

Deepawali - Diwali



Deepawali (1)

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Dhanteras

The festival of Dhanteras acts as the harbinger heralding the approaching festival of Deepawali. On the day of Dhanteras people clean their houses and in the evening, after lighting lamps, conduct invocation prayers for invoking Goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth).

The scriptures mention the divinity called Dhanvantary emerging from the churning of the ocean with a container (kalash) filled with Amrit (drink that confers immortality). Hence the tradition of praying to Lord Yama (god of death) on this day to win his favours (for long life).

It is also believed that the main divinity of Ayur-Vignan (knowledge of life) called Dhnvantary first manifested on this day. Hence the importance attached to this day for the healing profession practising the disciplines of Vaidya (practitioners of Ayur-Veda). All over India, the Vaidyas organise joyful celebrations of the annual Dhanvantary festival.

Narak Chaturdashi

Narak Chaturdashi is also known as the small Deepawali. Lord Krishna, who is the bestower of beauty and good looks, is worshipped on this day. Lord Krishna killed the demon Narkasur on this day. It is believed that the observance of vrata (fasting etc) on this day paves the way to heaven.

It is customary to get up early in the morning, massage the body with a mixture of oil, flour and haldi (tumeric) before the daily bath. In the evening, tarpan (act of satisfying by offering oblations of water) is offered to Yamaraj (god of death).

Deepawali (The festival of lights)

Throughout the world all Hindus celebrate Deepawali with great pomp and enthusiasm. This is the great festival honouring Mother Lakshmi (goddess of wealth).

Deepawali - Diwali

The historic origins of some of the various Hindu festivals revolve around their special significance for each of the four castes. Sravan is primarily a festive month for the Brahmins (priests). Dassera (Vijay Dashmi) is a festival primarily for the Kshatriyas (warriors). Holi is a festival primarily for the Sudras and Deepawali is a festival primarily for the Vaisyas.

These distinctions are not rigid and generally all Hindus participate and celebrate all these festivals.

Deepawali (2)

Contribution by Swami Dikshananda Saraswati

Arya Samaj, Delhi, India

The following article was written on 17-10-1978.

Om asato ma sadgamaya,
Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya,
Mrityor ma amritam gamaya.

Lead us from falsehood to truth; from Darkness to light; from Death to immortality and from Lethargy to Activity.

The essential principle of Vedic culture is eternal, universal and is applicable to the past, present and the future. The alternate for the Vedic culture is Human culture or Universal culture. Where the aspects of human personality are fourfold: there are four goals of life (dharma, artha, kama & moksha); four Yogas (karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja-yoga and gnana yoga); four Vedas (Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Veda & Atharva Veda); four ashramas (Brahmacharyashrama, Grahasthashrama, Vanprasthashrama & Sanyasashrama); four Varnas (Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya & Sudra); four yugas (Krata yuga, Treta yuga, Dwapar yuga and Kali yuga).

There are also four universally observed parvas (festivals) namely Shravani Upakarma, Vijaydashami, Deepawali and Holi. Parva means a link that joins two things. It is that link on which the skeleton stands. The joints of a man's skeleton are, therefore, called parvas. It is with the help of these that an individual can stand, can sit, can bend and can lunge. Without these joints man would be stiff and not be able to make any movements. Likewise is the state of nations and societies, the framework of which is based on parvas (festivals). Without these parvas society would have collapsed a long time ago.

These four festivals commence with Upakarma (Raksha-bandhan) and end with Holi. The four festivals are associated with four different goddesses. Raksha-bandhan is associated with Goddess Saraswati (the goddess of education); Vijaydashami with Shakti (goddess of power); Holi with Prasannata (goddess of joy) and Deepawali is associated with Lakshmi (goddess of wealth).

Deepawali - Diwali

Raksha-bandhan or Shravani is directed at spiritual education, Vijaydashami at military education, Deepawali at economic education and Holi at cultural education of the masses. As long as humanity is not moved with inner satisfaction and joy so long there would exist defects in the imparting of spiritual, economic and cultural education.

According to Vedic culture the message of Asato ma sad gamaya (lead us from falsehood to Truth) through the parva of Shravani; of Mrityorma amritam gamaya (from death to immortality) through the parva of Vijaydashami; of Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya (from darkness to light) through the parva of Deepawali; and of Alasyatma shrama gamaya (from lethargy to activity) through the parva of Holi, is conveyed to the masses.

The message of Deepawali

According to the Vedic culture, the message of Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya (from darkness unto light) is given through the festival of Deepawali to all peoples of the world. During the night of Deepawali the myriads of little clay lamps (dias) seem to silently send forth Deepawali messages: Come let us remove darkness from the face of the earth. This is not the work to be done by one dia or by one individual. It requires collective effort. In the diffusion of light the question of high and low is forgotten. This is the lesson taught by both small and big dias.

The second message of the burning dias is to destroy the difference between rich and poor- the destruction of discrimination based on poverty and wealth. The burning dia, whether in a palatial bungalow or in a grass hut, is a symbol of this unity. The wall of separation based on economic status cannot prevent the penetration and spread of the light of the dia.

The third message of the burning dias of Deepawali is to kindle the extinguished lights of our neighbours. Let us find out what is needed- whether there is a shortage of wick or oil- and just by a little help the neighbour's lamps can be lit. One dia can light several others. A little charity can bring joy to countless others.

The row of lamps teaches yet another lesson and that is of unity as exemplified in Satyam, Shivam Sundaram- Truth, Joy and Beauty.

The lights of Deepawali are displayed at the entrance doors, by the walls of houses, in the streets and lanes. This means that the inner spiritual light of the individual must be reflected outside. Passersby may thereby be prevented from stumbling on their way to reach their destination.

