

# **Rāma-navamī Observance and Fasting**

a paper by the Śāstric Advisory Council  
of ISKCON's  
Governing Body Commission

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# Rāma-navamī Observance & Fasting

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## Maṅgalācaraṇam

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*namo brahmaṇya-devāya*

*rāmāyākuṅṭha-medhase*

*uttamaśloka-dhuryāya*

*nyasta-daṇḍārpitāṅghraye*

O Lord, You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who have accepted the *brāhmaṇas* as Your worshipable deity. Your knowledge and memory are never disturbed by anxiety. You are the chief of all famous persons within this world, and Your lotus feet are worshiped by sages who are beyond the jurisdiction of punishment. O Lord Rāmacandra, let us offer our respectful obeisances unto You. (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 9.11.7)

*sītā-lāvanya-pīyūṣa-*

*pāna-pātrāyitekṣaṇaḥ*

*śiveṣvāsa-bhañjano 'sau*

*pātu vo raghunandanaḥ*

His eyes turned into lotus leaf shaped vessels due to drinking the nectar of the beauty of the youth of Sītā. May Raghunandana, the breaker of Śiva's bow protect you all.

## Summary

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In this paper, we present research on the length and type of fasting for *Rāma-navamī* from *sādhu*, *śāstra* and guru. We also examine related items such as the concept of completing one's fasting vow, specific calendar considerations, a comparison with other *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days and *Ekādaśī*, and practices in some ISKCON centers. We then make recommendations at the end of the paper of general principles which we apply to ISKCON leaders, ISKCON members, and suggestions for the calendar listing.

A summary of the main findings upon which we base our recommendations is as follows:

In *śāstra* there are many types of fasting, such as from all food and water, only food, or from certain types of food. The Sanskrit term for the successful completion of the one's vow is *vrata-pāraṇa*, at which time one resumes eating or drinking what one had abstained from. The *śāstric* reference for how to observe and complete fasting for *Rāma-navamī* is the 14th *Vilāsa* (Chapter) of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* where, as on all *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days, fasting is prescribed from sunrise on the appearance day to sunrise on the following day. In another section (*atha pūjā-vyatirikta-bhojana-doṣāḥ*), there are general instructions that

one should daily worship the Lord before eating or drinking. On an appearance day, the main worship of the Lord will only occur at or after the time of His appearance, and The *Nirṇaya-sindhuḥ* (*Pariccheda 2, Caitra-navamī* section, page 64) of Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa quotes from the *Agastya-saṁhitā* that the appearance of Lord Rāma was at noon. Additionally, in verse 12.100 of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, there are a list of items which do not break a fast, including anything one's guru's orders and offerings that a *brāhmaṇa* desires us to eat.

*Śāstra*: Regarding time to end one's fasting vow:

- fast from sunrise on *Rāma-navamī* to sunrise the next day
- minimum time to complete one's fast (in general) is until after the Lord is worshipped that day (logically one cannot worship the Lord until he appears, and Rāma appears at noon, so at least fast until noon)
- any food offered by one's guru or a *brāhmaṇa* does not break a fast

*Śāstra*: Regarding the type of food one eats at the end of fasting:

- No mention whatsoever; whatever food or drink one has abstained from

When researching regarding *sādhus* other than in ISKCON, from interviews with Śrīla Bhakti Prapanna Tīrtha Mahārāja and Gopīnātha Bābājī Mahārāja we learn that among various Maṭhas, there are a variety of standards. Most end their fast at the time of the appearance of the Lord (in this case, noon) and some places serve a full grain feast, and some places serve *anukalpa* (Ekadasi type). The Śrī Vaiṣṇavas' tradition is of a fast on, for example, *Janmāṣṭamī*, from sunrise to sunrise, but in practice members do not generally fast. Madhva *sannyāsīs* eat once a day in general. On *Ekādaśīs* and other religious fast days they fast completely. Other Madhvas fast optionally.

*Sādhus*: Regarding time to end one's fasting vow:

- Various Gauḍīya Maṭhas fast until noon or evening. Śrī Vaiṣṇavas and followers of Madha fast only as individual *vratās*.

*Sādhus*: Regarding the type of food one eats at the end of fasting:

- Some Gauḍīya Maṭhas serve a full, regular grain feast; some serve *anukalpa* (Ekadasi style)

Guru/ Śrīla Prabhupāda:

There is ample evidence that in letters, and in lectures and conversations that did not take place on the day of *Rāma-navamī*, Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed completing one's fast in the evening. However, when he was present with devotees on *Rāma-navamī* day he consistently directed completing the fast at mid-day and with a full-grain, opulent feast. His directions given on *Rāma-navamī* day itself often explicitly took into consideration the local needs of devotees and bringing in the outside community.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Regarding time to end one's fasting vow:

- Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed to fast until evening or moonrise in letters, and in lectures and conversations that did not take place on the day of *Rāma-navamī* itself

- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s verbal instruction on the day of *Rāma-navamī* itself and his instruction and practice on locations when *Rāma-navamī* was occurring was to fast until noon
- Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared to be emphasizing local needs in terms of both the devotees and guests in his decision of the time to break the fast

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Regarding the type of food one eats at the end of fasting:

- Śrīla Prabhupāda directly instructed opulent and full grain feasts when *Rāma-navamī* was celebrated in his physical presence
- Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared to be emphasizing local needs in terms of both the devotees and guests in his decision of the type of prasadam served.

Recommendations based on the above research are in the conclusion of this paper.

## Methodology

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The GBC asked the Śāstric Advisory Council (SAC) to research and give recommendations on the length and type of fast that should be followed on *Rāma-navamī*.

SAC members who contributed to this paper are: Ādi-puruṣa Dāsa, Brijbasi Dāsa, Chaitanya-charan Dāsa, Drutakarmā Dāsa, Gaurāṅga Dāsa, Hari Pārṣada Dāsa, Nārāyaṇī devī dāsī, Sarvajña Dāsa, and Urmilā devī dāsī (chair). We discussed the paper by conference call on 31 May 2017. Each participating member researched various areas. Each member contributed to the Wiki mostly during December 2017 (because from May-November we were working on a complex hermeneutics paper), and could edit and modify others' work. Each member could see a history of changes and each has approved how he or she is credited here. Among the SAC members, we especially note that Hari Pārṣada Dāsa contributed to the *maṅgalācaraṇa* verses at the beginning and the end as well as the section on fast breaking vs. fast completion. He also translated the verses pertaining to *Rāma-navamī* from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* along with the commentary of Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī as well as the verses from other *purāṇas* and *smṛtis*.

For this paper, SAC relied heavily on consultants who were not part of their conference call or their email group discussions. SAC members solicited their advice, shared both their references and outlook with the rest of SAC on the group email for discussion, and then used their contributions in this paper. In some cases, their contributions were used verbatim, in some cases they were used with slight editing for clarity, and in some cases their concepts were used to inform SAC decisions. The contributions of these consultants are as follows: Bhānu Swami (member of the GBC Vaiṣṇava Calendar Committee) contributed to the section on types of fasting, calendar considerations, and the section on the ambiguity and flexibility in fasting on the appearance and disappearance days of the *ācāryas*. Rukmiṇī Devī dāsī (daughter of Rasarāja Dāsa and Devamayī dāsī) conducted the first interview with Śrīla Bhakti Prapanna Tīrtha Mahārāj, by phone. Her father, Rasarāja Dāsa, interviewed Gopināth Bābājī Mahārāj of Gopinath Gauḍīya Math in person. Gopāla-priyā Dāsa (of Slovakia, who programmed GCal) contributed sections from *Hari-bhakti-*

*vilāsa*, as did Gaura Keśava Dāsa (originally from Australia, disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who is expert in Deity worship, *yajñas*, *saṁskāras*, etc.). Gaura Keśava Dāsa also supplied information about the fasting practices of those in the Śrī and Madhva *sampradāyas*, the summary of general fasting rules from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, and contrasting *śāstric* statements with modern practice. Both Gaura Keśava Dāsa and Bhaktarūpa Dās (member of the GBC Vaiṣṇava Calendar Committee) contributed to the section on the rationale of the times to complete the fast. Bhaktarūpa Dās and Bhānu Swami contributed to the section of types of fasting. Bhaktarūpa Dās also contributed to the section on calendar considerations. Praṇava Dāsa (who wrote *Modern Hindu Personalism: The History, Life, and Thought of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī*) contributed the quote from Bhaktisiddhānta about *Ekādaśī* fasting.

The SAC chair set up most of the headings according to the SAC phone conversation, subsequent emails, and the contributions of the consultants. Other SAC members also added headings and diacritics to the document. The chair also did the final editing for grammar and clarity.

