

Diwali

'Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya' - Lead me from darkness to light

- *The word Diwali is derived from the sanskrit word 'Deepavali' which means 'row of lights.'*
- *This festival is most commonly celebrated by the lighting of rows of 'deeps' or lamps, decorating houses with beautiful rangoli patterns, and magnificent displays of fireworks. Before there were street lights, being a new moon day, there was no light from the moon either. Therefore deeps were lit to brighten streets and villages. All the illumination and fireworks, joy and festivity, is to signify the victory of divine forces over those of wickedness. Light also signifies knowledge which is the remover of darkness or ignorance. If the spiritual message of Diwali is to be summed up in one line then it is best done by the following line from a well know prayer 'Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya' - Lead me from darkness to light.*
- *On this day, Lord Rama returned to the capital of his Kingdom Ayodhya, after an exile of 14 years, forced upon him by his step -mother Kaikeyi. He returned in triumph and glory after slaying the demon Ravana, hence the crackers and lights signify his victorious return and the triumph of good over evil. The people of Ayodhya, overwhelmed with joy, welcomed Rama through jubilation and illumination of the entire capital.*
- *Another example of the victory of righteousness is that of Shri Krishna. Narakaasura was a demon king ruling over the present-day Assam. His power made him conceited and he became a menace. The Gods pleaded with Sri Krishna who was at Dwaaraka (in the present-day Gujarat) to come to their rescue. Sri Krishna responded. He marched from the western end of the country to its eastern end, destroyed the huge army that opposed him, and finally beheaded Narakaasura. The people were freed from the oppressive tyranny and all heaved a sigh of relief. The 16,000 women kept in captivity by the demon king were freed.*

Diwali is in fact a five-day festival. Each of the 5 auspicious days of Deepavali is marked by a 'puja' of a certain deity and separated by different traditions.

- *The first day is Dhanteras. This is the sacred occasion for the worship of Maha Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.*
- *The second day is known as Chotti Diwali or Naraka Chaturdashi and reminds us of the victory of Shri Krishna over Narkaasura*



- *The third day is known as Chopda Pujan, where the great importance of books or knowledge that enrich our lives is recognised and remembered. It is from this day that businesses start their new accounting year, by first offering prayer to Lakshmi.*
- *The fourth day is called Padwa or Varshai Pratipada.*
- *The fifth day is known as Bhai Dooj, a day which symbolizes the bond of love between brothers and sisters.*

To the Jains, Deepaavali has an added significance to the great event of Mahaaveera attaining the eternal bliss of Nirvaana.

It was also on the day of Diwali that Sikh Guru Hargovindji reached Amritsar after his release from the imprisonment of Moghul ruler Jehangir.

Diwali brings in a certain element of happiness and special cheerful spirit amongst all communities. It is a festival with seasonal, religious and historical significance. It is a New Year day, a harvest festival day and a home-coming day.

At the time of Deepavali we should remember the great accomplishments of people in our past who have helped individuals and society to improve and progress. We must first light a deep in our own hearts to remove any 'darkness' such as ignorance, selfishness and other sinful attributes. Deepavali symbolises the victory of knowledge over ignorance and goodness over evil and our lives must be led in a way that reflects this message.