The lights of the dias on earth beckon the lights in the firmaments to descend upon earth and establish the heavenly kingdom of God for the welfare of the human race. Feeding empty stomachs, lighting blown-out dias and providing cheer and joy amongst the downtrodden is to enter the true spirit of Deepawali. This is the true prayer to Lakshmi.

Deepawali - Diwali

Deepawali (3)

Based on an article by Shree Pandurang Shastry Athavle

By Shree Rajanikantbhai B. Master

Deepawali is a festival of lights celebrated with fanfare to fill the hearts with joy. Traditionally, the week of the deepawali celebrations coincides with other religious days.

It commences with:

1.Dhanteras, 2.Kali Chaudas, 3.Deepawali, 4.Navu-Varsha (new year), 5.Bhai-beej.

The significance of all these five religious' days, in short, is as follows:

DHAN TERAS

DHAN TERAS- This is a day on which Lakshmi-poojan (worship of the goddess of wealth) is performed. Sages gave to wealth the status of a holy mother. Wealth is popularly regarded as fickle. A person may well be wealthy today and could be dispossessed tomorrow. However, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth is not fickle. The fickleness lies in the human mind. The mental attitude of a wealthy person undergoes tremendous change. Wealth gives a feeling of power. When used properly, it can benefit humanity. If misused, it could become a means of exploitation and a cause of misery. If one regards wealth only as a means of personal enjoyment, human morality will deteriorate due to unbridled indulgence.

Rishis teach us to regard wealth as a pious gift from God and as such must be utilised with the utmost respect and discrimination.

The Rishis have further elaborated wealth into four categories:

1. A-LAKSHMI = misused wealth. 2.VITTA-LAKSHMI = selfishly used wealth. 3.LAKSHMI =charitably used wealth. 4.MAHA-LAKSHMI = wealth used for God`s work.

KALI CHAUDAS

KALI CHAUDAS. This day is allotted to the worship of MAHA-kALI or SHAKTI. Shakti is categorised as:

A-SHAKTI = power misused for persecution. 2.SHAKTI = power used for selfish purpose. 3.KALI = power used for protection. 4.MAHA-KALI =power used for God`s work.

2.Kali chaudas is also referred to as Narak-Chaturdashi.

There is legend about a king of Prag-Jyotishpur, named Narkasur. A powerful king who misused power to harass his subjects. Sri Krishna destroyed this devilish and oppressive king on this day.

Deepawali - Diwali

Unjustly imprisoned people celebrated their freedom with friends and family. The citizens celebrated deliverance from Narkasur's reign by lighting lamps.

NAVU VARSH (Vikram New Year)

This being the first day of a new calendar year (Vikram New Year). On this day new-year resolutions are made. Traditionally, people greet friends and relatives either personally or at the temples where a havan is ceremoniously performed. In these modern times, greetings and well-wishing about health, prosperity and happiness, are exchanged by e-mails, telephonically and by means of attractive and colourful Diwali-cards.

BHAI- DHUJ

BHAI DHUJ is a day on which all married sisters will invite their brothers for meals. The sisters will wish their brothers longevity, health, prosperity and happiness, thereby also renewing their affection.

Thus Deepawali must be understood in its wider context. The festival of lights does not simply mean lighting lamps. Hearts must be enlightened with goodwill for peaceful co-existence with fellow human beings and the rest of creation. Enlightenment (light of knowledge) leads to the dispelling of spiritual ignorance

Deepawali (4)

Swami Shivananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, wrote:

The illuminations and fireworks, joy and festivities, are to signify the victory of divine forces over those of wickedness. On Deepawali day, triumphant Sri Ram returned to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, the demon of Lanka. On Deepawali day, we celebrate the marriage of Goddess Lakshmi with Lord Vishnu.

On this day also Lord Krishna killed the demon Narkasur.

On Deepawali day, everyone forgets and forgives the wrongs done by others. There is an air of freedom, festivity and friendliness everywhere. This festival brings about unity. It instills charity in the hearts of the people.

In a happy mood of great rejoicing, village folks move about freely, mixing with one another, all enmity being forgotten. They embrace one another with love. Deepawali is a great unifying force. The holy vibrations produced by the greetings of love fill the atmosphere and are powerful enough to bring about a change of heart in every man and woman in the world.

On Deepawali day, merchants open their new account books and pray for success and prosperity during the coming year. The homes are cleaned and decorated by day and illuminated at night.

Deepawali - Diwali

During Deepawali festival is celebrated the Govardhan Puja signifying the Govardhan episode in Sri Krishn`s life, and also anna koot (heap of grains and foods) conveying affluence and prosperity; and feeding the poor on a large scale.

Deepavali--- The festival of lights (5)

The light reflected in the individual mind is the soul. The light reflected in the cosmic mind is the universal spirit. The microcosm and the macrocosm. Beyond both the individual and the cosmic is the one light of infinite spirit beyond name and form. The infinite consciousness is beyond all form and beyond all personality. This is the ultimate Reality.

For the ultimate Reality of infinite inner Consciousness, the best symbol is light. The light of lights, the self-luminous inner light of the self is ever shining steadily in the chamber of your heart. Sit still, close the eyes, withdraw the senses. Fix the mind on this Supreme light and enjoy the real Deepavali, by attaining inner illumination. Wake up from the slumber of ignorance through meditation and self-inquiry. Realise the constant and eternal light of the soul.

"The self is self-luminous being pure Consciousness. The cognition of all objects arises from the light of pure Consciousness." -Bhadaranyaka Upanishad

May we attain perfect inner illumination. May the Supreme light of lights enlighten our understanding. May we attain the inexhaustible spiritual wealth of the eternal, all-pervading Self. May we all prosper gloriously on the material as well as on the spiritual planes.