

Diwali

The Most Popular
Hindu Festival



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What is Diwali?

- Diwali, which simply means a “Row of Lights”, is a celebration of the triumph of light over darkness and *Satya* (truth) over *Asatya* (untruth).
- Looking historically, Diwali is a celebration to mark the return of Shree Rama along with Devi Sita and Shree Laxmana to Ayodhya after completing fourteen years in exile and defeating Ravana of Lanka.



Ayodhya Ghat

Ayodhya Ghat, in the city of Ayodhya, India, is decorated every year to mark the return of Shree Rama with a record-breaking number of *diyas* (oil lamps).



410,000 *diyas* lit in 2019 | 584,000 *diyas* lit in 2020



This Shloka (verse) illustrates the meaning of Diwali.
It is from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,
authored by Sage Yajnavalkya, and is part of the Yajurveda

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय ।

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।

मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Asato Maa Sad-Gamaya |

Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya |

Mrtyor-Maa Amrtam Gamaya |

Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih

Meaning (line by line):

- 1: Om, (O Supreme Being) keep me **not** in (the phenomenal world of) **Unreality**, but **make me go** towards the **Reality** (of Eternal Self),
- 2: Keep me **not** in (the ignorant state of) **Darkness**, but **make me go** towards the **Light** (of spiritual knowledge),
- 3: Keep me **not** in (the world of) **Mortality**, but **make me go** towards the world of **Immortality** (of Self-realization),
- 4: Om, **Peace, Peace, Peace.**



- Diwali unites the diverse traditions across Hinduism into a single focal point - lighting of the *diyas* and celebrating the victory of righteousness over unrighteousness.
- Besides Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Newar Buddhists also celebrate Diwali.
- The main day of the festival of Diwali (the day of Lakshmi Puja) is an official holiday in Fiji, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.



Diwali at the
Golden Temple in
Amritsar, India

Historical Records

- Many stories surround the origins of Diwali; it is connected to harvest festivals in India.
- Earliest mentions can be found in Sanskrit texts in the second half of the 1st millennium CE, symbolizing the parts of the sun as the cosmic giver of light.
- Through the years, travelers such as Al Biruni, Domingo Paes, and Niccolo de Conti, have all described the Diwali over different time periods in different parts of India.





The Five Days of Diwali



For many Hindus, the Diwali festival is a five-day event

Day 1 - Dhanteras

Day 2 - Naraka Chaturdasi

Day 3 - Laxmi Puja

Day 4 - Govardhan Puja

Day 5 - Bhai Dooj

By celebrating Diwali, we not only remember the glorious history and life of Shree Rama, Devi Sita, and Shree Laxmana but we reflect on the ideals and principles of righteousness and the pursuit of knowledge and strive for the welfare of society and all existence.

Day 1: Dhanatrayodashi (Dhanteras)

Dhanvantari - the *Vaidya* (physician) to the gods - came out of the *Samudra Manthan* (churning of the ocean) with *Amrut* (nectar of immortality).



On this day, wealth is worshipped. In parts of India, it is time to reap the fruits of the last harvest. New purchases are also made, stimulating the local economy. Community gatherings also connect people with the festive spirit.

Day 2: Naraka Chaturdasi

Also known as “Choti Diwali” (small Diwali) and marks the day the evil king Narakasura was killed by Shree Krishna and Satyabhama, releasing 16,000 captive women.

Different regions of India celebrate it in different ways:

- In Goa, effigies of Narakasura are burned.
- In West Bengal, it is believed that on this day souls of the deceased visit their relatives on earth.
- In some communities, people have a special bath (Abhayanga Snan) and wear new clothes to commemorate Shree Krishna’s victory.
- It is also the day that weapons (both literal and metaphoric) are celebrated.



Day 3: Lakshmi Puja

- The main day of Diwali festival is the Lakshmi Puja – offering devotional services to the Goddess of wealth and prosperity.
- It falls on *Amavasya* - the new moon night of darkness.
- It is believed that Lakshmi visits her devotees and blesses them with wealth.



Hindus clean their homes, and wear new clothes to welcome Her. Devotees observe the Lakshmi Vrat (a vow or fast). In business communities, this day marks the end of the year, and old accounts are balanced and closed.

Day 4: Gau/Govardhan Puja

- Fourth day, of Diwali, when Shree Krishna saves the village of Vrindavan by lifting the Govardhan mountain.
- It marks the victory of Krishna over Indra, benevolence over jealousy and greed.
- Devotees offer a mountain of food, called the *Annakoot*.
- It is a day of charity, with donations made in the form of food.
- It is an ecologically focused celebration, where Hindus plant trees and tend to animals.
- It is the day for Gau Puja – devotional services to the sacred cow.



