

Upasana Amrit

Chaturmasya

A Period for Accumulating Spiritual Wealth

One should fast on the Ekadashi falling in the bright fortnight of Ashadha and start the Vrata of Chaturmasya with full faith and devotion. By observing the prescribed austerities in Chaturmasya, one attains virtues equivalent to those acquired from performing one thousand Ashwamedha Yajnas.

The practices like observing Brahmcharya, austerity, taking food on pattals, fasting, Mauna, Japa, meditation, bathing early in the morning and in holy waters, charities and other virtuous acts earn added merits for the aspirant when observed in Chaturmasya.

Of all the Vratas, Brahmcharya is the Supreme one. Brahmcharya is the essence of penance and bestows great virtues. There is nothing more effective than Brahmcharya when it comes to earning spiritual wealth. The Vrata of Brahmcharya becomes all the more efficacious during Chaturmasya.

By nature, man yearns for what he likes. One, who willfully forgoes his coveted pleasures in Chaturmasya, will then attain them for eternity. One, who forgoes jiggery in Chaturmasya, acquires a sweet demeanor. By renouncing one's addiction to betel-leaves, one enjoys all worldly pleasures as well as a melodious voice. If one does not take curd during this period, one gets entitled to Goloka. One attains success in all religious and altruistic endeavors by renouncing salt. One who observes Mauna in Chaturmasya is obeyed without fail.

One should not wear black or blue coloured clothes in Chaturmasya. Even looking at blue coloured clothes is forbidden. If one happens to look at blue coloured clothes, one should have darshana of the Sun (only a causal look is enough) to counteract the resulting vice. Red and saffron colours are also forbidden.

During Chaturmasya, Lord Shri Hari (lord Vishnu) sleeps in 'Yoga Nidra'. Therefore during these four months one should sleep on the ground. This entitles one to celestial vehicles along with an abundance

of wealth. If one is content with the food one receives without asking for it, he attains virtues equivalent to digging a well for the general public. The non-violent one, who harbours malice towards none, also attains the same virtues. It is a grave sin to consume honey in Chaturmasya when Lord Vishnu is in His 'Yoga Nidra'. Pomegranates, lemons, coconut, chilly, black lentil and gram (chick peas) should also be avoided.

It is a grave sin to speak ill of others, more so in Chaturmasya. Even listening to such slander is sinful.

How well has it been said, 'Backbiting is a grave misdeed; it is immensely horrific; it is extreme wretchedness and a colossal sin.'

Use of copper utensils is especially prohibited in Chaturmasya. One should not use bronze utensils either. If utensils of other metals are not available, one should use earthen-pots. It is still better to shun metal-pots altogether and take meals on pattals made from leaves of Palash, swallow warts (*Calotropis Gigantea*) or Banyan trees. When food is taken on the palash leaves, it is equivalent to observing the Chandrayana Vrata and Ekadashi Vrata.

Each of the meals taken on the Palash leaves yields virtues equal to that accrued from observing a 'Triratna Vrata' and is known to destroy the gravest sin as well.

One who eats only one meal a day in Chaturmasya, attains the virtue equivalent to that of an Agnishtoma Yajna.

Consumption of Panshagavya grants virtues equivalent to those obtained from observing a Chandrayana Vrata. A person who eats moderately throughout Chaturmasya is delivered from all sins and attains Vaikuntha, the exalted abode of Lord Vishnu. One who eats only one specified grain throughout Chaturmasya does not fall ill. One who consumes only milk or fruits throughout Chaturmasya is instantly delivered from thousands of sins. One should observe a complete fast once in a fortnight, for such fasting destroys all afflictions of the body and converts the Rasa of the food eaten during the previous fourteen days into vital energy. That is why the fast of Ekadashi is very significant. A householder is otherwise ordained to observe a fast on the Ekadashi of only the bright fortnights, but during Chaturmasya, every householder should observe a fast on both the Ekadashis of the lunar month.

The one who speaks while eating makes the food impure. Intake of such food is equivalent to eating sins. No misery befalls a person who observes mauna while eating. Even demons have attained heavenly abodes by observing mauna while having food. If insects or flies fall on cooked food, it becomes impure. If a person consumes each impure food, he commits a sin. The virtuous one who takes meals silently and makes oblation to the five body-winds by chanting the following mantras before eating meals, has five body-winds by chanting the following mantras before eating meals, has five of his sins destroyed:-

‘Om pranaya svaha, om apanaya svaha, om udanaya svaha, om vyanaya svaha, and om samanaya svaha’

Lord Vishnu is to be worshipped in Chaturmasya and so are Brahmins. In the month of Bhadrapada. Brahmins are worshipped with great religious fervor. One who recites ‘Purusha Sukta’ standing before Lord Vishnu in Chaturmasya, is endowed with improved intellectual faculties. (For ‘Purush Sukta’, refer to August 2003 issue of Hindi Rishi Prasad.)

