

[Respected Maharajas, Prabhus, and Didis,

Dandavat pranama. All glories to Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga.

Devotees often ask about the proper way to observe Ekadasi in the strictest sense. We found the following letter, written by Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja, written at the Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha in Mathura, India, on July 11, 1993. We hope this will be helpful.

Your aspiring servant, Syamarani dasi]

Please accept my heartfelt blessings. All glories to Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga and Sri Sri Radha Vinoda-vihari.

I received your letter sent to Navina Krsna Brahmachari. You have inquired about nirjala-ekadasi and caturmasya vratas. I think you have Hari-bhakti-vilasa and you have all read these topics in that book. You have also read in Srimad-Bhagavatam about Ambarisa Maharaja who always used to do nirjala-ekadasi. From Hari-bhakti-vilasa and from the example of Ambarisa Maharaja's vrata, we know that on the day before ekadasi we should take prasadam only one time, and we should not take any water - even at night. On the second day we should take no water and no maha-prasada, throughout the entire day and night. We should not sleep. We should observe brahmacharya, always chant and hear hari-katha, and we should read bhakti books. Also, we should always remember the pastimes of Krsna, using our eleven indriyas (senses) in His service. On the next day, after worshipping the Deities, we can take parana, the remnant food grains of maha-prasada.

By chance, if Nityananda Prabhu's or Advaita Acarya Prabhu's birthday comes in that day (dvadasi), and we want to maintain our vrata, we will break the ekadasi vrata by taking Krsna caranamrta. No food grains are to be taken, but on that day we can take water. And on the next day, after worshipping Nityananda Prabhu or Advaita Acarya, we will break the vrata by remnants of maha-prasada food grains.

All this has been told for persons who are able to do so. Those who are not able should follow Srila Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja's guidelines.* In Kali-yuga, only rare persons can follow, but if anyone wants to follow, that is very good. I have seen generally that our Gurudeva, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, Pujoyapada Sridhara Maharaja, Pujoyapada Madhava Maharaja, Pujoyapada Bhakti-vilas Tirtha Maharaja, Pujoyapada Sarathi Maharaja, and other respected acaryas did not do nirjala when they became elderly. They used to take milk, curd, fruit juice, boiled potato, plantains, and other vegetables with ekadasi salt. But I have also seen Vaisnavas doing nirjala ekadasi. You can follow which is suitable to you.

Somehow we should try to remember Krsna, along with His associates and His pastimes, throughout the day and night. Don't sleep, and don't be lazy. If anyone does nirjala ekadasi but at the same time gets a headache, becomes nervous, becomes lazy, and he does not remember Krsna, then there is no use of doing nirjala. Somehow our hearts should always remember Krsna's pastimes. The main objective of all our activities should

be to somehow or other keep our heart always at the lotus feet of Krsna, by hook or crook.

Regarding, Caturmasya, we should try to follow Hari-bhakti-vilasa and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has written an article in which he has explained what to eat and what not to eat in each of the four months, but he did not include certain prohibitions. So you should read Hari-bhakti-vilasa and try to follow it. If you take fruits, they should be taken once in a day, not again and again, so many times in a day. I only try to follow my Gurudeva. We should follow our Gurudeva.

Regarding serving the Deities during Caturmasya, certainly we cannot keep our fingernails so long. We try to be neat and clean to serve the Deities.

During the four-month caturmasya vrata, we should bathe the Deities with pancamrta (yogurt, milk, ghee, honey, and sugar), and this pancamrta should be taken by us. At that time it becomes pancamrta-caranamrta, and therefore it should be taken. This is also true in the case of dahi (yogurt) and madhu. Madhu, honey, is prohibited, but when it is included in that pancamrta, it can also be taken. Only during nirjala ekadasi is pancamrta-caranamrta prohibited, although it can be taken after breaking fast.

We should try to follow the culture and activities of Vaisnava behavior. Whether outsiders criticize or not, we should try to follow all principles strictly. This is pracar. We should not leave the bhakti cult in any way. Once an Indian devotee prayed to Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, "I have not shaved, I will take only tulasi mala on my neck, and I will not do Kartika-vrata or ekadasi-vrata. But I will follow you and I want to live with you." Srila Swami Maharaja rejected the proposal. Actually, in our cult we don't shave daily.* Bramacaris and sannyasis should only shave one time in a month as we have seen Srila Prabhupada Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati and his followers do, and we have also heard about Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His followers doing.

We don't follow any other puranas or Mahabharata. We follow Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His followers. When there is any discrepancy between the Vedas and the Puranas, that is, Bhagavata, we will follow Srimad Bhagavatam. We should try to follow Srila Rupa Gosvami and Srila Sanatana Gosvami and our guru-parampara. I have not read Mahabharata so deeply, but I know the Vaisnava parampara. We don't touch Tulasi on the dvadasi day. We should follow this. And if you have seen Mahabharata with your own eyes, then there is no harm that on amavasya we do not touch Tulasi.

We hope this letter will find you in good health and Krsna Consciousness,

Your ever well-wisher,
Swami B. V. Narayana.

[* extra notes: Srila Maharaja has often explained that Srila Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja was dealing in certain ways with beginners, knowing that they would come to stricter standards later on.]