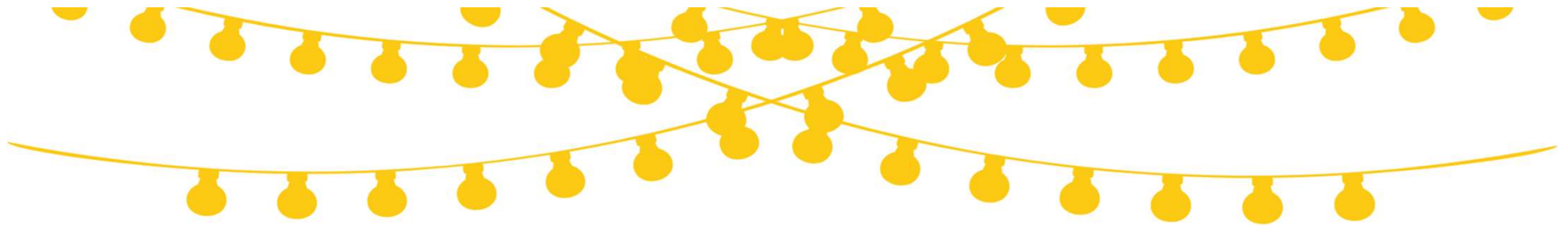
Day 4: Other Celebrations

- **Bali Pratipada** - This is the day the King Mahabali returns to earth to meet his subjects. According to the Puranas, in His Vamana Avatar, Vishnu pushes Bali to the netherworld to punish him for his pride. This festival is ancient with written records dating back to the 2nd century BCE.
- **Nutan Varsha (New Year)** - In Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, this is the start of the Vikram Samvat (Hindu calendar) and is also a regional public holiday usually observed on the day after the festival of Diwali.
- **Vishwakarma Puja** - Artists, mechanics, craftsmen, factory workers, shopkeepers and others worship Vishwakarma, the divine architect. He is said to have designed both the cities of Dwarka and Indraprastha in the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*.

Day 5: Bhai Dooj

- “Brother’s Day” which is the fifth day of Diwali and celebrates the bond between siblings.
- A story about the Yama, the Hindu god of death and righteousness, and his sister Yamuna, is associated with this day.
- Traditionally, on this day, sisters invite their brothers for a lavish meal and perform a *Tilak* ceremony.
- Sisters pray for their brother’s long and happy life while brothers give gifts to their sisters and promise to protect them and stand by them.





Diwali in Other Parts of the World

- Wherever Hindus live, Diwali is celebrated with *diyas*, sweets, firecrackers and various religious and culture ceremonies.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the largest Diwali celebration outside of India is held in Divali Nagar.
- In **Thailand**, Diwali is celebrated as Loi Krathong, with fireworks and boat parades.
- In **Indonesia**, Balinese hindus release lanterns, light *diyas* and burst fireworks.
- In the **US, Canada, UK, Australia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Mauritius, Singapore** and all countries with a large Hindu diaspora, Diwali is an important event.



Diwali Celebration
in Trinidad and
Tobago



Diwali Celebration in Thailand



Diwali
Celebration in
Bali



Diwali Celebrations in New York City

Nepali Diwali: Tihar

In Nepal, Diwali is known as Tihar or Swanti.

Like Diwali, Tihar is celebrated by lighting *diyas*, and includes honoring of the four animals associated with Yama, the god of death and righteousness.

1. The first day of Tihar is called *Kaag* (crow) Tihar.
2. The second day is called *Kukur* (dog) Tihar, also called *Khicha Puja* by the Newars.
3. The morning of the third day is called *Gai* (cow) Tihar.
4. The fourth day of Tihar is *Calleja*, where the ox is honored and celebrated.
5. The fifth and last day of Tihar is called *Bhai Tika* or *Kija Puja* in Nepal Bhasa, celebrated like *Bhai Dooj*.





How To Celebrate Diwali:

1. Clean your home and decorate it with *rangoli (kolam)*, flowers, etc.
2. Perform a *Puja* and discuss the significance of Diwali.
3. Observe the five days of Diwali.
4. Have a Diwali gathering in your community (subject to COVID restrictions).
5. Burst crackers (subject to local restrictions) and light *diyas*.
6. Pay respect to your parents and elders.
7. Enjoy sweets and exchange gifts!



Lighting of the Diya

Lighting a *diya* is an important part of Diwali and the *Puja* as it signifies purity, goodness, good luck and power.





Rangoli (Kolam)

- A *rangoli* or *kolam* is a beautiful, intricate pattern drawn inside or outside homes.
- Either powdered calcite and limestone, or rice and other grains are used for these designs.
- The *rangoli* or *kolam* represents the **happiness, positivity and liveliness of a household**, and is intended to welcome Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, prosperity and good luck.
- A *rangoli* or *kolam* may also contain important Hindu symbols such as Aum and Swastika (a symbol of well-being and prosperity).



Annakuta/Rajbhog (Food)

Diwali is a time when families get together and prepare delicious sweets (*mithai*) and savory snacks.

A wide variation of dishes are prepared during this time, depending on traditions from various regions of India, as well as in individual households.

Some food is first offered to the Divine before being consumed.

Diwali is the perfect time to cook delicious food and share with

loved ones!



Fireworks

- Depending on local restrictions the community gets together and celebrates the return of Shree Rama by bursting fireworks.
- Lighting fireworks are another way to ward off negativity and enhance the festive mood.



Cards & Board Games

In some communities, Diwali is celebrated by playing card games and board games between family and friends.

There is a story in the Puranas about how Goddess Parvati played dice with Shiva, and decreed that whoever played on this night will prosper throughout the year.

Diwali is a great time to let loose!





May Diwali fill your life with the
sparkle of joy!

Happy Diwali



For additional resources, visit
<https://cohna.org/diwali>