

Diwali



What is Diwali?



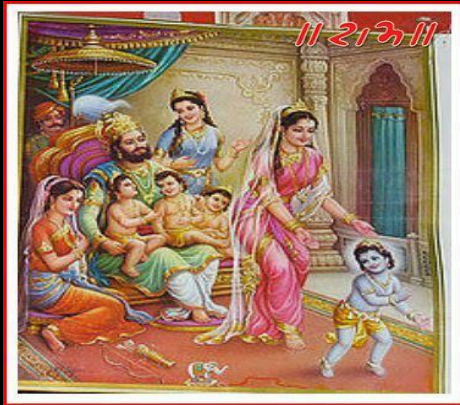
As India's largest and most important holiday of the year, Diwali is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and some Buddhists.



Diwali comes from the Sanskrit word Deepavali, which means rows of lighted lamps.



Hindu Celebration History of Diwali



According to the epic story of Ramayana, a king named Dasharatha ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya with his three queens and four sons. The first queen gave birth to Lord Ram, the second queen gave birth to Bharat and the youngest queen gave birth to twins named Lakshaman and Shatrughan.



The four brothers were very fond of each other. After completing their education, Ram married Sita, the oldest daughter of king Janaka, the ruler of Mithila.

Ram and Sita were incarnation of Lord Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

The Two Boons



Ram and Sita were admired by the people of Ayodhya. After Ram's marriage, the king decided to retire and give the kingdom to Ram. However, the second queen, Kaikeyi, wanted her son Bharat to be the king.

Kaikeyi, a great soldier, had saved her husband's life in a battle. The king was pleased with her bravery and promised her any two wishes.

On the day of Ram's coronation, Kaikeyi demanded her two wishes. First wish was that her son Bharat to become the king and her second wish was to exile Ram to the jungles of India for 14 years.



Ram's Exile



Dasharatha was heart broken and couldn't ask Ram to leave. But Ram knew that his father could never break a promise and decided to leave the kingdom. Sita and Ram's younger brother Lakshman also decided to accompany Ram.

After Ram, Sita and Lakshman went to the jungles, Dasharatha couldn't bear to lose his beloved son and died of heart attack.



Sita and Ravan



Ram, Sita and Lakshman spent 13 peaceful years in the jungle. Ravan, a very powerful ten headed demon king heard about Sita's beauty and wanted to marry her. One day, when Ram and Lakshman were in the woods, Ravan kidnapped Sita.

Sita cried for her help, but whoever came to help was killed by Ravan. Sita took her jewelry off and threw it in the woods in hopes that Ram would be able to track her.



Where is Sita?



Ram was devastated to learn about Sita's kidnapping and started searching for her everywhere. He ran into Hanuman, a devotee of Ram and a monkey warrior. He introduced Ram to the army of monkeys and promised him that he would help him find Sita.

Hanuman searched for Sita and finally found her across the ocean in Ravan's kingdom, Lanka.

Ram, Lakshman and Hanuman's army crossed the ocean to battle with Ravan.

Battle with Ravan



Ram and Ravan fought a fierce battle with bow and arrows for nearly seven days. According to the story, when Ram sent the deadly arrow toward Ravan, he recognized that Ram was Lord Vishnu, the creator, and begged for forgiveness for his sins.



Ram and Sita were reunited, and their 14 years of exile were complete. It took 20 days for them to return to Ayodhya.



Ram returns to Ayodhya with Sita and Lakshman



The people of Ayodhya were thrilled to have their king return. They celebrated his return by lighting oil lamps throughout the kingdom. They sang and danced as they welcomed their beloved king.



To remember this epic story, every year people burn effigies of Ravan which are stuffed with firecrackers. This day is called Dussehra and is celebrated 20 days before Diwali.

Sikhs celebrate Diwali



In 1619, India was under the rule of Mughal emperor Jhanghir. He was known to ask for unjust demands from his people. However, Guru Hargobind, the sixth profit of the Sikhs, refused to comply with his demands. Jhanghir arrested the 14 years old Guru and imprisoned him in the Gwalior Fort. During his imprisonment, he found out that the emperor had wrongfully captured 52 princes from the near by kingdoms. When the emperor decided to free the Guru, he demanded that he would only leave with the 52 princes. The emperor told the Guru that whoever could grab on to his robe would be freed. The Guru made a special robe with 50 strings. On the day of Diwali, the Guru walked out with 50 princes holding one string each while the other two princes held on to the sides of his robe.

Diwali celebration



Every region of India has its own unique way of celebrating Diwali, but it is agreed that it is a day of triumph of good over evil.

The Golden Temple of Sikhs is known for its spectacular display of fireworks. Recently, the temple switched to more eco-friendly fireworks to protect our environment.



People perform rituals based on their own traditions and religious beliefs.