



Diwali - Festival of Lights



What is Diwali?

Diwali or Deepavali (also known as the *festival of lights*) is one of the most celebrated Hindu festivals in India and around the world. The festival gets its name from the Sanskrit word *Deepavali*, which means row (*avali*) of clay lamps (*deeps*) or "row of lights". People light the clay lamps all around the house. Diwali is the *festival of lights*, celebrating the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.

When is Diwali?

Diwali celebrations last for five days and are based on the Hindu lunar calendar. The exact date of Diwali varies from year to year, but it usually falls between October and November each year.

Why do we celebrate Diwali?

1. In northern parts of India Diwali is celebrated to commemorate the return of King Rama, to Ayodhya along with his brother Laxmana and wife Sita after spending 14 years in exile. This joyous occasion marks their victory over the demon king Ravana of Lanka.

2. In Southern India Diwali is celebrated as the day when Lord Krishna triumphed over the demon Narakasura.

3. In western India this festival signifies the day when Lord Vishnu, one of the main gods in Hindu mythology sent King Bali to rule over the netherworld.

Diwali represents a triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge, over ignorance.

Diwali is celebrated over five days

Diwali, a festival celebrated over five days holds significance in ways;

1. Dhanteras:

Dhanteras, also known as "Dhanatrayodashi " is a day dedicated to the worship of wealth and prosperity. It is believed that on this day Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and Lord Dhanvantari, the god of health emerged during the oceans churning. To invite prosperity into their homes people clean their houses. Purchase utensils or gold/silver items.

2. Choti Diwali (Narak Chaturdashi):

Choti Diwali or Narak Chaturdashi marks the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon Narakasura. This triumph signifies the victory of good, over evil. Emphasizes the significance of light. Lighting lamps or diyas is a practice to symbolically dispel darkness and negativity.

3. Main Diwali Day (Lakshmi Puja):

The main celebration day is considered auspicious for worshipping Goddess Lakshmi. Families come together dressed in their attire for rituals like puja (worship) aarti (devotional songs) and prayers to seek prosperity and well being, from Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha. This joyful occasion is often followed by a feast mesmerizing fireworks displays and other festivities.

4. Govardhan Puja:

Also known as Annakut or Govardhan Puja; this day holds importance in Diwali celebrations. This day is an occasion to honor Lord Krishnas act of lifting the Govardhan Hill to protect the villagers, from rain and flooding. It emphasizes the significance of nature and the importance of eco conservation. People. Offer a variety of vegetarian dishes and sweets as offerings to Lord Krishna.

5. Bhaiya Dooj:

On the day known as Bhaiya Dooj we celebrate the bond between siblings. Bhai Dooj is a celebration that symbolizes love, protection and the strong relationship, between brothers and sisters. It is said that on this day Lord Yama visited his sister Yami, who applied a tilak (vermilion mark) on his forehead and served him a meal. Sisters apply tikka on their brothers foreheads and perform aarti (an involving light). Brothers express their love and protection by giving gifts to their sisters as tokens of affection

How is Diwali celebrated?

The way Diwali is celebrated can vary depending on the region and community. There are traditions associated with Diwali but here are some of the most common ones;

1) Cleaning:

Its a customary practice to thoroughly clean ones home, on the first day of the festival. This is done to welcome the goddess Lakshmi as it is believed that she only visits houses.

2) Decorating the house:

Many people decorate their homes with rangoli designs garlands and flowers as a part of Diwali celebrations. Decoration serves as a way to bring light and color into homes while inviting blessings from Lakshmi.

3) New attire:

Wearing clothes and exchanging them as gifts is an aspect of Diwali that symbolizes new beginnings. Its also believed that new clothes bring fortune and prosperity to those who wear them.

4) Lighting diyas:

One of the iconic customs during Diwali involves lighting diyas (oil lamps) and candles, representing the triumph of light over darkness.

5) Puja:

Puja refers to a worship ritual where offerings such, as flowers, fruits and sweets are presented to honor Hindu deities. During the festival of Diwali individuals engage in the ritual

of performing puja to seek blessings from deities such, as Lakshmi for wealth and prosperity.

6) Feasting:

Food holds significance during Diwali as families prepare delicacies and sweets to relish during the joyous occasion. Amongst the array of delights mithai stands out as a popular choice. These delightful Indian sweets are made from a combination of sugar, flour, milk and nuts.

7) Fireworks:

Fireworks form a part of the festivities with people coming to witness their colorful displays. Lighting up the sky with fireworks symbolizes the triumph of light, over darkness. Is believed to ward off forces.

8) Exchanging gifts:

Traditional Diwali customs involve exchanging gifts with loved ones. Popular gift options include Ganesh coins, jewelry pieces, dried fruits and idols.