

Diwali: the festival of lights. The name of this ancient tradition comes from the Sanskrit word dipavali, meaning row of lights and nowadays to celebrate it, houses and shops are decorated with rows of small earthenware oil lamps called diyas, the sky is lit with millions of fireworks and the air buzzes with the excitement of vivacious people. It falls on the darkest moonless night on the fifteenth day in the lunar month of Kartik.

It is said that Dipavali is the only day in the year when the goddess Lakshmi comes down to earth and people welcome her into their houses to bring them an auspicious start to the new business year. Probably one of the most famous Diwali legends is that of lord Rama and Sita, who were the prince and princess of Ayodhya who, after being banished for fourteen years, returned from exile having killed the evil demon Ravana. The devoted people of Ayodhya lit diyas outside their houses to guide them back and gladly receive them.

At the heart of Diwali lies the significance of the triumph of good over evil, as lord Rama defeats ravana. However if we look deeper into the meaning of Diwali it tells another story. This story refers to the light of higher knowledge shining so brightly that it dispels all ignorance that masks one's true nature. It stems from the idea that there is something pure and infinite beyond the physical body and called 'atman'; in English it is the same idea as the soul and it is central to Hindu philosophy. With this awakening comes compassion and the awareness of life and higher knowledge.

Regardless of the many legends and spiritual truths Diwali enlightenments us with, what the festival of lights really stands for today is a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a rapturous celebration of the simple joys of life. This colourful festival thus assumes immense importance for the people of India. Diwali is eagerly awaited by both young and old as it is the time for family celebrations, fireworks and fun. Happy Diwali!