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## Types of Fasting and Degrees of Austerity

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In ISKCON, there is some ambiguity in the term “fasting.” This ambiguity is reflected in the GCal computer program, and it is often perpetrated in many printed calendars produced by ISKCON centers. Sometimes “fasting” means fasting from grains all day (*anukalpa*), as on *Ekādaśī*. Sometimes it means not eating anything, even non-grain *prasāda*, until a certain time, as in the phrases “fasting till noon on *Ekādaśī*” (which is mentioned for the *Ekādaśīs* that occur before *Vāmana* and *Varāha Dvādaśīs*) or “fasting till moonrise” (which is mentioned for *Gaura-pūrṇīmā*). And sometimes the term's meaning is unclear, as in “fasting till noon” on the appearance day of an *ācārya*. Can one take non-grains before noon on those days? After one “fasts till noon”, what does the “break-fast” consist of? On the *Ekādaśī* before *Vāmana-dvādaśī*, it must be non-grains, but on the appearance day of an *ācārya*, it is grains. On *Gaura-pūrṇīmā*, many centers “break fast” with non-grains, others serve grains.

Breaking the fast would mean taking items which were avoided during the fast. Grains were avoided during the fast so therefore take grains. However, in exceptional cases if one did *nirjala*, then one could break just by taking water.

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## Fast Breaking versus Fast Completion

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Devotees often translate the term “*vrata-pāraṇa*” as “fast breaking.” While it is understood that the convention is to use the phrase “break the fast” and Śrīla Prabhupāda too used the same phrase on many occasions, it is also a fact that this phrase does not do justice to the original Sanskrit term — *vrata-pāraṇam*.

The term *vrata* however does not exactly mean “fasting.” *Vrata* means “vow.” Fasting (*upoṣaṇam*) may be one of the activities of a vow. For example, the day of an *Ekādaśī-vrata* is ideally supposed to be free from all other encumbrances; a day dedicated to giving that well deserved loving one-pointed attention to the love of our life — Kṛṣṇa.

The term *pāraṇam* means “successful completion.” (Hindi = पार लगाना/*pāra lagānā*)

Thus, the term *vrata-pāraṇam* literally means “successful completion of vows.” We are not supposed to break our vows. We're meant to complete them. Therefore, putting the emphasis on when to eat may miss the point. Before undertaking a vow, a person makes a *saṅkalpa*, or resolution, of what the vow will be, and then completes that vow. In the section on *Rāma-navamī* observance we quote in this paper from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* one can find such recommended resolutions. Here is another example from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (13.25) in relation to *Ekādaśī*:

*atha tatra saṅkalpamantraḥ (Mantra for making a formal vow)*

*ekādaśyām nirāhāraḥ*

*sthitvā'ham apare'hani*

*bhokṣyāmi puṇḍarikākṣa*

*śaraṇam me bhavācyuta*

**Translation:** O lotus-eyed Lord! O Acyuta! I will observe fasting on *Ekādaśī* and eat [grains] on *Dvādaśī*. Please be merciful to me so that I may not break my vow.

The English term 'breakfast' originally came from Middle English *brekefast*, *brekefaste*, equivalent to break +fast) literally “to end the nightly fast.” This term was used because the body would be fasting from all food at night during sleep and the morning meal would break that fast. The word has also been used historically in English to indicate the meal taken at the end of a religious observance of fasting, and we can use it in that sense today, with the understanding that our meal completes our vow rather than “breaking” it.

## *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*

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### **Instructions for *Rāma-navamī***

**Summary:** Full day (sunrise to sunrise) complete fast, with prior statements of what vow an individual will take—the *saṅkalpa*.

The 14th *Vilāsa* (Chapter) of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* has an entire section describing the *Rāma-navamī* fast. It is as follows:

[Verse 241]

*agastya-saṁhitāyām —*

*caitre māsi navamyām tu*

*śuklāyām hi raghūdvahaḥ*

*prādurāsīt purā brahman*



*param brahmaiva kevalam*

*tasmin dine tu kartavyam*

*upavāsa-vratādikam*

**Translation:** The *Agastya-saṁhitā* says, "O *brāhmaṇa!* Long ago, on the ninth day of the bright fortnight of the *Caitra* month, the non-dual Supreme Brahman, the best among Raghus [named Rāma] appeared in this world. On that day, one must carry out fasting, vows etc."

Commentary by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī: *brahman he sutīkṣṇa!*

**Translation of Commentary:** The term *brahman* (O *brāhmaṇa!*) in the verse refers to an individual named Sutīkṣṇa.

[Verse 242]

*atha tad-vratā-nityatvam (Now the eternality of this vow is being described)*

*tatraiva —*

*mumukṣavo 'pi hi sadā*

*śrī-rāma-navamī-vratam*

*na tyajanti sura-śreṣṭho*

*devendro 'pi viśeṣataḥ*

**Translation:** The same literature [*Agastya-saṁhitā*] says, "Even those who desire liberation from material existence never fail to observe this vow of *Rāma-navamī*. Indeed, it is faithfully observed even by Indra — the greatest among demigods."

[Verse 243]

*kiñca —*

*prāpte śrī-rāma-navamī-*

*dine martyo vimūḍha-dhīḥ*

*upoṣaṇam na kurute*

*kumbhīpākeṣu pacyate*

**Translation:** Moreover, a foolish mortal who does not observe fasting on the arrival of the *Rāma-navamī* day gets cooked in the fires of the various *Kumbhīpāka* hells.

[Verse 244]

*yas tu rāma-navamyām hi  
bhuñkte mohād vimūḍha-dhīḥ  
kumbhīpākeṣu ghoreṣu  
pacyate nātra saṁśayaḥ*

**Translation:** A foolish person who out of illusion eats on *Rāma-navamī* gets cooked in the various formidable hells known as *Kumbhīpāka*. Of this there is no doubt.

[Verse 245]

*atha tad-vratā-māhātmyam (Now the glories of the Rāma-navamī-vrata are  
being described)*

*tatraiva —  
śrī-rāma-navamī proktā  
koṭi-sūrya-grahādhikā  
tasmin dine mahā-puṇye  
rāmam uddiśya bhaktitaḥ  
yat kiñcit kurute karma  
tad bhava-kṣaya-kāraṇam*

**Translation:** The same literature [*Agastya-saṁhitā*] says, "The vow of *Rāma-navamī* is declared [in scriptures] to be more important than observing vows related to millions of solar eclipses. Any service whatsoever that is rendered with devotion for the pleasure of Lord Rāmacandra on this greatly auspicious day becomes the cause of liberation from material existence."

[Verse 246]

*kiñca —  
kuryād rāma-navamyām ya  
upoṣaṇam atandritaḥ  
na mātur garbham āpnoti  
sa vai rāma-priyo bhavet*

**Translation:** Moreover, one who observes fasting on *Rāma-navamī* without remaining idle never again enters the womb of a mother. Such a person becomes dear to Lord Rāmacandra.

**Commentary by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī:** *rāma-priyo bhaved iti tat-sārūpyam prāptaḥ syād ity arthaḥ*

**Translation of Commentary:** The phrase *rāma-priyo bhaved* (becomes dear to Lord Rāmacandra) means that such a person attains *sārūpya* i.e. an eternal form similar to the form of Lord Rāma.

[Verse 247]

*tasmāt sarvātmanā sarve  
kṛtvaitan-navamī-vratam  
mucyate sarva-pāpebhyo  
yānti brahma sanātanaṁ*

**Translation:** Therefore all living entities who have heartily performed this *Rāma-navamī* vow become free from all sins and attain the eternal spiritual realm.

[Verse 248]

*kiñca —  
ekam api naro bhaktyā  
śrī-rāma-navamī-vratam  
upoṣya kṛta-kṛtyaḥ san  
sarva-pāpaiḥ pramucyate*

**Translation:** Simply by devotedly observing fasting on *Rāma-navamī* even once, a person becomes completely successful in life and is delivered from all sins.

[Verse 249]

*caitre māsi navamyām tu  
jāto rāmaḥ svayaṁ hariḥ  
punar-vasv ṛkṣa-saṁyuktā  
sā tithiḥ sarva-kāmadā*

**Translation:** Śrī Rāmacandra is Lord Hari himself, and He appeared on the ninth day of the waxing moon in the month of *Caitra*. This day conjoined with the *Punarvasu* constellation fulfills all of one's desires.

[Verse 250]

saiva madhyāhna-yogena  
mahā-puṇya-tamā bhavet

**Translation:** Whenever the conjunction [with *Punarvasu* constellation] occurs at noon, this day becomes even more auspicious.

[Verse 251]

meṣam pūṣaṇi samprāpte  
lagne karkaṭakāhvaye  
āvīrāsīt sva-kalayā  
kauśalyāyām paraḥ pumān

**Translation:** When the sun attained the *Meśa-rāśi* and the *lagna* was *Karkaṭa*, the Supreme Lord, Rāmacandra made His advent from the womb of *Kauśalyā* accompanied by His plenary portions.

[Verse 252]

navamī cāṣṭamī-viddhā  
tyājyā viṣṇu-parāyaṇaiḥ

**Translation:** If the *Navamī-tithi* is contaminated by the presence of *aṣṭamī*, then it should be rejected by those devoted to Lord Viṣṇu.

