

Diwali – festival of lights

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Diwali (also spelled Devali in certain regions) or Deepavali,[1] popularly known as the "festival of lights", is an important five-day festival in Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism, occurring between mid-October and mid-November. For Hindus, Diwali is one of the most important festivals of the year and is celebrated in families by performing traditional activities together in their homes. Deepavali is an official holiday in India,[2] Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, Malaysia, Singapore,[3] and Fiji. The name "Diwali" is a contraction of "Deepavali" (Sanskrit: दीपावली

दीपावली), which translates into "row of lamps". [4] Diwali involves the lighting of small clay lamps (diyas or dipas) in Sanskrit: दीपा) filled with oil to signify the triumph of good over evil. During Diwali, all the celebrants wear new clothes and share sweets and snacks with family members and friends. Most Indian business communities begin the financial year on the first day of Diwali. Diwali commemorates the return of Lord Rama, along with Sita and Lakshman, from his fourteen-year-long exile and vanquishing the demon-king Ravana.

In joyous celebration of the return of their king, the people of Ayodhya, the Capital of Rama, illuminated the kingdom with earthen diyas (oil lamps) and burst firecrackers. [5] In Jainism, Diwali marks the attainment of moksha or nirvana by Mahavira in 527 BC. [6][7] In Sikhism, Deepavali commemorates the return of Guru Har Gobind Ji to Amritsar after freeing 52 Hindu kings imprisoned in Fort Gwalior by defeating Emperor Jahangir; the people lit candles and diyas to celebrate his

return. This is the reason Sikhs also refer to Deepavali as Bandi Chhorh Divas, " the day of release of detainees".

The festival starts with Dhanteras on which most Indian business communities begin their financial year. The second day of the festival, Naraka Chaturdasi, marks the vanquishing of the demon Naraka by Lord Krishna and his wife Satyabhama. Amavasya, the third day of Deepawali, marks the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth in her most benevolent mood, fulfilling the wishes of her devotees. Amavasya also tells the story of Lord Vishnu, who in his dwarf incarnation vanquished the Bali, and banished him to Patala.

It is on the fourth day of Deepawali, Kartika Shudda Padyami, that Bali went to patala and took the reins of his new kingdom in there. The fifth day is referred to as Yama Dvitiya (also called Bhai Dooj), and on this day sisters invite their brothers to their homes. -----

Spiritual significance In each legend, myth and story of Deepawali lies the significance of the victory of good over evil; and it is with each Deepawali and the lights that illuminate our homes and hearts, that this simple truth finds new reason and hope.

From darkness into light — the light that empowers us to commit ourselves to good deeds, that which brings us closer to divinity. During Diwali, lights illuminate every corner of India and the scent of incense sticks hangs in the air, mingled with the sounds of fire-crackers, joy, togetherness and hope. Diwali is celebrated around the globe. Outside India, it is more than a Hindu festival, it's a celebration of South-Asian identities. 5] While Deepavali is popularly known as the " festival of lights", the most significant spiritual

meaning is " the awareness of the inner light". Central to Hindu philosophy is the assertion that there is something beyond the physical body and mind which is pure, infinite, and eternal, called the Atman. The celebration of Deepavali as the " victory of good over evil", refers to the light of higher knowledge dispelling all ignorance, the ignorance that masks one's true nature, not as the body, but as the unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent reality.

With this awakening comes compassion and the awareness of the oneness of all things (higher knowledge). This brings ananda (joy or peace). Just as we celebrate the birth of our physical being, Deepavali is the celebration of this Inner Light. While the story behind Deepavali and the manner of celebration varies from region to region (festive fireworks, worship, lights, sharing of sweets), the essence is the same - to rejoice in the Inner Light (Atman) or the underlying Reality of all things (Brahman).