The significance of

Deepavali (or DIWALI)

The Indian Festival of Lights

Hinduism is practiced for millennia essentially in the same form – philosophy, religious and faith system, mythology, rituals, festivals and culture. While there are many Hindu festivals, the fervor, intensity and emphasis with which different festivals are observed vary by region. However, the one festival observed universally everywhere with great enthusiasm, intensity and fervor is Diwali.

Diwali is the celebration of triumph of truth over untruth, righteousness over evil. This is based on several events in the religio-social history.

One of the most important stories is based on the great epic *Ramayana.* Ravana, an evil demon with magical powers became a menace to society. He harassed and killed sages, teachers and terrorized the society at large. Responding to the prayers of suffering humanity, God incarnated on earth in the form of Prince Sri Rama of Ayodhya. Due to palace intrigue Sri Rama was banished to live in the forests away from Ayodhya. His good and pious wife Sita and devoted younger brother Lakshmana accompanied Sri Rama to live in the forests. Ravana came in the disguise of a sage and kidnapped Sita through deception. Eventually Sri Rama goes to war and kills Ravana, thus not only freeing his wife Sita, but relieving the entire world of the misdeeds of Ravana and his evil followers. Upon their return, Ayodhya received Sri Rama and Sita with great enthusiasm by lighting up the entire city with lamps, and fireworks. Diwali is observed as the anniversary of that day of triumph of the righteous and just Sri Rama over the evil and monstrous Ravana.

In the era of the great classic *Mahabharata*, the Lord incarnated as Sri Krishna who with the help of his wife Satyabhama vanquished another evil demon called Narakasura. Diwali also commemorates this event reassuring humanity that righteousness always prevails over evil.

At an individual level the deeper spiritual meaning of Diwali is to understand that the darkness and evil lurking in our minds should be destroyed with the light of knowledge, righteousness and truth to lead us to peace, tranquility and salvation.