**Commentary by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī:** nanu vaiṣṇavair viddhā sarvatra eva varjyeti pūrvam niścitaṁ. atrāpi tathaivoktam — '**navamī cāṣṭamī-viddhā tyājyā**' iti.

**Translation of Commentary:** The universal avoidance of fasting on contaminated dates has been spoken of previously in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. This same principle has been repeated in this verse.

[NOTE: The commentary is referring to situations such as when in a location *gaura-pūrṇimā tithi* or *balārāma-pūrṇimā tithi* is contaminated by the presence of *caturdaśī* at the time of sunrise. In these cases, the event is celebrated on the following day.]

[Verse 253]

upoṣaṇam navamyām vai  
daśamyām eva pārāṇam  
daśamyām pārāṇāyās ca  
niścayān navamī-kṣaye

*viddhā 'pi navamī grāhyā*

*vaiṣṇavair apy asaṁśayaḥ*

**Translation:** [**Doubt:** In certain years on the appearance of Lord Rāma, there is *Daśamī* immediately after *Aṣṭamī*. In such years, the *Aṣṭamī-tithi* has contaminated the *Navamī-tithi* and the *Navamī-tithi* undergoes what is known as a *kṣaya*, diminution. In such years the *Navamī-tithi* is not counted at all and one sees in the calendar that *Aṣṭamī* is immediately followed by *Daśamī*. If one were to fast on *Daśamī* in such a situation, then the next day after that would be *Ekādaśī* and one will not be able to perform *pāraṇa* of the *Rāma-navamī* fast. What to do in such a situation? **Solution:** The answer is that in such a situation] one should fast on the *aṣṭamī* that has contaminated the *navamī* and complete the fast on the next day i.e. *daśamī*.

[Seeing such a conclusion, one may feel uncomfortable in fasting on a mixed *tithi*. To clear the minds of such individuals, Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī says] — Since it is firmly decided that fasting [for *Rāma-navamī*] should certainly be concluded on the *daśamī-tithi*, the *vaiṣṇavas* should unhesitatingly fast on *aṣṭamī* that has encapsulated the *navamī* whenever the *navamī tithi* is not counted due to *kṣaya*(diminution).

**Commentary by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī:** tatra ca navamī-kṣaye sati tithi-hrāsa-krameṇa ekādaśyāś ca śuddhatve kiṁ kartavyam? tatrāha — upoṣaṇam iti. tadevābhivyajya likhati — daśamyām iti. niścayād daśamyām eva ity eva-kārataḥ. anyathopavāsa-dvaya-prasaṅgād iti dik.

**Translation of Commentary:** Whenever *Navamī* undergoes *kṣaya* (diminution) and *aṣṭamī* is followed by *daśamī* followed by a pure *Ekādaśī*, then what should one do? In such a situation, the first half of the verse says that one should fast on the *aṣṭamī* that has encapsulated the *navamī*].

Through the phrase *daśamyām pāraṇāyāś ca*, the same principle is being explained in some detail. The term *eva* (certainly) indicates that one should certainly fast on the *aṣṭamī*, otherwise [if one fasts on *daśamī*] one will be faced with the impossibility of needing to observe two consecutive fasting days [*daśamī* and *Ekādaśī*].

**NOTE:** Such a situation is going to arise in 2018 for certain parts of India viz. Mumbai, wherein *Rāma-navamī* will be observed on 25th March even though it is an *aṣṭamī tithi*.

[Verse 254]

*asya vratasya cāgastyā-*

*saṁhitādau sa-vistaram*

*vidhir uktaḥ prasiddhañca*

*likhyate 'tra samāsataḥ*

**Translation:** Since the elaborate process for observing this vow is described in great detail in books viz. *Agastyā-saṁhitā* etc., it has only been described briefly here.

[Verse 255]

*atha śrī-rāma-navamī-vratā-vidhiḥ (Now the procedure to carry out the  
Rāma-navamī vow)*

*aṣṭamyām caitra-māsasya*

*śukla-pakṣe jitendriyaḥ*

*danta-dhāvana-pūrvan tu*

*prātaḥ snāyād yathā-vidhi*

**Translation:** On the *aṣṭamī* day [the day before the vow] of the bright fortnight of *Caitra* month, a sense-controlled person should brush his teeth in the morning and take a bath according to scriptural directions.

Commentary by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī: *aṣṭamyām ity ādi spaṣṭārtham eva.*

**Translation of Commentary:** This verse is clear in itself.

[Verses 256 - 257]

*dāntam kuṭumbinam vipram*

*veda-śāstra-ratam sadā*

*śrī-rāma-pūjā-niratam*

*su-śīlam dambha-varjitam*

*vidhijam rāma-mantrāṇām*

*rāma-mantraika-sādhakam*

*āhūya bhaktyā sampūjya*

*śṛṇuyāt prārthayann iti*

**Translation:** [On the *aṣṭamī* day i.e. the day before the fast], One should invite a sense-controlled householder *brāhmaṇa* who is always engaged in the study of Vedas and other scriptures and who regularly performs the worship of Lord Rāmacandra. Such a *brāhmaṇa* should be of good character, free from pride, should know the various rituals related to Rāma mantras, who chants the holy name of Lord Rāma. Having invited and devotedly worshiped such a *brāhmaṇa*, the householder should pray to him as follows.

[Verse 258]

*śrī-rāma-pratimā-dānam*

*kariṣye 'ham dvijottama*

*tatrācāryo bhava prītaḥ*

*śrī-rāma-vit tvam eva me*

**Translation:** [One should pray as follows], "O topmost among *brāhmaṇas*, I give you a deity of Lord Rāmacandra in charity. Kindly be pleased with me and act as my *ācārya* because you are the only one for me who knows truths pertaining to Lord Rāmacandra.

[Verse 259]

*ācāryam bhojayet paścāt*

*sāttvikānnaiḥ suvistaraiḥ*

*bhuñjīta svayam apy evam*

*hṛdi rāmam anusmaran*

**Translation:** Then one should feed the [*brāhmaṇa* who has just been appointed as the] *ācārya* by supplying sumptuous and pleasant grains. Thereafter, one should accept food oneself while continually remembering Lord Rāma in one's heart.

**NOTE:** One is allowed to eat only once on *aṣṭamī*. Thus, one becomes known as *eka-bhakta* or a person who has eaten only once. In some other literature, this is also known as *eka-bhukta* instead of *eka-bhakta*.

[Verse 260]

*tatraika-bhakta-nivedana-mantraḥ — (Submissive prayers offered by a devotee who has eaten only once on aṣṭamī and is going to perform the Rāma-navamī vow)*

*navamyām aṅga-bhūtena*

*eka-bhaktena rāghava*

*ikṣvāku-vaṁśa-tilaka*

*prīto bhava bhava-priya*

**Translation:** O Rāghava! O descendent of the Ikṣvāku dynasty! O Lord dear to Śiva! Kindly be pleased with the *eka-bhakta* vow that was observed by me [on *aṣṭamī*] as limb of my *Rāma-navamī* vow.

[Verse 261]

*tataḥ prātaḥ samutthāya*

*snātvā sandhyam vidhāya ca*

*prātaḥ sarvaṇi karmāṇi*

*śīghram eva samāpayet*

**Translation:** On the day of fasting [i.e. *Navamī*], having gotten up early in the morning and completed one's bath and *gāyatrī*, one should complete all of the other morning duties as soon as possible.

[Verse 262]

*upavāsa-nivedana-mantraḥ (The mantra for mentally offering the fast  
before commencing it)*

*upoṣyā navamī tvadya*

*yāmeṣv aṣṭāsu rāghava*

*tena prito bhava tvarṁ bhoḥ*

*saṁsārāt trāhi mām hare. iti.*

**Translation:** O scion of the Raghu dynasty, I will observe a fast today, for a period of eight *yāmas* (i.e. 8 x 3 hours = 24 hours). O lord Hari, kindly be pleased on me as a result of this observance and deliver me from material existence.

[Verse 263]

*vidhivan nirmite yāga-*

*maṇḍape paramotsavaiḥ*

*puṇyāhaṁ vācayitvā tu*

*sadbhiḥ saṅkalpam ācaret*

**Translation:** Then in a *Yajña-śālā* created in accordance with scriptural rules, one should observe festivities, one should recite auspicious invocations and then utter the *saṅkalpa-mantra*. All of this should be done in the presence of various saintly souls.

