keep records of so many people what to speak of Yamaraja's clerk Chitrugupta who is especially empowered by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We should be very careful how we act because all our activities will be recorded and sinful activities are liable to punishment and because of that we may be dragged to Yamaraja's abode and there we will be charged and punished. So in Yamaraja's abode (*Yamalaya*) the sinners are punished and one day Krishna when to Yamaraja's abode as we know Yamaraja is one of the Mahajanas, great devotees of the Lord, so Krishna visited Yamaraja and he was very pleased to greet Krishna, he washed His feet, offered *padya* and *argya*, *asana* to sit down and he worshipped Him, offered Him *bhoga* and at that time Krishna heard inhuman cries of agony coming from the Southern side of *Yamalaya* so He asked Yamaraja "what is happening? Why do I hear these cries of agony? So then Yamaraja told Him, "This is where the sinners are being punished due to their sinful reactions." Krishna wanted to see and He saw the various kinds of punishments, the living entities are being tortured in a terrible way due to their sinful activities. Krishna decided that they are my creation, my creatures and they are suffering so I must do something to alleviate their suffering condition, to free them from their suffering condition. So Krishna right there created a personality a beautiful young woman and she is Ekadasi, Krishna's internal potency, Krishna made arrangements that if anybody observes Ekadasi on this particular day which is the eleventh day which she was created he will become free from all sinful reactions. Krishna in this way makes various arrangements to free the living entities from the sinful reaction. Like in Bhagavad Gita also he made this arrangement *Sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam çaraëam vraja* give up all your so called pious religious activities, so called duties/responsibilities and just surrender unto Me then I will deliver you from all your sinful reactions, So similarly, Ekadasi is another arrangement of Krishna to free the living entities from the sinful reactions. *Sarva-dharman parityajya* may not be possible but observing Ekadasi is easy. Just observe Ekadasi and you will be free from all your sinful reactions. So in this way Krishna made this arrangement and this was also projected through saintly personalities who were very compassionate and who also want to help living entities to become free from sinful reactions. So when Krishna made this arrangement it was broadcasted all over the universe. Just observe Ekadasi the eleventh day of the lunar movement and you will become free from all your sinful reactions. So in this way people just started to become free

from their sinful reactions. Now because there was no sin, sin personified *Papapurusa*, he was dying so one day Krishna saw that sin was staggering towards Him and He asked him, "Why are you in this kind of condition? So sin said, "Look my Lord You are my creator also so You have the responsibility to maintain me but unfortunately for me the day You created the Ekādaṣi since then all the living entities are observing Ekādaṣi and becoming free from sinful reaction and as a result of that just see my condition there is no sin in the universe so my existence is becoming practically terminated, therefore please do something for me to survive." So then Krishna said, "Okay from now on all the sins on the Ekādaṣi day will enter into the grains and beans." Now grains actually means the things that grow from plants, when the crops become ripe then the plant dies so that is the definition of grains. The plants when the harvest is ripe it automatically dies. So wheat, rice, maize, barley, corn, all these fall into this category, even the pulses like dhal, beans, beans also notice when they ripe the plant dies. So, this day the day of Ekādaṣi Krishna made the arrangement for *Papapurusa* that all the sins will enter into grains and those who take grains on that day although they may not have physically committed those sins they will liable to those sinful reactions so that is why on Ekadasi days we so strictly observe so that we do not take grains or beans. Taking the grains on that day one will be taking the sins although they have not committed the sins. Therefore the devotees are very careful on the Ekadasi day the devotees don't even take maha prasadam although the maha prasadam is free from sinful reaction, free from any karmic reactions and still devotees don't even take maha prasadam also on that day. The devotees should be very careful not to take grains and beans on that day. So that is the appearance of Ekadasi and why we abstain from grains and beans.

