



“Deepavali - The Festival of Lights”

A Reflection

**“Which else shall beautify a home
But the flame of a lovely lamp.
Which else shall adorn the mind
But the Light of Wisdom deep,”**

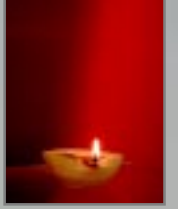
This beautiful verse glorifies the lovely lamps of Deepavali, the festival of lights. Dancing amidst the row of lamps, these mysteriously beautiful little lights, proclaim our inherent and deep-seated wish to be free from the path of darkness, misery and evil. When the lamps are lit on the dark 'new moon' night, the entire place becomes enchantingly beautiful with the innumerable lights brightening every home. They remind us that our essential nature is Light. This makes Deepavali especially relevant in the trouble-torn world of today as a festival that represents hope, promise and renewal to humanity.

The festival

Deepavali falls on the 14th day of the dark half of *Aippasi* (the 7th month in the Hindu *Almanac*), when astrological calculations predict the moon to be in the lunar mansion of *Swati* (a star). It is a time for rejoicing and the festival of lights conjures up in every Hindu mind, however young or old, man or woman, a vision of lights, rituals, baths, prayers and festivities.

Tokens of love are exchanged among members of the family and new cloths are worn.

It marks the commencement of a new financial year business among some Indian communities, normally done by invoking spiritual prayers for Goddess Lakshimi to ensure prosperity.



Lovely lamps are lit and members of the family visit temples with offerings of flowers, fruits, silk, incense etc. These community gatherings at temples convey deeper meanings - of friendship and love, humility and enlightenment, caring and sharing thereby ushering in peace, unity and compassion. This is expressed in the last hymn on Peace and Unity in the Rig Veda -

“Let your aim be one and single; let your heart be joined in one;

The mind at rest in unison, at peace with all, so may you be,”

Peace and love go together while hatred and violence are disturbing conditions that breed fanaticism. As the ancient sages said,

“What ever you love, you are its master; what ever you hate, you are its slave.”

Its significance

Deepavali is a very auspicious occasion where the darkness of ignorance and evil is illuminated by the Light of Knowledge. The yearning prayer of the Vedic sages, - “*Tamasomaa jyotir gamaya,*” (Through the Light of Knowledge, lead us, O Lord, from darkness unto light’), - was, for a life more beautiful and an existence more spiritual. The Light of Knowledge is enshrined in man’s heart; it is the *Deepam* (the Light) that symbolises *Atma Jyoti* (flame or light of the soul). This deep-seated Light is unfortunately concealed in layers of ignorance that one has accumulated over various births. The Light must be brought out in order to drive away darkness and ignorance. It is then that the Vedic Rishi’s prayer for the Light of Eternal Bliss - “*Mrityormaa amritam gamaya,*” (Lead me from death to Eternal Bliss, O Lord,) - becomes a reality.