Chaturmasya is complete with all virtues. One should engage in religious and spiritual observances and austerities during Chaturmasya with full faith and devotion. The scriptures recommend-

‘Satsang, devotion to the Lord, propitiating the Guru, gods and fire, donating cows, recital of the Vedas, righteous deeds, truthfulness, venerating cows and Charity-all these are the ways and means of Dharma for all times.’

From ‘Dev Shayani’ Ekadashi to ‘Dev Uthani’ Ekashi, the practice of these virtuous acts is supremely beneficial. In Chaturmasya, Lord Vishnu sleeps in ‘Yoga Nidra’. Therefore, marriage and other wish-fulfilling religious sacraments are not held during these four months. These four months are meant only for sadhana.

One practicing yoga (spiritual) in Chaturmasya, realized God. Japa of ‘Namo Narayanay’ in the Chaturmasya affords hundred times more virtues compared to those accrued from the same practice done during the rest of the year. If one does not engage oneself zealously in spiritual endeavors during Chaturmasya then one literally allows the pot of nectar to slip from one's hands. One who fritters these four months away without following a routine of austerities, fasting and japa, is a damned fool.

Wise men should constantly Endeavour to keep the mind under control. When the mind is under complete control, it helps one attain the Supreme Enlightenment.

‘Truth is the only Supreme religion. Truth alone is the greatest penance. Truth alone is the Supreme Knowledge and religion is established by Truth alone. Non-violence is the foundation of religion. Therefore one must practice non-violence in mind, word and deeds.’

Water is particularly pious in Chaturmasya. Bath, taken at places of pilgrimage and in rivers during this period, has a special significance. Libation of water to the manes and gods. Japa and fire sacrifices performed after bathing in holy waters, afford infinite virtues. One should not take a bath in the night or at sandhya times except in the case of an eclipse occurring during this period. One should not take a bath using warm water. One who forgoes warm water. One who forgoes warm water for bathing becomes entitled to virtues equal to those attained from bathing in the holy Pushkar.

One who takes a bath with water mixed with sesame and amla, or with bilvapatra and recites "Om Namah Shivay" 4 to 5 times while bathing, is endowed with great virtues forever. Bilvaptra is useful in fighting vata disorders and thus is protect health.

Compassion towards all creatures is a key virutes in Chaturmasya. One should not harbor any ill-will against them. Therefore, one should by all means deal with all creatures with love and compassion. A religion devoid of compassion is grossly irreligious. One should practice seeing one's won self in all begins and thus be compassionate towards them. This is the principal tenet of Santana Dharma, Which is worth following for all and forever.

Of all the religious endeavors, charity is accorded the highest place by wise men. Donation of grains, water and cow, daily recital from the Vedas and performing fire sacrifices afforded great virtues during Chaturmasya.

Religious practices, listening to legendary tales, servicing Saints, darshana of Saints, worship of Lord Vishnu and a penchant for charity all these should be eagerly south; so day the learned one. Donation of milk, curd, ghee and buttermilk affords tremendous virtues during these four months. One who imparts knowledge to others, donates cows and land during these four months, with the sole purpose of attaining Divine Love of the Lord, ensures the deliverance of his ancestors. Fire sacrifices, donations to pious Brahmins and devotees of God and servicing the cows with diligence are recommend in Chaturmasya.

While performing Shraddh, one should not wear stitched clothes. One, who eschews falsehood and anger and follows the guidelines of the scriptures in the matter of sex, is endowed with the virtues of performing as Ashwamedha Yajna. One who gives up falsehood has the doors of salvation opened for him.

Before using anything, a part of it should always be offered to worthy Brahmins. The part of wealth that is given to a worthy Brahmin becomes imperishable. Similarly if one has taken a vow to stop using some particular object during Chaturmasya, one should offer those object to worthy Brahmins. This makes the renunciation fruitful.

Whatever virtue is earned in Chaturmasya, whether through bathing in holy waters, charities, japa, oblations, study of scriptures, worshipping gods, etc, becomes eternal. One, who listens to Puranas twice or even once in a day, is delivered from all sins and is entitled to Lord Vishnu's abode. One who engages himself in japa and kirtana in Chaturmasya, when Lord Vishnu is in His 'Yoga Nidra', receives million times its normal virtues.

After 'Dev Shayani' Ekadashi, take an oath before the Lord, 'O Lord! I will perform such and such pious deed for your pleasure' and when you carry out that oath, it is called a Vrata. This vrata is supremely rewarding. Take the oath to observe vratas like agnihotra, devotion, religious faith, pious wisdom, satsang, truthfulness, compassion, simplicity, softness, sweetness of speech, piety of character, study of the Vedas, non-stealing, non-violence, modesty, forgiveness, self-restraint, freedom from avarice, anger and delusion, acquiring Supreme knowledge of the Vedas, and surrendering the chitta to the Lord. Then observe the Vrata steadfastly.

(Compiled from the Uttar Khanda of Padma Purana, Brahma Khanda and Nagar Khanda of Skanda Purana)