

Festival of Lights to Illuminate Your Heart

By CHAITANYA CHARAN DAS

The aesthetically appealing Diwali illumination dates back to many millennia when the jubilant citizens of Ayodhya welcomed Rama back to their city after his exile. The Ramayana describes how, following Rama's exile due to the machinations of Kaikeyi, Ayodhya became like a ghost city. All its citizens were plunged into sorrow of separation from Rama for 14 long years. When Rama finally returned, they spontaneously celebrated the joyful reunion by illuminating their homes.

Ayodhya is likened to our hearts and Rama is the supreme object of our love and devotion. Due to misconceptions, we, too, have exiled the Lord from our hearts. Just as Ayodhya became a ghost town when Rama departed from our hearts, too, tend to become ghostly with anxiety, boredom, loneliness, depression, stress, prejudice, envy, anger and hatred, filling our lives with emptiness and lament.

There is one important difference between us and the citizens of Rama's Ayodhya. Rama's people knew clearly that their grief was due to separation from the Lord. We, however, are often slow to recognise the cause of our malaise. We try to hide the existential emptiness of our life by accelerating our pursuit of wealth, enjoyment, entertainment, fame, power and position. But these are illusory substitutes for the love of God and at best offer only flickering titillation, not lasting fulfilment. Consequently, we remain unfulfilled and disappointed.

Diwali is not just the lighting of lamps, it signifies the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya. Our celebration of Diwali will remain incomplete if we continue to restrict ourselves to lighting lamps.

How can we welcome the Lord back into our hearts and experience the essence of Diwali?

Lord Rama provides answers in the Ramayana through His instructions, which inform us of our actual identity and purpose. We are all eternal spiritual beings, belonging to the kingdom of God, where we eternally enthrone the Lord as the king of our hearts and rejoice in selfless loving exchanges with Him. When we exile the Lord from our hearts, we exile ourselves from that world of endless love and come to the mortal world, where we identify ourselves with temporary material bodies. Carried away by spiritual amnesia, we play illusory roles and pursue illusory goals, but get only disappointment and distress.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Though we exile Him and forget the Lord, He never forgets us and never actually leaves us. He just becomes unmanifest to our vision; He continues to accompany and guide us through all our adventures and misadventures in this world, eagerly waiting for us to invite Him back to our hearts. By cultivating knowledge from the sacred scriptures about the Lord and His love for us and reviving our dormant love for Him by chanting His holy names, we can invite Him back to our hearts.

Therefore, while lighting the earthen lamps this Diwali, let us also light our hearts with divine wisdom and love. This will enable us to live life fully, achieving a state of tranquil contentment, illuminated by the eternal light of Divine love. The festival of lights symbolises the lighting up of our inner consciousness towards realisation of the Divinity that lies dormant within our hearts.

visit us at: www.radhagopinath.com