

DIPAVALI – THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

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Various occasions which come annually, periodically, monthly and daily are what we call the Vratas, of which one is the Dipavali Vrata which we are observing today.

There is a story. Once upon a time, thousands of years ago, there was a demon called Narakasura. He was a very fierce, demonical element. Nobody could face him. He overthrew the gods themselves in the heavens. Mother Earth was crying, "What sort of being is this Narakasura?" She wept. The gods entreated Mahavishnu, "Will you save us from this terror, Narakasura?" "Well, in due time everything shall be done," was the dignified answer of Bhagavan Mahavishnu.

Well, it took so many years for him to take action. By that time, this demon had swallowed so many people. I don't know why God takes so much time. He always takes a long, long time to do a thing – very slow action, but very powerful. He will immediately pound the man when he comes into his grips – but is very slow. We cannot understand why it appears that God works so slowly. He gave such a long rope to that terror called Ravana. Of course, God came as Rama and destroyed him. But why not destroy him on the first day

itself? The moment he's born, finish him. [laughter from audience] He won't do that. He must torture so many people, kill so many Brahmins, destroy so many temples, murder poor fellows, carry away Sita, then God will do something, and not before that. This is a peculiarity of God. Whatever it is, we can't question Him. [laughter from audience] So we have to bear with it. So here also He took a long, long time and said, "I will do it when I incarnate Myself as Krishna."

Krishna Avatara did so many miracles, wonderful deeds. One of these deeds was the encounter with Narakasura.

Lord Krishna had many queens – Rukmini, Satyabhama, and others. Satyabhama was a very special type of queen – very ostentatious, showy, a little egoistic and assertive in nature, contrary to Rukmini, the principal queen, who was very calm, mild, unostentatious, never asserting herself in anything. One day, Narada brought a fragrant flower from the heaven of the gods. It's called parijata – a very fragrant, white flower. And it was brought to Dwarka, to the palace of Lord Krishna. Satyabhama saw it. "Oh, what is this? From where have you got this flower?"

"It is not from anywhere in this world," replied Narada. "It is only in the heaven of the gods."

"Oh, I must have this flower growing in my garden!" cried Satyabhama. Krishna said, "What is this foolishness? How can you have it? It is not anywhere in the world itself; it is only in the heaven of the gods. What good is it saying 'I want it'? You cannot have it."

"No," she said. "I must have it. You must get it!" See how wives pester their husbands. [laughter from audience] "You must get it for me!" Krishna said, "I cannot get it. It is not anywhere in the world. It is only in the heaven of the gods."

"I don't know anything," she said. "You must get it." "All right, I shall try," relented Krishna. What to do? She wouldn't allow him to sleep. So he said, "The only way is to go to heaven and ask Indra if he can give a branch of a parijata tree, and I'll plant it in your garden."

“Okay, let us go. I will also come with you. If he doesn’t agree, I’ll importunate,” she said. So she also followed Krishna to the heaven of the god Indra. Indraloka was reached. Well, there is a long story of Sri Krishna’s encounter with Indra; there was a tug of war, and he refused to give it, and finally in the battle Indra was defeated and Krishna snatched a tree of parijata. “Oh, wonderful!” said Satyabhama, who was so happy. And they got set to return to their palace. While returning, Krishna observed that this lady has become very proud. “So much she pestered me for this parijata, and now she thinks there is nobody equal to her in the three worlds because of the possession of this. I must teach her a lesson.”

Krishna came through Pragjyotishapura. Pragjyotishapura is now modern-day Assam. And there Narakasura is supposed to have been ruling. The moment they descended, this gentleman Narakasura geared up for war. Sri Krishna said to Satyabhama, “I don’t know how to face this gentleman. Your parijata, everything, will be finished here itself. He will kill us.”

“No, you don’t bother. I will see to it,” Satyabhama said. She asked Krishna to be charioteer, while she herself would fight. “All right, you can see to it,” Agreed Krishna. And then the demon with a huge army attacked Satyabhama from all sides. She started perspiring, and it was impossible to face him. Then the lady said, “I don’t know what to do! You please look into this. I cannot handle this, because that man is coming with a huge army and I am alone. What is this! You are teasing me like this?” Krishna said, “I knew this already. Now, don’t talk, just take over the reins of the horses.” And Satyabhama became the charioteer, and then Narakasura was slain.

