

DIWALI FESTIVAL SPECIAL

Diwali embodies the principle of happiness

By Ryuko Hira

Honorary President of the Indian Merchants Association of Yokohama

During economic exchanges in the 10th year of the Taisho era—1921—the Zaidan Hojin Indian Merchants Association of Yokohama was established, followed by the Indian Chamber of Commerce Japan in Osaka in 1937. Our association commemorates its 88th year, for which we express our gratitude to Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and Empress, the Japanese government and people for having extended their support and cooperation over the years, especially during the Great Kanto and Hanshin earthquakes.



Ryuko Hira

Indian festivals are inextricably intertwined with spirituality. Festivals, birthdays and anniversaries are celebrated to mark our victory over the lower self. Festivals mark the time and seasons of our own spiritual progress. The higher self allows us to understand that all festivals benefit all of humanity. Each festival symbolizes some spiritual aspects and spurs mankind's spiritual march in life with full faith and confidence for the higher evolution of the self.

Happy Diwali is a universal greeting to celebrate the Festival of Lights. From the very name of the *Dipawali festival*, it can be seen that the divine effulgence is manifested. *Dipawali* means the array of lights. *Tamaso maa Jyotirgamaya* (Lead me from darkness to light), is an Upanishadic prayer. This means that where there is darkness, light is needed.

What is this darkness? Sorrow is one form of darkness. Lack of peace is another. Loss is another. Disappointment is one form of darkness. Lack of enthusiasm is another. To get rid of the darkness of sorrow, you have to light the lamp of happiness. To dispel the darkness of disease, you have to install the light of health. To get rid of darkness of losses and failures, you have to usher in the light of prosperity.

When we inquire into the significance of the Dipawali festival, we find that traditionally it is a joyous festival to celebrate the destruction of the demon Narakasura by Sri Krishna. The inner meaning is that man, within his body, is forgetting the light, Atma-jyoti (spiritual light) in him.

When Narakasura was destroyed—that is to say, when six foes of man—desire, anger, greed, attachment, lust and jealousy, which drag him toward a fall, are overpowered—then the flame of wisdom can shine clear and bright. It is in order to demonstrate this, on Dipawali day, lamps (Dipas) are lit and arranged in every house, dispelling darkness, which is the home of evil and vice. Each of us has to fight and destroy the demonic forces within each by Sathya (truth). "*Sathyameva Jayate*" (Truth alone tri-



Dance and music shows featuring Indian folk dance in Diwali 2008

Courtesy of the Executive Committee of Diwali in Yokohama

umphs). "*Speak the truth*" is a Vedic injunction which is the national motto of India.

Dipawali must be observed as the day for eliminating all the bad qualities in us, as symbolized by the demon Narakasura. Good qualities should be manifested effulgently. This is the inner significance of the festival. As long as the demonic qualities remain, the person will be immersed in darkness. Bad qualities and thoughts have to be gotten rid of altogether. Our festivals and holy days should be observed in the right spirit, with an understanding of their deeper significance. The destruction of Narakasura symbolizes the destruction of evil and restoration of what is good.

Let the lamp illuminate every minute of your life. The splendor of light will drive away darkness from outside you as well as inside you.

Dipawali is intended to give you the lesson of light and love. Move out, clasp, spread, expand, give up limits of mine and thine, his and theirs, caste and creed, in one limitless flow of love. That is the culmination of all fes-

tivals. We should celebrate Dipawali not by feasting and by exploding crackers to disturb the peace of neighborhood, but by silent lighting of lamps and by silent service to the needy through love.

Celebration across the prefectures of Japan and most cities of the world has made Diwali a universal principle transcending religions and nationalities.

Six decades of peace have substantially contributed to globalization of cultures where Madras Coffee and Italian Cappuccino blend in the Japanese cuisine.

Divine inspiration illuminates human wisdom to overcome borders and boundaries. Expansion and adoption of cultures through festivals widens horizons. A poem from the holy sage Sri Sathya Sai Baba says:

*Beings are many, Breath is one;
Nations are many, Earth is one;
Stars are many, Sky is one;
Lamps are many, Light is one.*

May the shining lamps of happy Diwali illuminate every reader.



The "World of Light Illumination" conducted with candles by festival participants in Diwali 2008

Courtesy of the Executive Committee of Diwali in Yokohama

Diwali in Yokohama 2009

Dates: Oct. 17 (Sat.) and 18 (Sun.)—10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Venue: Yamashita Park Omatsuri-hiroba (Yamashitacho, Yokohama)

Admission: Free

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Diwali Festa Program

- Opening Ceremony: "Diwali festival" that celebrates the Indian New Year is held at the opening ceremony.
- India Diwali Bazaar: A market area for Indian food such as curry and tandoori chicken, as well as Indian handicraft and decorations
- Dance & Music Stage featuring Indian folk dance
- "World of Light-Illumination" conducted with candles by participants