Fasting to self-awareness

BY SADHGURU

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

This cycle is something that most people can identify if they stop the nonsense of “so many calories, so much protein and so much mineral should be eaten,” and just listen to the body. This is why it was said 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 awareness, so they fixed Ekadashi as the day for not eating. Ekadashi means the eleventh day after the full moon and the eleventh day after the new moon. If you observe, there are three ekadashis in 48 days.

On that day, our planet is in a certain state and 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—i.e., dinner the previous day and the next thing you eat is dinner on Ekadashi. 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 a conscious process. We do not want to eat compulsively, we want to choose.

In some Indian languages, phal means fruit, but phal also means many. So, today in South India, on Ekadashi, phalahara has been interpreted as eating different varieties of food, not the regular diet. This happens because the same word has a different meaning in their language. The result is people follow the worst diet on that day.

Another aspect of Ekadashi fasting is this: when one is on the spiritual path, one usually falls off track at the slightest discomfort. Fasting is one simple way of training the self to stay on track. When you are hungry, instead of going and sleeping, remain alert and active; even when you are very hungry, focus on sadhana. It is a very important part of the training to ensure that outside situations do not take you off track.

While fasting, if you feel thirsty, drink water. If you feel tired, add a few drops of honey or squeeze a few drops of lemon into the water you are drinking. 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 forgo 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 bonds are coming and hitting you like asteroids, then you must fast.

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