[Verse 264]

*atha saṅkalpa mantraḥ (saṅkalpa-mantra for taking a vow)*

*asyām rāma navamyām tu*

*samārādhana-tatparaḥ*

*upoṣyāṣṭasu yāmeṣu*

*pūjayitvā yathā vidhi*

*imām svarṇa-mayī rāma-*

*pratimām su-prayatnataḥ*

*śrī-rāma-prītaye dāsye*



*rāma-bhaktāya dhimate  
prīto rāmo haratv āśu  
pāpāni su-bahūni me  
aneka-janma-saṁsiddhany  
abhyastāni mahānti ca*

**Translation:** On this day of *Rāma-navamī*, I will be situated firmly in worshipping the Supreme Lord. I will fast for eight *yāmas* (= 24 hours), having worshiped the Lord in accordance with scriptural regulations. For the pleasure of Lord Rāma, I will gift a golden deity of him to an intelligent and devoted *Rāma-bhakta*. May Lord Rāma be kindly pleased on me and quickly remove multiple sinful activities that I have accrued and repeatedly committed over multiple lifetimes.

**NOTE:** After this verse, descriptions of the elaborate worship of Lord Rāma are described in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. Since these are not related directly to the fast completion time, they are not being transliterated and translated here. The *pāraṇa*, completion of the vow is described in verses 296 - 298 of the same chapter. These verses are as follows:

*[Verse 296]*

*punaḥ puṣpāñjaliṁ dattvā  
yāme yāme hy atandritaḥ  
pūjayed vidhivad bhaktyā  
divā-rātraṁ nayed budhaḥ*

**Translation:** After having performed the *puṣpāñjali* ceremony, one should give up laziness and worship the Lord in each *yāma* (part of the day) according to scriptural regulations. Thus, the intelligent soul should spend his entire day and night engaged in these acts.

*[Verse 297]*

*tataḥ prātaḥ samutthāya  
nitya-kṛtyaṁ samāpya ca  
vidhivad rāmam abhyarcya  
bhaktyācāryaṁ pratoṣya ca  
brāhmaṇaiḥ saha bhuñjīta  
tebhyo dadyāc ca dakṣiṇām*

**Translation:** On the next day [i.e. *daśamī*], having gotten up, having completed one's daily acts viz. bathing etc., having worshiped Lord Rāma according to scriptural regulations and

having satisfied the *ācārya* through devotion, one should accept [offered] food along with *brāhmaṇas* and should give charity to those *brāhmaṇas*.

[Verse 298]

***atha pāraṇa-mantraḥ*** — (Now the mantra for declaring the completion of the vow)

*tava prasāda-svikārāt*

*kṛtaṁ yat pāraṇaṁ mayā*

*vratenānena santuṣṭaḥ*

*svasti bhaktiṁ prayaccha me*

**Translation:** The completion of this vow is being performed by me by accepting your remnants. Being pleased with my performance of this vow, kindly bestow auspiciousness and devotion unto me.

## **Section in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* called *atha pūjā-vyatirikta-bhojana-doṣāḥ*, the offense(s) of eating without worshiping**

**Summary:** The Lord should be worshiped each day before taking food

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 9.331]

*śrī-kūrma-purāṇe* —

*anarcayitvā govindaṁ*

*yair bhuktaṁ dharma-varjitaiḥ*

*śvāna-viṣṭhā-samaṁ cānnaṁ*

*nīraṁ ca surayā samam*

**Translation:** The *Kūrma-purāṇa* says, "For those impious souls who eat without first worshiping Lord Govinda - all their food is considered as no better than dog's stool, and whatever they drink is considered to be no better than wine."

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 9.332]

*kiñca* —

*yo mohād athavālasyaḍ*

*akṛtvā devatārcanam*

*bhuñkte sa yāti narakam*

*śūkaṛeṣv iha jāyate*

**Translation:** Moreover, due to laziness or illusion, if a person eats without first worshipping the deities, he will go to hell and then be born in this world among the pigs.

*[Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.333]*

*viṣṇu-dharmottare—*

*eka-kālam dvikālam vā*

*tri-kālam pūjayed dharim*

*apūjya bhojanam kurvan*

*narakāṇi vrajen naraḥ*

**Translation:** The *Viṣṇu-dharmottara-purāṇa* says, "It is the duty of a person to worship Lord Hari - either once, twice or thrice per day. By having one's meal without first worshipping the Lord one paves one's way to hell."

*[Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 9.337a]*

*na tv evāpūjya bhujīta*

*bhagavantaṁ janārdanam*

**Translation:** it is prohibited to eat without first worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Hari.

**[Note:** Many other verses in this section speak of offering all one's food to the Lord first before eating but these are the ones that prohibit eating before worship. The discussion of taking *prasādam* goes on till the end of the 9th *Vilāsa* (Verse 411).]

In *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* Chapters 12-13 deal with *Ekādaśī* duties covering *Daśamī*, *Ekādaśī* and *Dvādaśī*, preparing, fasting and breaking the fast. Later Chapters 14-16 deal with different festival (*vratas*) throughout the year, many of which also include fasting and breaking fast. These later discussions often say that one should take note of the descriptions and rules of *Ekādaśī* and apply them to the fasting on the occasions of other *vratas* like appearance days of *viṣṇu-tattva avatāras*. Below are some other verses about breaking fast after *Ekādaśī* or *Mahādvādaśī* (a special type of *Ekādaśī* fast) as examples:

*[Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 13.230]*

*tad uktaṁ kātyāyanena —*

*prātaḥ snātvā harim pūjya*

*upavāsam samarpayet*

*pāraṇam tu tataḥ kuryād*  
*vratā-siddhau hariṁ smaran*

**Translation:** Kātyāyana says, "After bathing in the early morning and worshiping Lord Hari, one should offer the result of his vow of *Ekādaśī* to Him. Then, one should perform *pāraṇa* to complete the vow, after remembering the Lord."

*[Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 13.236]*  
*nitya-kṛtyam samāpyātha*  
*śaktyā viprāṁś ca bhojayet*  
*kurvīta dvādaśī-madhye*  
*tulasīm prāśya pāraṇam*

**Translation:** Having completed one's daily duties on the day of *dvādaśī*, one should feed *brāhmaṇas* according to one's capacity. Then one should complete his fast by first eating a *tulasī* leaf that was offered to the Lord.

*[Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 13.252]*  
*kāla-dvayam trayam vāpi*  
*dvādaśī yadi dṛśyate*  
*snānārcanādikaṁ karma*  
*tadā rātrau vidhīyate*

**Translation:** It is recommended that if only two or three *kālas* of *dvādaśī* remain when it is time to break one's fast, one should start performing his duties, such as bathing and worshiping the Lord, from midnight."

[Note: So, a lack of time is no excuse for not performing all one's duties and worship of the Lord before breaking one's fast.]

*[Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 13.255]*  
*kātyāyanoktau ca —*  
*mantram japitvā haraye*  
*nivedyopoṣaṇam vratī*  
*apbhis tu pāraṇam kuryād*  
*saṅkaṭe viṣame sati*

**Translation:** Kātyāyana says, "If there is a severe dilemma, one should chant his mantra and break his fast with water after offering his fast to the lotus feet of Lord Hari."

[**Note:** In other words, if there is some problem with the time of breaking the fast and one cannot worship the Lord or finish all his duties before having to break the fast, one must take only water and not eat for breaking the fast, and then eat later after finishing his duties and worship of the Lord.]

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 13.256]

*kiñca —*

*sandhyādikam bhaven nityam*

*pāraṇam tu nimittataḥ*

*apbhis tu pārāyitvā tu*

*kuryāt sandhyādikam punaḥ*

**Translation:** Moreover, morning duties, such as worshiping the Lord and chanting mantras are eternal duties, whereas breaking a fast is an occasional duty. Therefore, one should break his fast with water only within the period of *dvādaśī* and thereafter perform his required duties.

[**Note:** This proves that one must not eat anything, not even a grain or *tulasī* leaf, before finishing his spiritual duties which include the worship of the Lord, even if one has to break a fast at a particular time. The proper conduct is to only take water if one needs to break a fast before worshiping the Lord. Generally, one shouldn't even take water before the Lord's daily worship is finished. Of course, one naturally takes some water during *ācamana* at the time of worship. Naturally this is not counted as drinking water as the water is taken as ritual purification, not for quenching thirst. Obviously in India we see people do drink water before worship when they need to due to excessive thirst. However, there are some very orthodox *vaiṣṇavas* who follow this rule of not taking even water before finishing their daily *pūjā*.]

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 13.384 – 385]

*dātavyam gurave sarvam*

*prabhāte devatādikam*

*kṣamāpayitvā deveśam*

*gurum caiva viśeṣataḥ*

*kṛtvā naimittikam sarvam*

*bhoktavyam bandhubhiḥ saha*

**Translation:** On the next day of the vow, one should offer everything to his spiritual master and beg forgiveness from the Lord, and especially from his spiritual master. After completing all of one's duties (which would include the daily *pūjā* of the Lord), one should sit down and have his meal, along with his friends.

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 13.466]

*niśānte punar īśāya  
dattvā cārghyaṁ vidhānataḥ  
snānādikāṁ kriyāṁ kṛtvā  
bhuñjīyād brāhmanaiḥ saha*

**Translation:** At the end of the night, one should again offer *arghya* (water mixed with honey etc. as explained in Krishna Book, ch. 68) to the Lord, according to the prescribed rules and regulations. Thereafter, one should complete his daily duties, such as bathing (and daily worship) and then sit down and take his meal, along with other *brāhmaṇas*.

