

Spiritual Riches

Bidding prayers for religions on their major festivals



Diwali

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Hinduism

The Hindu festival of Diwali is celebrated during a five-day period. It is one of the most important festivals of the year for Hindus, but is also celebrated, for different reasons, by the Jain, Sikh and Buddhist communities.

Bidding Prayer

As Hindus in the UK, and worldwide, prepare to celebrate Diwali over the course of the coming week, we pray for them, and for all of us, that we may be a source of light in a world full of darkness.

For Newsletters

Although traditions vary, the occasions that are celebrated on each day of Diwali, the festival of light, centre on the victory of good over evil, and light over darkness. The third day of Diwali, the main festival, is dedicated to the goddess of wealth and prosperity, Lakshmi. There are roughly 550,000 Hindus in Great Britain, over half of whom live in London.

Background

Hindus tend to believe in one Supreme Being with many manifestations, and a cycle of rebirths experienced by each individual. The name Diwali means “row of lights”, as lamps are lit every day of Diwali. These lamps recall the welcome that, according to Hindu belief, was given to the just kings Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, both of whom are believed to be incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Lamps were lit when the former returned to his realm after 14 years of exile, and after Lord Krishna had gained victory over the demon Narahasur,

which is celebrated on the second day of Diwali. Other days celebrate the return of five royal, and divine, brothers, the Pandavas, from exile. Houses are also cleaned, decorated and lit to make the goddess Lakshmi welcome in them, and traditional patterns, rangoli, as well as little footsteps are drawn in the entrance area to signify the expectation of her coming.

Light also has a spiritual meaning – on the first day of Diwali, when it is traditional to buy gold, silver, and household goods, a wife is celebrated who saved her dying husband's life by confusing the god of death by lighting candles and surrounding him with glittering coins and jewellery. In addition to this victory of light and life over death, Hindus believe that each being has an inner light, atman, the true self which shines in every individual, and Diwali is a celebration of this, too.

The fourth day of the festival is dedicated to the relationship between husband and wife, and the fifth to the one between brothers and sisters, on which prayers are said for each other, and presents exchanged. Fireworks and fire crackers are also associated with Diwali.

Hinduism is an ancient religion (some say the oldest of all) which encompasses a wide range of beliefs, but most Hindus believe in a Supreme Being who is revered and appears in different forms, leading to the common misconception that Hinduism has many gods. Hindus also believe that living a good and compassionate life will, in time, release them from the cycle of re-birth. These beliefs are based on the ancient scriptures of Hinduism, the Vedas. Many of their sentences and phrases (mantras) are repeated prayerfully to the present day.

These leaflets offer suggestions for bidding prayers at the major festivals of non-Christian religions, along with a short text of explanation for use in parish newsletters, and some background information. In acknowledging these festivals, and praying for those who celebrate them, Catholics can express their connectedness to all people of faith, as well as the respect which the Church holds for their spiritual wealth.