↓ Ekadasi is also known as *Harivasar*

Now this Ekadasi is also known as *Harivasar*, *Hari* means Supreme Personality of Godhead and *vasar* means day. The day of Hari. This day is so dear to Hari that it is considered to be His day. Therefore observing Ekadasi immensely pleases the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna. There is another narration of the appearance of Ekadasi, that is there was a demon called Mura. Mura demon was so powerful that he defeated all the demi-gods Indra, Candra, Varuna, .all these different demi-gods were defeated by Mura demon, he drove them out of the heavenly planet. He assumed the control of the universe. Actually demi-gods take care of different universal affairs like rising of the sun, rising of the moon, controlling the wind, controlling the air, controlling rain so these are the universal affairs controlled by the demi-gods. Now Mura drove them out which is their place of residence and he took over the heavenly planet and being completely distort the demi-gods approached Lord Siva and asked him what they should do, this particular demon has driven them out so they asked Him to help them. Lord Siva expressed his inability and said, "Look, I can't do anything but you can go to the Supreme Personality of Godhead Jaganatha Lord of the Universe go to Him and tell Him to do something about it." So when the demi-gods went to Narayana, Jaganatha, to pray to Him to please do something about this and when

Narayana heard that He became very very angry. He said, “Who dares to interfere in my arrangement?” The demi-gods controlling the different elements in nature is actually Krishna’s arrangement so to disregard that arrangement is to disregard Krishna. So Krishna was very upset and He said, “Okay you all pick up your weapons and where is the Mura demon?” So they went to his abode and attacked him and Mura was extremely powerful and he was also supported by millions of other *asuras* demons and when the demi-gods attacked them Mura becoming very angry he counter attacked and the demi-gods ran away. These demons attacked the only person that was standing there was Hari, Narayana. Narayana at that time just released His weapons and millions of arrows were coming out of his bow killed all those demons and at that time Mura decided to confront Him so that is the Vedic way of fighting. The leaders don’t fight at the beginning they send the less powerful ones to fight and then greater and greater strength comes and so finally Mura was the only one left. So Mura started to fight and to His great surprise the Lord saw that His weapons were not being effective. So then they started to fight with bear hands wrestling and they fought for a long long time. Still Mura could not be defeated and finally becoming exhausted the Lord retreated to Badarikasrama and he went to a cave called Himavati to take rest. Hima means snow a huge cave with only one entrance covered in snow and ice. The Lord fell asleep there and at that time Mura entered there after chasing the Lord but the Lord was sleeping so Mura thought he could take advantage and kill my enemy Hari. So when Mura was about to attack the sleeping Lord then a beautiful young woman appeared from the body of the Lord. She stopped Mura and they fought. Mura’s weapons were totally ineffective to this young girl and all of his weapons were exhausted and Mura just came to attack this woman with bear hands. Another law of Vedic way of fighting if the enemy doesn’t have a weapon then they drop their weapon and fight with bear hands. Naturally this young girl was going to fight hand to hand with Mura, with her razor sharp weapon she cut the head off Mura and killed him. So when the Lord woke up He saw Mura’s head body there and this beautiful woman so He asked, “Who are you?” She narrated the whole story to the Lord and the Lord said, “Even I could not defeat this demon and you have defeated him so ask for any boon.” She said, “Give me the boon that from now on that whoever on this vow of austerity, observes fasting, abstaining from frivolous talks, bathing and worshipping the Lord and staying up the whole night, singing the glory of the Lord, he will become free from all sinful reactions.” The Lord granted that boon and He also told her “Since you have appeared on this day of Ekadasi therefore you will be identified as Ekadasi your name will be Ekadasi.” This is how Ekādaṣī began and this is the first Ekadasi called *Utpanna* Ekadasi *Utpanna* meaning generated or produced because she appeared on this day in this month of November it is known as *Utpanna* Ekadasi.

↓ So observe this Ekadasi very nicely and take advantage of this wonderful arrangement that Krishna made.