Now, this Naraka Chaturdashi, which is today early morning when people took oil bath, was the occasion when Narakasura was overthrown, destroyed by Bhagavan Sri Krishna with his Sudarshan Chakra. It is said the Sudarshan Chakra of Bhagavan Sri Krishna simply sliced the body of

Narakasura into pieces, bits, and blood shot from his body and fell on the bodies of Satyabhama and Krishna. There were spots of blood everywhere on the bodies of Krishna and Satyabhama. It was almost sunrise time – that is, the time when the moon rises today. So at that time Krishna and Satyabhama took an oil bath – perhaps a hot water bath. [laughter from the audience] Maybe – quite possible – because the blood and other things must be washed out. I don't know whether they used soap. [laughter from the audience] Hot water at least they must have used. So Sri Krishna and Satyabhama applied oil on their body at that time, and took a nice bath. And so we also take bath, an oil bath, generally. It is considered very auspicious. Every person will take an oil bath today, especially in early morning. That is the speciality of Naraka Chaturdashi. And to celebrate the victory over this great demon, Narakasura, who was a terror to the gods themselves, they offered worship to the Goddess of Prosperity. Lakshmi Puja was performed by Bhagavan Sri Krishna himself and Satyabhama. They lit lamps everywhere in Dwarka. It was all a gorgeous celebration. Musical instruments were played. People danced in ecstasy that the parijata tree has been brought; and not only that, this demon has also been destroyed. They have achieved two great victories in one single adventure.

So this great gala, this great celebration – gorgeous festival celebrated, observed in Dwarka with Lakshmi Puja as the consummating feature – this event is recorded in the Puranas. In several Puranas this is mentioned, with different details. And while it is perhaps the main historical background of the observance of Naraka Chaturdashi with oil bath and the performance of Dhana Lakshmi, Dhyana Lakshmi, Saubhagya Lakshmi Puja today, people attach various anecdotes to the occasion - like Dussehra. What is Dussehra? Some people say it is the occasion when Rama killed Ravana. Some say it is the occasion when Saraswati – Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati – destroyed Shumbha, Nishumbha. It is also supposed to be the occasion when the gods won victory over the asuras. Likewise, various stories

are attached to this event, while the prevalent one, the most prominent one known to people is this story, this historical narration of Bhagavan Sri Krishna's overthrowing Narakasura and bring the parijata from the heavens.

I will give you a humorous aside to this parijata story. It is not connected with Dipavali, of course, but it is something very interesting. Krishna was a mischievous man – not so simple as people would imagine him to be. He brought the parijata tree from Indra's heaven because Satyabhama would not leave him in peace. So he said, "I have brought it, Very well, now I will plant it in your garden." And Krishna planted this parijata tree just in a corner of the garden of Satyabhama so that while the tree was planted in her garden, it bore flowers into the garden of Rukmini. [laughter from the audience] The tree was bent, like this, [Swamiji gestures with his arms] so all the flowers were falling into the garden or compound of Rukmini. This lady only had the satisfaction the tree is hers. "The tree is mine; it is my garden. But all the flowers go to her!" She was cursing. "What is this? I got the plant, and now the flowers are hers!" This was a little mischievous prank of Krishna. Wonderful! Complex was his life.

So Dipavali is a festival of lights, is a celebration of the rise of knowledge, and also the celebration of the victory of the sattvic, divine elements in us over the rajasic and tamasic and baser elements which are the real asuras – which are the rakshasas, this Narakasura, etc. The whole world is within us. The whole cosmos can be found in a microscopic form in our own bodies. Ram-Ravan yudh and Narakasura – everything is going on inside us.

This Dipavali is thus also a psychological context wherein we contemplate in our own selves the holy occasion of self-mastery, self-subjugation, self-abnegation, and all those spiritual virtues which are regarded as lustre, as it were, radiance, as it were, emanating from Self-knowledge. Bhagavati Mahalakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity, does not merely mean the goddess of wealth in a material sense.

Lakshmi does not mean only gold and silver. Lakshmi means prosperity in general, positive growth in the right direction, the rise into the higher stages of evolution. This is the advent of Lakshmi. Progress and prosperity are Lakshmi. In the Vishnu Purana we are told that if Narayana is like the sun, Lakshmi is like the radiance of the sun; they are inseparable. Wherever there is Narayana, there is Lakshmi; wherever there is divinity, there is prosperity. So this is the worship of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, worship of Narayana, worship of the Supreme God who is the source of all conceivable virtues, goodness and prosperity, which is symbolised in illumination, lighting, worship in the form of aarti, and a gay, joyous attitude and feeling in every respect. In short, this is a day of rejoicing over the victory of sattva over the lower gunas – the victory of God Himself over the binding fetters of the soul.

God's grace be upon you all on this holy occasion of Dipavali, the festival of the line of lights – dipa avali. Avali is a line, a series. Wherever you go in India you will find lines and lines and series of lights and lights.

Krishna Bhagavan ki jai!