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 13.562]

*prātaś ca devaṁ nīrājya  
nityaṁ karma samāpya ca  
mūrty ādi gurave dattvā  
prāgvat pāraṇam ācaret*

**Translation:** "The next morning, one should worship the Lord, complete his morning duties, and then break his fast, after donating the deity (which he had made and specifically installed and worshiped for that particular *vrata*) to his spiritual master."

### Specifically in relation to *śālagrāma-śilā-pūjā*

[*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 5.448]

*pādme —  
śālagrāma-śilā-pūjā  
vinā yo'snāti kiñcana  
sa caṇḍālādi-viṣṭhāyām  
ākalpaṁ jāyate kṛmiḥ*

**Translation:** The *Padma-purāṇa* says, "One who eats before performing his *śālagrāma-śilā-pūjā* is condemned to live as a worm in *caṇḍāla*'s stool for the rest of this day of Brahmā."

(Note: in ISKCON's manual for Deity worship, the above is explained as follows: "Some devotees worship the *śālagrāma-śilā* in the late morning, after worshiping their other Deities. In that case one should complete the worship at least by noon. Also, one should not eat before performing the worship. (If necessary, one may drink water before the worship.) The *śāstra* warns that a person who eats before performing his morning *śālagrāma-śilā pūjā* is condemned to live as a *caṇḍāla* for the rest of this day of Brahmā. [*Pañcarātra-Pradīpa* 2.1: Worship of *Śālagrāma-śilā*])

### **From Śrīla Prabhupāda**

"Before breakfast she should worship Lord Viṣṇu and mother Lakṣmī" (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.19 Summary)

## **Eight ways of "eating" which do not break a fast**

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (12.100) specifies a general rule for all fasts as follows:

*aṣṭaitāny avrata-ghnāni  
āpo mūlaṁ phalaṁ payaḥ  
haviḥ brāhmaṇa-kāmyā ca  
guror vacanam auśadham*

**Translation:** These eight do not break a fast —

- (1) water
- (2) roots
- (3) fruits
- (4) milk
- (5) *haviḥ* (anything offered to the Lord such as grains offered in sacrifice)
- (6) *brāhmaṇa-kāmya* (offerings usually dear to a *brāhmaṇa* or offerings that a *brāhmaṇa* desires us to eat)
- (7) *guror vacanam* — (anything ordered by one's guru/*ācārya*)
- (8) *auśadham* (medicine)

### **Example from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's instructions**

In a letter from the collection *Patrāmṛta*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta states the following:

On *Ekādaśī*, the devotees fast completely, not even accepting *mahā-prasāda* or *mahā-mahā-prasāda*. One who breaks the fast by taking *mahā-prasāda* or some other *prasāda* fails to respect *Ekādaśī*, or the day of Lord Hari. To not accept even *mahā-prasāda* on *Ekādaśī* is called fasting, or observing the day of Lord Hari. But, if a person is unable to follow this vow strictly, then the following of an alternative arrangement is not detrimental to displaying

respect for this sacred *tithi*. (Letter, Śrī Māyāpura Bāmana Pukur, Nadia, 11th Pauṣa 1322 Bengali era, Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta. *Patrāmṛta*: Nectar from the Letters, Touchstone Media.)

## ***Viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days and *Ekādaśī*, in general**

In *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* chapters 12-16 there are instructions, separately, for various days of *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days. However, if we were to go through that section to extract all the details, this paper would increase in size and scope enormously. Therefore, to summarize, on such days fasting is always for one day according to the lunar calendar, in terms of *tithi*, *yāmās*, *praharas*, and so forth. To be precise, such days start at sunrise and end at sunrise, which may not be exactly 24 hours of a solar day. *Śāstra* doesn't use hours. Neither does *śāstra* stipulate fasting normally by giving an exact time for it. The fasting time is from the beginning of the fast date at sunrise, to the time of *pāraṇa*, completion of the fast, after the next sunrise. There is no prescription for fasts of less than that duration. So, there is nothing in *śāstra* about half-day fasts, or quarter-day fasts.

To give some perspective on the above, we look, briefly, at the instructions in *śāstra* regarding *Ekādaśī*. *Ekādaśī* is a little different because one is supposed to eat only once on *Daśamī*, eat nothing on *Ekādaśī* and eat only once on *Dvādaśī*. So specifically, this means that the time from the meal on *Daśamī* to the *Ekādaśī pāraṇa* (breaking of fast) on *Dvādaśī* is a little more than 24 hours. If we eat right before sunrise on *Ekādaśī* (which would be very unusual) then we would have just over 24 hours fast till the *Ekādaśī pāraṇa* on *Dvādaśī*. However probably the last time we eat for fasting on *Ekādaśī* would be sometime in the evening of *Daśamī*, or if we are strictly following the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, around noon on *Daśamī* (which would mean almost 42 hours). If we eat at noon on *Daśamī* then 24 hours later is noon on *Ekādaśī*, then 48 hours later is noon on *Dvādaśī*, so since we do the *Ekādaśī pāraṇa* just after sunrise on *Dvādaśī* (which could be 6 am) we have to subtract about 6 hours from noon on *Dvādaśī* for the approximate time of *Ekādaśī pāraṇa*. Thus 48 minus 6 is 42 hours fasting. This is just an example of following the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* strictly which we can compare to the range of current ISKCON practice.

## **Other *purāṇas* and *smṛti* compilations**

The *Brahma-vaivarta-purāṇa* (Brahma-khaṇḍa, 27.11) speaks against the eating of grains on *Janmāṣṭamī*, *Rāma-navamī* and *Śiva-rātrī*:

*janmāṣṭamī-dine rāma-  
navamī-divase hareḥ  
śiva-rātrau ca yo bhuṅkte  
so 'pi dvi-guṇa-pātakī*

**Translation:** One who eats anything on Hari's appearance days viz. *Janmāṣṭamī*, *Rāma-navamī* and on *Śiva-rātrī* receives double the sinful reaction of eating on other fasting days.



(**Source:** *Brahma-vaivarta-purāṇa*, with Hindi Translation by Tarinish Jha, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, 1981 A.D.)

The *Nirṇaya-sindhuḥ* (*Pariccheda 2, Caitra-navamī* section, page 64) of Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa quotes from the *Agastya-saṁhitā* that the appearance of Lord Rāma was at noon:

*caitre navamyām prāk-pakṣe*

*divā puṇye punarvasau*

**Translation:** Lord Rāma appeared on the *Navamī* of the *Caitra* month just before afternoon in the constellation named *Punarvasu*.

(**Source:** *Nirṇaya-sindhuḥ* of Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa. Edited by Pandit Ramnarayan Ācārya. Republished from the *Nirṇaya Sagar Press* edition by Krishnadas Akadami, Varanasi. 1985 A.D.)

## Calendar considerations and confusions

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As specified in the section on *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* above, there is a special rule (not happening very often) in calendar calculations for *Rāma-navamī* observance that if *navamī tithi* is *kṣaya*, meaning that it is not present on any sunrise in a particular location, then someone in that location should observe *Rāma-navamī* on the *aṣṭamī*. This seems strange at first glance, since for just about all other such occasions if the *tithi* is *kṣaya* then one observes on the following day (eg. if *Pūrṇimā-tithi* is *kṣaya* then *Gaura-pūrṇimā* should be observed on the *pratipāt*). The reason for this strangeness is that if we observe *Rāma-navamī* on the *daśamī* then we have to fast that day and conclude the fast the next morning, but the next morning will be *Ekādaśī*. These calendar rules support the practice of a full day fast (sunrise to sunrise).

## Statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda

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Summary: fasting until evening or no specified time

### Letters

**Letter to Mukunda - San Francisco 26 march, 1968:** Our next ceremony is Lord Rāmacandra's Birthday, on the 7th of April. It should be observed in the same way as Lord Caitanya's Appearance Day, namely, fasting up to evening and then accept *Prasādam*, and all our ceremonies should be performed with continuous *Kīrtana*, of Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Rāma. That will make all our functions successful.

**Letter to Mahāpuruṣa - San Francisco 28 march, 1968:** So far the Advent Day of Lord Rāma Candra, it should be celebrated as Lord Caitanya's Birthday was done. Fasting up to evening, and then take *prasādam*, and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa whole day, and be engaged in reading and chanting off and on, chant for some time, then read for some time, then again have *Kīrtana* and so on, throughout the day. If you have not got a Rāmāyaṇa, then you can read *Bhagavad-gīta* or *Srimad-Bhāgavatam*, that is all right.