The twenty six Ekadasis are known as *Utpanna*, *Mokshada*, *Saphala*, *Putrada*, *Sat-Tila*, *Bhaimi*, *Vijaya*, *Amalaki*, *Papamochani*, *Kamada*, *Varuthini*, *Mohini*, *Apara*, *Nirjala*,

Yogini, Sayana, Kamika, Pavitropana, Annada, Parsva, Indira, Papankusha, Rama and Utthana. Purushotam has two more Ekadasi known as *Padmini and Parama*. So this is how there are twenty six Ekadasis. Hare Krishna. So observe this Ekadasi very nicely and take advantage of this wonderful arrangement that Krishna made. Just observe one day Ekadasi every fortnight and the benefit you will derive from that is inconceivable especially today Nirjala Ekadasi. Fast from water observe it properly and you will get the benefit of observing Ekadasi and medically also it is said that fasting twice a month is very good for health because this way your digestive system gets complete rest. Generally we not only eat we overeat and that excess food becomes toxins when the food that is not digested in the stomach becomes toxic then this toxins in the body give rise to various diseases. When we fast then our fire of digestion burns out whatever food was there from previous days in the stomach and then it starts to burn the poisons and toxins in the body. Therefore fasting is a very good detox process so in this way clinically we can also see that it has its own benefit. It's not that we should fast for physical well being but the point is that while we are deriving spiritual benefit physically also there is benefit. Although the purpose is to derive spiritual benefit we can also derive the physical, material benefits. Thank you very much. All glories to Srila Prabhupada!

2. Questions and Answers

↓ What if someone cannot do Nirjala Ekadasi today?

Try to observe the other twenty three Ekadasis properly or wait for the next Nirjala Ekadasi.

↓ In Puri they don't observe Ekadasi what should we do when we are here?

There is a saying that Jaganatha Puri is such a holy place and one doesn't need to observe Ekadasi but on Ekadasi there is a big rush in Jaganatha Puri that they don't have to observe Ekadasi. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvaté Öhäkura did not approve of that mentality. He said our business is to please the Lord not take advantage of the Lord. Some loopholes. As I mentioned like although maha prasadam is free from sinful reactions and Jaganatha Puri is the place where there is no need to observe Ekadasi but still you observe Ekadasi because its *Harivasar*. It is a day which is very dear to the Lord and for the pleasure of the Lord we observe not for any other business our business is simply to please the Lord.

↓ How can one be free from acquiring fruits from pious deeds and subsequently enjoy Krishna bhakti?

Very good. Actually piety has not been mentioned in this respect because pious activities everyone wants to enjoy. Generally people want to enjoy, people don't want to suffer, sin gives suffering so they want to get rid of sin but piety gives enjoyment so everybody wants to enjoy so they do not want to get rid of their piety. In the long run both sin and piety is on the bodily platform therefore they are in ignorance because the

bodily platform prevents us from becoming Krishna Conscious. Like even if there are pious activities we offer it in the form of service to Lord. Example when a devotee gets wealth what does he do? He uses it in the service of Krishna. Due to pious activity one becomes famous what does he do? He uses his fame in glorifying the Supreme Personality of Godhead and spreading Krishna Consciousness. Due to pious activity one gets a beautiful body so this beautiful body becomes attractive to others so he uses his body to promote Krishna Consciousness. So in this way whatever pious result is there a devotee uses that in the service of Krishna that is a devotee. He doesn't remain attached to either the suffering or enjoyment that is the attitude of a devotee. In happiness and in distress, in profit and loss, in victory or defeat he remains unperturbed because he simply takes shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord.

↓ If one follows all the Ekadasis strictly what is the value of following this one strictly?

Well if you are observing all of them so strictly then you observe this one also so strictly that goes without saying but the point is if you cannot observe the other Ekadasis so strictly at least observe this Ekadasi strictly. If you are observing all the other twenty five Ekadasis strictly then you will naturally observe this one also strictly. The logic cannot be I will observe all other Ekadasi strictly but not this one.

↓ Sometimes due to fasting Nirjala Ekadasi it becomes difficult to attend the mangala aarti morning programme on the next day how do we balance both?

Well, try to attend but if you can't what can be done. If you stay up the whole night attend the managala aarti then go to sleep.

↓ When should we take water after 12am or after sunrise?

Fasting meaning until the next morning and by the way the break fast times are there for example from 5.41am to 10.13am. In Vaishnava calendar we get break fast time for your location so try to break your fast so drink water after observing the day of Ekadasi and at the time of break fast you can drink some water.

↓ What do you do when its Ekadasi fast today and the next day Vaman Dwadasi fast?

