

HAPPY Diwali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS



Diwali is a time to celebrate and to rejoice, a time of sharing, of being with family and friends and a time to fill not only the empty stomachs but, especially, the empty hearts and spirits.



Festivals like Diwali, Eid and Christmas, serve to remind and to restore, the meaning and purpose of our lives. Without them our lives would be less colourful.

Diwali is the most popular festival celebrated by Indians all over the world. Diwali occurs during the 'dark half' fortnight of Ashvin, which usually falls in October or November. The word Diwali is the evolution of the Sanskrit word 'Deepawali', literally meaning a row of lights ('deep' - lights and 'avail' - a row). The earliest scriptural mention of Diwali is thought to be present in the Jain scripture Harivamsha Purana by Acharya Jinasena. The festival is not mentioned specifically in any of the major Hindu scriptures such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which has given rise to the speculation that Diwali was initially a Jain festival and afterwards embraced by Hindus as a festival of their own.

Diwali is a time for tradition and celebration. It is a festival of joy, splendour, brightness and happiness. The festival also symbolises an integral facet of Indian culture which teaches us to vanquish ignorance that subdues humanity and to drive away the darkness that engulfs the light of knowledge. In this modern world, Diwali is a timely reminder for us all to uphold the true values of life.



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During Diwali, different communities will kindle innumerable lamps to immortalise the sacred memories of those great men who lived to brighten the lives of millions of their fellow beings.

Sikhs celebrate Diwali to mark the day when Guru Hargobind Sahib was freed by the Mogul Emperor along with 52 Princes. Nowadays, the Golden Temple is illuminated with myriad of lights as part of the festival.

Many of us will be familiar with the story of Rama and Sita. The examples set by Rama and Sita on how we should live our lives - the importance of duty to others, to be good citizens are very relevant in this day and age. Some Hindus celebrate Diwali to mark the homecoming of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile in the forest and Rama victory over Ravana. The people of Ayodhya welcomed them by lighting Divas all over the streets. They also spring cleaned their homes and decorated the outside of their homes with colourful rangolis. For Hindus today, the story of Rama's victory over Ravana is a celebration of the victory of good over evil.

Diwali, for us Jains, is the celebration of Bhagwan Mahavir's attainment of Moksha. Mahavir lived as a light, a beacon of inspiration, a blessing to all. Diwali is the time for self reflection when the light shines inwards as well as outwards. On this occasion of Diwali, let us reflect on Bhagwan Mahavir's life and teachings and review our behaviour accordingly. Like Bhagwan Mahavir, let us nurture that light within ourselves so that we can share more knowledge and show greater affection, love and compassion for all creatures and our environment and distribute sweetness to all through our sweet thoughts, speech, deeds and actions. In doing so, we will celebrate the festival of Diwali in its true sense.



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We as Jains celebrate Diwali, because Bhagwan Mahavir attained Nirvana on this day. Mahavir lived a life of absolute truthfulness and chastity, a life of perfect honesty, a life full of love and compassion. During the forty two years of his ascetic life, Mahavir preached his message of Ahimsa to millions of people. At the age of seventy two, he came to Pavapuri, in Bihar, Northern India and in the month of Ashvin he observed Chaudviha Apvas (fast without taking food or water) for two days and delivered his last and longest sermon - Uttaradhyayan Sutra - lasting forty eight hours. At the time of Bhagwan Mahavir's nirvana there were eighteen kings of Northern India present and they decided that the light of knowledge that was extinguished with the passing of Bhagwan Mahavir would be kept alive symbolically by the lighting of lamps. It is since then the festival of light - Diwali - has been observed by Jains.



The light of Mahavir's knowledge cannot be kept alive by just lighting up the lamps. Mahavir said that you have to kindle the light within you first. Diwali serves to remind us to illuminate our minds, body and soul so as to eliminate the darkness of ignorance, greed, jealousy, lust, anger, ego and sloth. Lighting the lamps should remind us to light the lamp of love and compassion within our hearts. This is what Bhagwan Mahavir did.



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- As a traditional Diwali lamp needs clay bowl, ghee, cotton and lighter or match stick, our inner lamp needs right faith, right knowledge, right conduct and right tap (austerities). As the external lamp needs oxygen, our internal lamp needs self effort as exemplified by Mahavir's life.
- Lamps gives light which is a symbol of Gyan (true spiritual knowledge). This knowledge is a lasting inner wealth by which all outer achievements can be accomplished. Lakshmi (wealth) increases only in the environment of knowledge and light, where intentions and motives are clear and full of wisdom. Therefore we light lamps to bow down to spiritual knowledge as the greatest of all forms of wealth.
- The wick represents our kashays – inner passions such as anger, greed, ego, deceit and all other negative tendencies. The wick starts to burn when the lamp is lit. Symbolically we can destroy our inner passions by lighting the flame of Samyak Darshan – Right Faith
- The flame of lamp always burns upwards. This reminds us to seek spiritual upliftment.
- A single lamp can light hundreds more without lessening its own brilliance. Similarly, one self realised soul – Mahavir - can bring about same qualities and experience of the Soul, in another



For Jains, the Divas or Lamps are of great significance



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New Year



Indrabhuti Gautamswami

Lord Mahavir's chief disciple, Indrabhuti Gautamswami had great attachment and affection for Mahavir and this proved to be an obstacle in his attaining absolute knowledge (Kevalgyan). On the day when Mahavir was to attend nirvana. Mahavir sent him to preach to a Brahmin in a nearby village. On his return journey he learned that Mahavir had attained nirvana and reached the Moksha. He was grief stricken and went on lamenting and started weeping. Then all of sudden he realised the folly and futility of it - maybe this was destined to happen this way. No one can live for ever; no relationship is permanent. Why was I so attached to Mahavir?. And at that very moment he attained absolute knowledge. This occasion is celebrated by Jains on New Years day.



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JAIN DIWALI AND NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Visit Derasar

Some fast for two days on Kali Chaudash and Amas. Some also fast for three days including the New Year day, the real wish being that the whole coming year may be filled with realistic Dharma, intellectual serenity and equanimity.

Recitation on Diwali Day - Perform 20 malas mediating on each line on every bead (108 beads in one mala)

Before Midnight

'Mahavir Swami Sarvagnaay Namah'

From Midnight to 4.00AM

'Mahavir Swami Paarangataay Namah'

From 4.00AM

'Gautam Swami Sarvagnaay Namah'

New Year - Listen with devotion Nav Smaran which is nine stotras in the memory of Bhagwan Mahavir's nirvana. Also listen to the auspicious Raasa (epical poem) of Gautam Swami and also spend some time to reflect and learn from Gautam Swami's life and devotion to Bhagwan Mahavir.

New Year Day is also when we greet each other and convey our best wishes for the ensuing year.



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To every end there is a new beginning. Hence Diwali is an auspicious time, the confluence of the old and new. It is a time to close off old business accounts and to open new ones; a metaphor for checking the accounts of the soul, to map the future and fix a "budget" for our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Occasions such as these inspire enthusiasm and newness in our lives, and it is only in this state of joy that we can think of resolutions and bring about sincere transformation. Try changing habits in a state of sorrow and it is difficult, but when the soul is healthy and happy then one can move mountains and illuminate the forgotten kingdom of the self.



With the beginning of a New Year,
Let our hearts be filled with love,
Let our eyes see only good,
Let our ears hear good about others and us,
Let our mouths speak in praise of our friends,
Let our hands do good for mankind
May this New Year be filled with love for all,
May this New Year bring Happiness, Good Health
and Prosperity to share with all



May the light of Diwali last for you throughout the coming year

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