## Lectures

### **Śrī Rāma-Navamī, Lord Rāmacandra's Appearance Day — Hawaii, March 27, 1969:**

There are so many historical incidences in the life of Rāmacandra, and we should remember, because if we remember why we are observing today fasting for Rāmacandra... There were many kings like Rāmacandra. Because the kings were trained in that way. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira was also as good as Rāmacandra, and Mahārāja Parikṣit was as good. There were many such kings. But we are not concerned because He was a king. He is the King of all kings, *parameśvara*. Because He is God, therefore we are observing today.

**Pandal lecture -Bombay, April 7, 1971:** yeṣāṃ anta-gatam pāpaṃ janānāṃ puṇya-karmaṇam te dvanda-moha-nirmuktā bhajante mām dṛḍha-vratāḥ So this process should be adopted, how to become sukṛtina. Sukṛti means yajña-dāna-tapa-kriyā. One must perform sacrifices as prescribed in the śāstras, and they must give in charity their hard-earned money for Kṛṣṇa's cause. That is called dāna. Yajña, dāna, and tapasya. Tapasyā. Just like tomorrow is Śrī Rāma-navamī. The tapasyā will be that all the devotees will observe fasting from morning till evening. This is called tapasyā. Just like Ekādaśī day—there is no eating sumptuously. Simply you take little fruits and flowers. Try to avoid that also. You don't take even water. That is really Ekādaśī. But because we cannot do it — in Kali-yuga the time is different—therefore we are allowed to take little fruit and milk, which is called anukalpa. These are different methods of tapasyā.

## Conversations

Room Conversation -- March 26, 1977:

**Tamala Kṛṣṇa:** So there will be an initiation on *Rāma-navamī*.

**Śrīla Prabhupāda:** *Rāma-navamī* is *upavāsa* up till the... Go to observe fasting up to the evening.

Tamala Kṛṣṇa: So moon.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Sunset.

## Interviews and Written Accounts of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Behavior and the Practice During Śrīla Prabhupāda's Time

**Summary:** The observance, from these accounts, was a half day fast and the preparations were with grains.

### **Arundhati devī dāsī who observed *Rāma-navamī* with Śrīla Prabhupāda**

Sorry, I can't remember specifically. I'm pretty sure I was with Śrīla Prabhupāda on some *Rāma-navamīs*, definitely in 1977 as I was in his entourage then, but don't remember fasting procedures. I think it was a half day fast though, and regular feast, not *Ekādaśī*. But am not certain.

## Girirāja Swami

From his forthcoming Juhu Book 1974.04.01 *Rāma-navamī*:

April 1 was *Rāma-navamī*. On his morning walk, Śrīla Prabhupāda noted that many people were bathing in the sea, and he inquired, "Because today's *Rāma-navamī* they're taking bath?"

Dr. Patel said yes. Toward the end of the walk, he raised the topic of fasting for *Rāma-navamī*, suggesting that one should fast throughout the night until the next morning. But a devotee volunteered that we fasted until sunset. Śrīla Prabhupāda agreed but added, "If one can continue, that's all right."

Later I asked Śrīla Prabhupāda when we should actually break the fast, and he replied that I should inquire when the local temples break theirs and we should do the same. It turned out that they broke their fasts at noon, so that day we did too.

## Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

(Transcribed from a lecture, <http://www.bvks.com/12136/>)

Śrīla Prabhupāda when he was asked, he said to fast until evening, but practically he didn't, nor did he have his disciples do. I remember being in Vṛndāvana in 1976 and Śrīla Prabhupāda was present on *Rāma-navamī*, and the feast *prasādam* was scheduled for 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It actually got served about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. And Lord Rāma appeared at mid-day, and the normal procedure is to fast until mid-day. So I was asked, so what do I know about Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, what did he say about that? Now I heard that the present fasting schedule was introduced after Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura left, by Ananta Vāsudeva or Bhakti Prasāda Purī Mahārāja for *Gaura-pūrṇīmā*. Whatever it was previously, he would have probably put something more strict, because he was like that. But I don't know. that's the simple answer.

## Bhanu Swami

Śrīla Prabhupāda was not particular about fasting 24 hours on other days and it seems, as far as I remember, we even used to take grains at midnight on *Janmāṣṭamī* and moonrise on *Gaura-pūrṇīmā*. His instruction to fast till moonrise on *Rāma-navamī* (in a letter) may be a follow-up on the time of *anukalpa*. However, Rāma was born at noon according to *Gauḍīya-pañjikā* of Mayapur. So fasting till moonrise does not seem logical. In practice, Śrīla Prabhupāda had devotees celebrate the appearance at noon, and then feast on grains.

## Opening of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Temple on Rāma-navamī in Śrīla Prabhupāda's presence

### **From Daivī śakti devī dāsī:**

Yes, I was Śrīla Prabhupāda's cook during the festival. I cooked for him and added several preparations from the Deity kitchen too. But because of the festivities and the Governor's presence he took *prasādam* very late. I waited for him till about 2:00 and then gave up. The fast was broken at midday by all the devotees and guests, about 6,000 total. Śrīla Prabhupāda had them serve a grain feast.

### **From Vrindavan is my Home, the chapter entitled: The Grand Opening:**

Meanwhile, many of the best cooks in the world were busy in the Deity kitchen preparing the first *rāja-bhoga* offering. Śrīla Prabhupāda's sister sat on the kitchen floor in front of coal bucket stoves. She had several assistants, some of whom were cutting vegetables with a special knife that required both hands and feet to maneuver...

The foreign disciples were busy working at the kitchen countertops, making varieties of sweets, savories and other special preparations. Disciples such as Bhojadeva, Gopati, Sakhā and Apūrva were some of the main cooks who worked tirelessly, churning out varieties of offerings that would soon be offered to Their Lordships...

When the dressing was complete, the gigantic *bhoga* offering was brought onto the altars. A *pūjāri* at each of the three altars chanted mantras to the Deities, requesting Them to accept the offerings that has been lovingly prepared by the devotees. There were so many preparations that devotees continued to bring things to the altar up to the time of the *ārātrika*...

When the *ārātrika* was over, Śrīla Prabhupāda again blew the conchshell exultantly... Śrīla Prabhupāda then joined his guests and went to the courtyard to watch a drama performed by the Vaikuṅṭha Players from New York. After the play, the devotees who had been watching the play joined the Vaikuṅṭha Players in the courtyard and had a lively *kīrtana*.

Now it was time for the sumptuous feast for thousands of guests. People sat in rows inside the temple, outside the temple, and anywhere there was space, all the way to the street.

### **From Memories of Vṛndāvana, Smarahari Dāsa:**

So, when I went to speak to the cook, they were aware of what was happening. I said, "We are going to open our temple on *Rāma-navamī*, and Śrīla Prabhupāda wants to have a feast for 6,000 people, 6,000 invited guests." The man said, first question, "Will all of the 6,000 people have the same identical *prasādam*?" I said, "No. We will have 2,000 people that are the main dignitaries, and they will have the same *prasādam* plus special milk product things. There would be *rasagullā*, there would be *kacorī* as well as *samosā*, there would be sweet rice." He said, "OK, what do the 2,000 have?" I told him, I read the list He said, "What do the additional 4,000 have?" I told him the list, "There's *purīs*, two *subjis*, *samosā*, *kacorī*,

*laḍḍū.*" I told him exactly the list Śrīla Prabhupāda had wanted to give...So there was a big feast, and Śrīla Prabhupāda was very, very delighted.

### **From Transcendental Diary by Hari Sauri Dāsa:**

April 9th, 1976.

Today is *Rāma-navamī*, the appearance day of Lord Rāmacandra, and everyone fasted until 4:00 p.m.

(**Source:** Transcendental diary, Volume 1, November 1975-April 1976, TdD1-11, Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma, April 9, 1976)

### **From Rādhā Dāmodara Vilāsa:**

There is always sumptuous *prasādam* during the festival and especially after the installation ceremony. Unknown to the local residents, most of the cooks are Śrīla Prabhupāda's Western followers. There are many peacocks in the *Ramaṇa-retī* area and some of the American devotees who are making *capātīs* like to throw them little pieces of *capātī* dough.

**Apūrva:** I was one of the head cooks for the Vṛndāvana opening. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to cook an incredible menu and do seven offerings a day. The lunch offering was 25 preparations. We did a lot of cooking, so it was intense.

### **Interview with Pradyumna Dāsa**

I don't retain memories of observing *Rāma-navamī* with Śrīla Prabhupāda after so many years.

According to *śāstra* (see *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*), the appearances of *viṣṇu-tattva* are observed with total fasting until breaking fast on the following day. Those unable to complete the fast, are permitted to accept *anukalpa* or non-grain food when necessary during the observance of the *tithi*.

I compiled the official ISKCON calendar for many years, consulting the *Navadvīpa-pañjikā* as published by several *Gauḍīya Maṭha* institutions, as well as the Directory *Pañjikā* (published from Kolkata). Yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda strictly followed the date of holiday and *Ekādaśī* observance as given in the *Pañjikā*.

