

The Shreyas Art of Living

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi

Namaste, Happy Diwali and Happy New Year! The festivities of Diwali are behind us and we are getting ready for the celebrations surrounding the western holiday season and New Year. In the last article you read about the purpose and the role of a Guru as delineated in the Vedas. With the guidance from a spiritual guide, the Guru, one can stay identified with their true Dharma, which, in turn, keeps them as close as possible to the 'light' of awareness and away from the 'darkness' of ignorance.

In this article we will look at the significance of 'Diwali' and the symbols surrounding it. Let's discover how this festival celebrates the highest form of 'Shreyas' in the quest for 'light.'

Diwali is also known by the name Deepavali, which literally means a row of light. The celebration has association with many historical events tying it to many cultures from both northern and southern parts of India. In the most popular versions of stories associated with Diwali, the celebration is said to mark the return of Lord Ram from his 14 years of exile in the forest. The end of his exile is marked by his victory over Raavan, the 10 headed evil king of Lanka. As a gesture of welcome, the inhabitants of the town are said to have gathered in a row along the path of Lord Rama's return holding lamps called 'Diya' or 'deepak' in their hands. This row of light is often signified in the literal meaning of Deepavali.

The light that emanates from the 'Diya' or 'Divo' is fueled by oil and burning on a wick. Traditionally, everyone in the community lights these lamps during the five-day festival. They dress-up in new clothes, visit the temples and relatives' homes, eat sweets and light firecrackers at night. The third day is the last day of the year and the fourth day marks the beginning of the New Year. The last, and fifth, day is meant for celebrating the brother-sister relationship.

This oil lit lamp holds direct significance to the same 'light' that you have been reading about in these articles. Each part of the lamp also has a symbolic meaning. The vessel holding the oil is symbolic of our mind. If you take a closer look at how life takes place, you will see good and bad in life being born from the workings of individual minds. The mind derives its thoughts, feelings and actions directly from our inner desires. The oil represents these inner desires. It is these desires that motivate our decisions and actions in life. All the thoughts and actions we perform usually give us a sense of being the 'performer' of these actions. This sense of being the performer creates a sense of 'me' and 'mine.' We call this sense our 'ego.' The wick, which burns using the oil, is one's ego. The ego is also known as 'ahem.' This is one's sense of 'me' and 'mine' that one develops as a child and accumulates throughout life.

In fact, if you think about the story of Ram's victory over Raavan, there is a direct symbolism. Raavan has 10 heads. Most of us have one head and it doesn't take much to get it 'full of hot air' or 'get it up in the clouds.' Imagine having 10 heads and being a king. You are set for a life-long ego-trip. It is this ego that Lord Ram has conquered in his victory over Raavan. This is what Diwali can inspire each of us to pursue.

This sense of 'me-mine,' which we call the ego, is what keeps us deeply buried in ignorance. The wick can easily get submerged in

the oil (the desires) and the light (awareness of true self) can get swallowed into the oil. Or, one can choose to keep the ego burning and producing light. That is, keep rejecting the sense of 'me-mine' to keep the wick above the oil level. This allows the wick, representing the ego, to keep burning. This burning away of the sense of 'me-mine' is what gives off light. This light symbolizes the awareness that we have been discussing as the highest form of 'Shreyas.'

Does that sound deeply thought out and meaningful to the purpose of life? Imagine living your life with this awareness actively intertwined in every aspect of your daily thoughts and actions. How purposefully aligned would you feel? How creative and passionate would you become? Now, imagine everyone in your family living their life in the same manner. How harmonious would your family life feel? And then, imagine a community, a town, or a city, made of families that conducted their lives with this awareness. How different would that community look? How different would everyone feel? What kind of civilization would that create? It behooves one to imagine this. All this significance can be created from a seemingly insignificant, simple, little lamp that we light at Diwali.

If you realize the symbolism contained in this Vedic tradition, you must feel inspired. And, you must also be wondering how, in our busy lives, can we remember the significance of this little light in our day-to-day life? Well, the simplest way to do so is to light one of these 'Diya' in your own home. You can do this once daily to keep your awareness and knowledge brightly lit, floating above the oil and burning away the egotistic desires. You may even want to consider taking on a new year's resolution to do so.

Daily lighting of a lamp can keep this awareness in your mind. This awareness will shape your daily thoughts and actions. These thoughts and actions will not only guide you to your best life but also provide your family with the inspiration to do the same. This awareness in every member of your family will spread the light to those that they encounter in their day-to-day life. The light, being ignited in individuals of a community, is the true significance of Diwali. Each individual, affected by this light, carries the light inside them and spreads it to others. That's how you get a row of lights, as envisioned in the Vedic tradition. Let's acknowledge the light in ourselves. Let's keep it alive and allow it to be the beacon for others. Namaste.

Dr Trivedi is a psychiatrist who treats children and adults. Please visit www.mindbodyintegrated.com for more information and wellness resources.