

From: "The Interfaith Chaplaincy" Brandeis University
Subject: A Message from the Interfaith Chaplaincy

DIWALI

Diwali is a significant festival in Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism. In a multi cultural and diverse country like India, everyone has their own way of celebrating this festival. Even though their belief in it may be different, the enthusiasm, vivaciousness and joy it brings to our lives is what binds us all together. It is celebrated as the festival of lights, during which we all decorate our homes with candles. Diwali projects the rich and glorious past and teaches us to uphold the true values of life.

For the Hindus, it symbolizes the return of Prince Rama of Ayodhya with his wife, Sita, and brother, Lakshman, from a 14 year-long exile and a war in which Prince Rama stood victorious. People of Ayodhya lit lamps along the way to light their path in the darkness. To the Jains, it has a whole different meaning. For them, Diwali is the day when the last of the Jain Tirthankaras, Lord Mahavira, attained nirvana, also known as complete knowledge and enlightenment. Lord Mahavira established the dharma followed by the Jains worldwide. For the Sikhs, it is a story of the struggle for freedom. A king tried to make Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, eat meat while the Guru was fasting. Guru Nanak refused to do what the king demanded. Soon, there were people outside the palace who had gathered around with lanterns, candles ,and torches and protested to set Guru Nanak free. The King released the Guru. And as a mark of victory of their struggle, the Sikhs celebrate Diwali.

Diwali is celebrated with worship, sharing sweets, fireworks and lights. While the story varies from region to region, its essence remains the same. We learn to rejoice in the inner light and the underlying reality of things.

***This document was prepared at the request of the Interfaith Chaplaincy by Neelanjana Gupta who is a member of Namaskar, a religious club for Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs.**