### **Nārāyaṇī devī dāsī's experience as a *pūjāri* in India during Śrīla Prabhupāda's time**

I was *pūjāri* at Calcutta and for *Rāma-navamī* we had half day fast and it was with grains. We only had two full fast days in a year: *Gaura-pūrṇīmā* and *Janmāṣṭamī*.

### **Interview with Purnaprajña Dāsa, another *pūjāri* at Calcutta temple during Śrīla Prabhupāda's time**

I don't remember being with Śrīla Prabhupāda on *Rāma-navamī*. I only can say that we never fasted all day, only to noon. And surely no *Ekādaśī* break fast.

# Interview with Śrīla Bhakti Prapanna Tīrtha Mahārāja

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## First interview

(note: Śrīla Bhakti Prapanna Tīrtha Mahārāja is a disciple of Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣak Śrīdhar Mahārāja, *sannyāsa* disciple of Śrīla Bhakti Sundar Govinda Mahārāja)

### **At what time is fasting broken on *Rāma-navamī* in your *saṅga*?**

Till noon, then full break fast including rice. Same on *Nityānanda-trayodaśī*, *Baladeva-pūrṇīmā*, *Rādhāṣṭamī*. Only on *Gaura-pūrṇīmā*, *Janmāṣṭamī*, and *Nṛsimha-chaturdaśī*, do they break fast (at moonrise, midnight, and dusk) with *anukalpa*.

### **Is the time of breaking fast on particular days related to anything in the *līlā*, such as the time of the Lord's appearance in that form?**

Rāmachandra, Baladeva, Rādhārānī, Nityānanda all appeared in the middle of the day (*madhyāhna*), and thus fasting is broken at noon.

### **To your knowledge, are there different standards in different *maṭhas* or temples in your *saṅga* regarding fasting, or is there a general standard?**

There is not a general standard, in some *maṭhas*, *anukalpa-prasāda* is prepared. Also, even in Śrī Caitanya Sārasvata Maṭha he sometimes prepares both, *prasāda* with and without grains, to accommodate people who come from other *maṭhas* and say they are doing *anukalpa* fast.

### **What is the history of the practices in your *saṅga*? Who established them, when?**

Would have to research what Śrīla Prabhupāda Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura used to do.

(He called again the next day.)

Śrīla Prabhupāda Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura once told Śrīla Bhakti Saraṅga Gosvāmī that since he was going to go out to do some service, he should eat full *prasāda*, not *anukalpa*. *utsavānte pāraṇa*: break fast at the end of the festival. On *Varāha-dvādaśī*, one must break fast since it's *Ekādaśī* the previous day. Then we follow: *arcanānte-pāraṇa*: break fast at the end of the Deity worship (i.e., offer *āratī* to Varāhadeva first). *Anukalpa* on *viṣṇu-tattva* days seems pretty standard, but various *guru-vargas* have made some concessions compared to that because otherwise there are too many festivals, seeing that we're not able to do them.

### **Please add any other information about fasting and breaking fast on *Rāma-navamī* or other *Viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days. What about *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*?**

In *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* are many things we cannot follow. We follow whatever our *guru-varga* did.

### **In many cases where they do *anukalpa*, is there a break fast time on the next day?**

Yes, I see that also in the *pañjikā*. There is no harm in doing more fasting and this is available for those who want to do so. For example, Although Śrīmatī Rādhārānī is *śakti-*

*tattva*, some people (even from Śrī Caitanya Maṭha) do more fasting on Rādhāṣṭamī, because a lot of benefit of this *vrata* has been described.

## Second Interview

Another friend of a SAC member also called to try to find out more of the history and reasons for their practice. Śrīla Bhakti Prapanna Tīrtha Mahārāj again confirmed that in Śrī Caitanya Sarasvata Maṭha they have a full fast till noon and then full feast with grains. The reason Mahārāja gave is that Rāma is an expansion of Baladeva and they have same procedure for *Baladeva-pūrṇīmā* and *Nityānanda-trayodaśī*. It's not clear if this was the system during Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja's times or was introduced later.

## Information from Gopīnātha Bābājī Mahārāja of Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha

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Gopīnātha Bābājī Mahārāja said that on *āvirbhāva* days, fasting is broken around the time of appearance. As far as he knows, the standard is the same everywhere: break fast with *anukalpa prasāda*. However, he says both Śrīla Bhakti Pramoda Purī Mahārāja and Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja sometimes allowed full-grain break fast, even on *Janmāṣṭamī*.

## Ambiguity and Flexibility in Fasting on the Appearance and Disappearance Days of the Ācāryas

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(Because of the ambiguity in fasting for *Rāma-navamī*, we bring up another example of ambiguity for reference)

For the appearance days of *ācāryas*, the *Gauḍīya* custom is to celebrate the appearance by commemoration speeches, and the offering of a feast to the *ācārya*. For convenience in *maṭhas*, this is usually done at noon. But as far as I know there is no injunction concerning that time. It could be observed in the morning, since most ISKCON temples have the main meal at that time. Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to bear this out in the following conversations, where even half-day fasting for Śrīla Bhaktivinoda's appearance becomes optional.

Morning walk, February 11, 1976, Mayapur:

**Devotee:** Fourteenth is the advent of or the demise of Haridāsa Ṭhākura?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes

**Devotee:** The death, I mean the disappearance

**Śrīla Prabhupāda:** Yes, but not for demise of Haridāsa Ṭhākura, but because that is *Ananta Caturdaśī Vratā*, the, generally the fasting is observed till evening, up to 5 o'clock. The next day, *Viśvarūpa-mahotsava*, feasting.

**Devotee:** On the 13th of September, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda's Appearance is there any special observance?

**Śrīla Prabhupāda:** No, special observance means to discuss about the life and works of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, that's all. Then 26th September, *Ekādaśī*.

Room conversation, Vṛndāvana, March 11, 1972:

**Tamāla Kṛṣṇa:** [break] ...on your appearance day and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Gaura Kīśora's we should observe half-day fast. I have a question that on all the other auspicious days, just like Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura and others, should we also observe half-day fast?

**Śrīla Prabhupāda:** It is... But if you cannot, that is another...

**Tamāla Kṛṣṇa:** Sometimes because of the *saṅkīrtana*...

**Śrīla Prabhupāda:** No, no. If you cannot, you can take.

**Tamāla Kṛṣṇa:** And just sing some songs and praise.

**Śrīla Prabhupāda:** Yes. Yes. *Kīrtana* is main thing.

(It is interesting to note that Śrīla Prabhupāda here mentioned fasting until sunset on *Ananta-caturdaśī*, which no one at present seems to be following.)

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## Fasting in General for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas

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Excerpt from a section from *Kāla-prakāśikā*, a standard book on *Muhūrta*, by an ancient traditional Śrī Vaiṣṇava which deals with how they observe *Janmāṣṭamī* and *Ekādaśī*: "To abstain from food and worship the Lord on the day of his incarnation, every year, subdues all sins. Having performed his daily ablutions, the devotee should stand in devotion before the image of the Lord, duly installed on a pedestal, and pronounce the following prayer— Oh! Lord of Lotus eyes! By solemn observance of the vow of fasting and of fixing my mind on Thee on this, the day of Thy incarnation, I thee adore. I break my fast next morning. Accept this humble token of my devotion, and give me Oh! Lord, Thy blessings divine."

Fasting in general is an individual choice. Since the system (*Prapattī*) of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas isn't dependent on such things (i.e. there is no *sādhana* requirements for *mokṣa*), there is no compulsory fasting. Many older more Orthodox Śrī Vaiṣṇavas do fast. But then again many do not fast at all. Fasting even for *Ekādaśīs* is considered as optional. Many people in South India observe fasting from whole, boiled rice on *Ekādaśī*. In *śāstra* sin is supposed to be in *annam* or boiled rice on *Ekādaśī*. Some avoid all rice. Some take items made from broken rice or rice flour like *idli*, *ḍosā*, etc. *Purīs* and *halavā* made of wheat are ok to eat on *Ekādaśī* for such persons. Those who are very orthodox and *sannyāsīs* do not eat anything.

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## Fasting in General for Followers of Madhvacarya

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For Madhvas at present fasting on *Ekādaśīs* is certainly more important than for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. That point probably is applicable to other fast days also. Madhva *sannyāsīs* eat once a day. On *Ekādaśīs* and other religious fast days they fast completely. Other Madhvas fast optionally. Many Madhvas do not eat rice or at least whole rice on *Ekādaśī*. Some might fast, but mostly eating wheat or other grains except whole, boiled rice is ok for them on



*Ekādaśīs*. Kṛṣṇa Maṭha in Udupi serves *prasādam* meals twice a day every day of the year except *Ekādaśīs* when they do not serve anything. Even the deities of devotees like Garuda, Hanuman, gurus in Madhva temples must fast on *Ekādaśīs*.