The thing is when Ekadasi and Dwadasi come one after the other then the day of Ekadasi fasting covers the next day's fast. Like for example we have occasions like that Varaha Dwadasi and Vaman Dwadasi so we are meant to observe fasting on Vaman Dwadasi so what we do is we fast the Vaman Dwadasi on the Ekadasi day because we cannot fast for two days because fasting also involves breaking the fast. So when you breaking the fast you can't fast you have already broken the fast so that is why the fasting is observed on the day of Ekadasi.

↓ If we follow Ekadasi strictly according to Srila Prabhupada's instructions will the family members who have not taken initiation attain any benefit?

Yes some benefit they derive no doubt but its better that they fast also.

↓ Which is the best attitude of observing fasting?

The best attitude of observing fasting is to give pleasure to Krishna. We are doing it simply to please Krishna. This is a day we must spend our time in glorification of Krishna by chanting His Holy Name, worshipping Him and other such activities.

↓ We have to fast from Brahma murat to Brahma murat so can we eat food before?

Yes, good point. The way to observe fasting has been described you eat on Dasami day at the time of sunset but don't eat after that Not if 4.30am Brahma murat is starting so at 4.15am I will take a big meal. No. Generally its not a twenty four hour fast but a thirty six hour fast. The latest time you can take food is the day before at sunset.

↓ Sometimes we see devotees taking maha prasadam on Ekadasi should they strictly not take even if the health is bad?

If the health is bad they should fast even more, if the health is bad why should one eat? Especially grains on Ekadasi that cannot be an excuse at all. Rather it is better to fast when one is sick because fasting is good for health.

↓ Krishna is responsible for everything so why was He pretending that He did not know what was happening in the hellish planet?

It is His pastimes so sometimes Krishna acts in such a way that He did not know because if He acted as all knowing then there would not be any room for pastimes. If Krishna acts as the Supreme Personality of Godhead all the time then the demons won't be there for Him to fight with therefore Krishna takes that role He has to give pleasure to the devotees.

3. Srila Prabhupada appreciation

Prabhupada's general attitude was very compassionate so therefore Prabhupada made it a point that devotees can take prasadam but fast from grains and beans on Ekādaṣi.

Always live in ISKCON and never leave ISKCON because ISKCON is the lotus feet of Srila Prabhupada. Serve Srila Prabhupada your whole life.

4. Guru Maharaja's Instructions:

↓ We should be very careful Ekadasi is the arrangement of the Supreme Personality of Godhead to free us from our sinful reactions so we should make it a point to take full advantage of this opportunity that the Lord has created for us, so this is the special purpose of observing Nirjala Ekadasi;

↓ Just observe Ekadasi and you will be free from all your sinful reactions;

- ↓ The devotees should be very careful not to take grains and beans on that day;
- ↓ So observe this Ekadasi very nicely and take advantage of this wonderful arrangement that Krishna made. Just observe one day Ekadasi every fortnight and the benefit you will derive from that is inconceivable especially today Nirjala Ekadasi. Fast from water observe it properly and you will get the benefit of observing Ekadasi;
- ↓ Therefore fasting is a very good detox process so in this way clinically we can also see that it has its own benefit. It's not that we should fast for physical well being but the point is that while we are deriving spiritual benefit physically also there is benefit;
- ↓ Our business is to please the Lord not take advantage of the Lord;
- ↓ Jaganatha Puri is the place where there is no need to observe Ekadasi but still you observe Ekadasi because it's *Harivasar*. It is a day which is very dear to the Lord and for the pleasure of the Lord we observe;
- ↓ So in this way whatever pious result is there a devotee uses that in the service of Krishna. Krishna that is a devotee;
- ↓ He doesn't remain attached to either the suffering or enjoyment that is the attitude of a devotee; and
- ↓ In happiness and in distress, in profit and loss, in victory or defeat he remains unperturbed because he simply takes shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord.

*(The content of this E-magazine was based on a lecture given by His Holiness Bhakti Charu Swami in Switzerland on Nirjala Ekadasi 20 June 2013 which was teleconferenced via Mayapur TV and ISKCON Ujjain)
(Compilation & editing by Hemavati Radhika dasi)*