

The Ramayana's lessons for Diwali



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The festival of lights teaches many lessons that continue to hold true today through the descriptive narrations of its legends

The wisdom of my grandmother struck me very hard when something drastically odd happened to me at age 31. Every night during my childhood, she would recite the story of the Ramayana to put me to sleep. These bedtime stories became my lifeline.

This initial seed got nourished as I delved into an intense study of the epic, and grew into a huge tree by the time I turned 30. I had studied the Ramayana thoroughly and had developed a desire to write it in an authentic, yet a modern way.

This prompted me on a journey to write a six-volume series called Ramayana, The Game Of Life. Along with a gripping narrative of the story, I have tried to pen down hundreds of life lessons that can be profitably inculcated in life.

From here, several lessons related to the grand festival of Diwali can be learnt from the story. Different people perceive life's jubilations differently. An upcoming festival is a joy to most and a relief to many. Those who focus

on new clothes, sweets, fun and frolic perceive it as a joy. Those who focus on the freedom it gives you from the burden of work – since a festival also means a holiday – look at it as relief. What does a festival herald for you?

Most people choose to float on the ritual of the festival rather than delve into its essence. They celebrate festivals with mechanical enthusiasm rather than essence-based awareness. The question shouldn't be 'Have we enjoyed the festival', rather it should be 'Have we been upgraded by the festival'. Rather than thinking how we have celebrated the festival, we should be asking whether we have contemplated during the festival.

Interestingly, almost every festival in the world is born to commemorate the sacrifice of some divine personality. Janmashtami is as much a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of Vasudev and Devaki as it is to celebrate the birth of Krsna.

Diwali is as much a festival to celebrate the spirit of sacrifice of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Sita

as it is a festival of lights to celebrate their return to Ayodhya. Christmas is as much a festival to celebrate the spirit of sacrifice of Christ as much as it is a festival to celebrate his birth.

Dussehra is a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of Vibhishan as much as it is to celebrate the victory of Rama over Ravana. Independence Day is a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of the martyrs as much as it is to celebrate freedom from domination.

The question is: if someone's hard work and sacrifice is celebrated as a festival now, what should our role in it be? Do these dates on the calendar mark one's freedom from the burden of work or do they actually mark opportunities to achieve freedom from selfishness; to dilute it by our frivolousness or uphold its sanctity by genuine appreciation and active gratitude?

Not being in sync with the mood of the festival is like going to a funeral not to contemplate about the good qualities of the departed, but to use it as a networking opportunity.

EPIC MUSINGS

When a festival is celebrated, it brings smiles of joy but when contemplated, it brings tears of gratitude. Celebration with contemplation uplifts, sobers, inspires, empowers and infuses us with the mood of respect and sacrifice. When a festival is celebrated, money is spent, but when contemplated, blessings are earned!

Let the festival of Diwali usher these six sparklers into your life:

● **Determination:** Rama's struggle of 14 years reveals his determination to instill the right value systems in the hearts of Ayodhya's citizens. Though wronged, he still followed his father's – the king's – orders even though it was completely absurd. He wanted to show the citizens of Ayodhya what it meant to be an ideal follower before becoming an ideal leader.

Even though so many tried to undo his decision, Rama was determined to demonstrate the right conduct of an ideal follower. Ramrajya was built on a foundation of 'won't power' (resisting the wrong) in addition to 'will power' (embracing the right).

● **Illumination:** The lights in every nook and corner of Ayodhya indicated a promise by the citizens that decisions would not be taken during emotional darkness but in the light of knowledge and clarity. The decision to banish Rama and crown Bharata was taken not just in the darkness of the night but also in the dark environment created by Keikeyi under Manthara's influence. While Ayodhya slept, that dark plot was hatched. When Rama returned to Ayodhya in the flying chariot, the city was lit up to indicate that the light of knowledge would now prevail and no more would decisions be taken in the emotional darkness of life.

● **Winning Tip:** By his actions, Bharata showed that winning hearts was more important than winning thrones. The game of life is more important than the game of the throne. Relationships must be prioritised over 'resource-ships'. Bharata was given the throne of Ayodhya on a golden platter. With his

father's death and no knowledge of his brother's whereabouts, he could have easily said that he had no option but to reluctantly accept the throne which needed a king that could protect it. Instead, Bharata chose the tough path of trying to find Rama and the even tougher path of trying to convince him to return to Ayodhya. Bharata prioritised his relationship with his brother over an opulent kingdom.

● **Accommodation:** When Rama was returning, he borrowed Vibhishan's *pushpak vimana* to traverse the huge distance to Ayodhya in one night. Rama invited all the male monkeys to join him. Sensing his desire, the flying chariot expanded to accommodate them. When they reached the vicinity of Kishkinda, Sita said it was only fair that the female monkeys be allowed to witness the coronation ceremony in Ayodhya too. Naturally, Rama agreed, and the flying chariot expanded further to accommodate them. So far, Ravana had used it only for solo pleasure rides but Rama was accommodating so many in it. Every time more people entered, the chariot expanded to create more

space. The ability to accommodate all kinds of people in our lives comes from the desire to accommodate.

● **Letting go:** Rama did not tolerate any insult to Keikeyi and made sure that no one referred to the past even subtly and sarcastically. He decided to let go off the past and gave her more attention and love than ever before. Letting go off others' lapses is the best way to constantly remind them of it.

● **Indebtedness:** During the coronation, Rama noticed that Sita was crying. He requested her to reveal the cause of her sorrow, and she revealed that the red powder thrown in the air as part of the celebrations reminded her of Jatayu's blood, shed when Ravana cut his wings. In remembrance of this sacrifice, Sita shed tears. She reminded Rama that behind their success were the sacrifices of so many heroes. Be grateful while celebrating, knowing that your success is due to the sacrifices of many.

Diwali means being determined to illuminate our lives by understanding that you win by accommodating others and by letting go of their lapses while being indebted for contributions of many. ■