## Various Examples in ISKCON

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### Ukraine

In most temples, like Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Odessa and Lviv the festival for the guests and general public is practically always accompanied with a feast without restriction on grains. In the main ISKCON center in Ukraine, Kyiv, there are only two festivals a year during which an *Ekādaśī* feast is served - *Gaura-pūrṇīmā* and *Janmāṣṭamī*. Oftentimes (though not always) there is Jagannātha Miśra's festival on the next day after *Gaurapūrṇīmā* during which grain *prasādam* is served to everyone. However, the number of attendants is significantly lesser than on the actual day of *Gaura-pūrṇīmā*. A similar situation is on *Janmāṣṭamī* and Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Vyāsa-pūjā* - on *Janmāṣṭamī* there is a huge number of guests and visiting devotees, but significantly smaller number on the following day of *Nandotsava* and Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Vyāsa-pūjā*, during which full feast with grains is served.

### Belarus

In Belarus in all the temples and preaching centers *Rāma-navamī* festival is accompanied with fast until sunset and then the feast with grains is served both to the devotees and to the guests.

### Ljubljana

In Slovenia the main festival feast for both the public and all the devotees is usually sufficiently opulent but free from grains. The *mahā-prasādam* with grains is served during lunch on the next day, although varieties of non-*Ekādaśī* prasadam are available for purchase on the temple premises.

## *Viṣṇu-tattva* Appearance Days in General: Rationale for particular times to complete the fast

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In *vaiṣṇava* regulations one cannot eat until one has performed *pūjā*, as we have given evidence earlier in this paper. No strict *vaiṣṇava* in any *sampradāya* eats breakfast before doing daily worship of the Lord. This stricture is natural because all food we eat is offered to the Lord. So, one has to offer it as part of the worship ritual. Only after offering the food can one honor the remnants.

On an appearance day of the Lord in forms such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Narasimha, Caitanya, etc. has a time of day He is said to have appeared at. One can, of course, worship that deity any

time on any day. But we specially worship that form of the Lord on the particular anniversary day **and time**, that He appeared. It is therefore only natural that one would take *prasādam* **only** after that time. For example, Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared at midnight. How can one justify worshipping Him on His appearance day to celebrate that appearance date and time before midnight? Thus, His special appearance worship is concluded only after midnight, which is the time He appeared.

Nanda Mahārāja had the festival for Lord Kṛṣṇa’s birth the next day on *Nandotsava*. So, the feasting was then and this practice coincides with the idea of fasting a full day and breaking the fast the next day. But at the very least, a *vaiṣṇava* must wait till the Lord has appeared i.e. midnight. Normally *vaiṣṇavas* of all *sampradāyas*, if not fasting till the next day, will wait for the special worship of the Lord in that form to be concluded which means at His appearance time and then honor His *prasādam*.

So, after midnight for Kṛṣṇa, after dusk for Narasimha, after noon for Rāma, after dusk (upon the moonrise) for Lord Caitanya, we take *prasādam*. But the point is that one should not just sit around and wait for that time and then eat. One must worship the Lord in that particular form and then after worship one can honor the *prasādam* of that worship.

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## Conclusion

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### The Overall Ambiguity

#### *Śāstric statements and modern practice*

As explained earlier in this paper, according to *śāstra*, *viṣṇu-tattva* (and even *Śiva-rātrī*) appearance days have a full day of fasting, sunrise to sunrise. On *Ekādaśī* one has to fast for three nights, the night of *Daśamī*, the full day of *Ekādaśī* and after breaking the fast on *Dvādaśī* no other meal that day either. So, we modern day *vaiṣṇavas* are far from following *śāstric* fasting rules. We do not find Śrīla Prabhupāda giving such rules. Nor does he say or write that he has made a special adjustment in these *śāstric* rules just for his followers, because, as we have noted, these strict rules are not generally followed in Gauḍīya Maṭhas, or by other *Vaiṣṇava-sampradāyas*. We note that according to the interviews, in at least some Gauḍīya Maṭhas they complete the fast with either grains or *anukalpa*, but in either case they do a full fast until the appearance of the personality.

#### *Śrīla Prabhupāda's written statements, oral instructions, and practices*

Earlier in this paper, there is evidence of the fact that although Śrīla Prabhupāda would instruct in letters, lectures, and conversations to fast on *Rāma-navamī* until the evening, in practice he would tell devotees to serve a regular, grain feast at mid-day. Thus, adherence solely to his written and transcribed instructions would deprive us of fidelity to what he actually did. Furthermore, as both a fast until mid-day or evening is a reduction of the *śāstric* protocol, there seems to be flexibility in application of how long to fast. Also, even when he wrote about completing a vow (breaking the fast) on Gaura Pūrṇimā with only

*Ekādaśī* type *prasādam*, in practice he had full grain feasts as indicated earlier in this paper. Thus, there seems to be flexibility in application of what types of *prasādam* are suitable to take at the completion of the fast.

## Recommendation

### ***General principles:***

The length of the fast on *Rāma-navamī* (and similar *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days, such as *Balarāma-pūrṇīmā*) and the nature of the *prasādam* served (grains or *anukalpa*) should follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's mood. His mood is primarily that of preaching and engaging everyone in celebrating Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Our main times for large *sādhu-saṅga*, both of our ISKCON members and the general public, are on major festival days. The majority of those festival days are *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days. On those days Śrīla Prabhupāda would generally arrange for gorgeous worship, large *kīrtanas*, dramas, readings, classes, and so forth. He would also arrange for an opulent feast, served at a time related to the appearance of that *avatāra* and a time when people would attend. If we follow a program on *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days of fasting sunrise to sunrise, or if we serve austere (or very unusual) *prasādam*, we will be limited both in attracting the public and "to bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Kṛṣṇa, the prime entity." Because whatever local *brāhmaṇa* leaders and spiritual masters decide to offer the devotees and the public in terms of type of *prasādam* and time of fast completion (as long as the Lord is first worshiped when he appears) does not break a fast, thus both the strict injunctions of *śāstra* and application to time, place, and circumstance can be fulfilled.

### ***Our recommendation for ISKCON leaders:***

On *Rāma-navamī* and similar *viṣṇu-tattva* appearance days such as *Balarāma-pūrṇīmā*, we suggest fasting until the Lord is worshiped at the appearance time of the *avatāra*, if known. As explained earlier in this paper, Rāmacandra appeared at noon. If the appearance time is not known, fasting can be completed at noon or later, after a special worship of the Lord. The special worship can be the offering and *ārātrika* which are performed normally in that ISKCON center at that time, with worship of the particular *avatāra* who is appearing. If that *avatāra* is not normally on the altar, the *avatāra* can be worshiped through the main Deity or a visiting Deity of devotees in the area. Generally, additional or more opulent food preparations will be offered, and guests will be invited to participate. Such details are at the discretion of local leaders. The type of *prasādam* served to complete the fasting vow may be grains or *anukalpa*. Both the timing of completing the fast and the type of *prasādam* served should be based on what would most facilitate the enthusiastic participation of the local community of devotees and the maximum outreach effect regarding the general public.

### ***Our recommendations for ISKCON members:***

*Śāstra* (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 12.100) states that eating what our guru or *brāhmaṇas* offer us does not break a fast. Therefore, following Śrīla Prabhupāda's general orders to preach and the local leaders' considerations of time, place, and circumstances allows us both to fully fast according to *śāstra* and fully push on Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission according to time, place, and circumstances. The vow of fasting may be completed anytime after the worship

of Lord Rāmacandra at the time of his appearance at noon, and with the type of *prasādam* most conducive for one's service in Mahāprabhu's mission.

***Our recommendation for the Vaiṣṇava calendar:***

We suggest that the *Vaiṣṇava* calendars simply state:

Specifically for *Rāma-navamī*: "fasting until worship of the Lord is completed at the time of his appearance at noon, and according to the standards of local ISKCON authorities"

For any and all fast days where there is any flexibility according to Śrīla Prabhupāda's example: "fasting until worship of the Lord is completed at the time of His appearance, and according to the standards of local ISKCON authorities."

We conclude this paper with the following two prayers dedicated to Lord Rāmacandra and his devotees respectively:

*mantratas tantrataś chidraṁ*

*deśa-kālārha-vastutaḥ*

*sarvaṁ karoti niśchidram*

*anusaṅkīrtanaṁ tava*

**Translation:** There may be discrepancies in pronouncing the mantras and observing the regulative principles, and, moreover, there may be discrepancies in regard to time, place, person and paraphernalia. But when Your Lordship's holy name is chanted, everything becomes faultless. (*Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 8.23.16)

*dṛṣṭaṁ kim api loke 'smin*

*na nirdoṣaṁ na nirguṇam*

*āvṛṇudhvam ato doṣān*

*vivṛṇudhvaṁ guṇān budhāḥ*

**Translation:** There is nothing in this world without its faults or merits. Therefore, O intelligent souls! Cover up the faults and cultivate the merits in everything. (Concluding verse of *Subhāṣita-ratna-bhāṇḍāgāram*)