

# **Universal Peace Federation**

43 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NA

Email: [pa@uk.upf.org](mailto:pa@uk.upf.org) [peacefederationuk@gmail.com](mailto:peacefederationuk@gmail.com)

Web: [www.uk.upf.org](http://www.uk.upf.org)

## **Invites you to National Interfaith Week**

**Hosted by Prof. Lord Bhikhu Parekh**

## **Celebrating and learning from Diwali - Festival of Lights**

Speaker: Vijay Mehta

E-mail: [Vijay@vmpeace.org](mailto:Vijay@vmpeace.org)

Committee Room 4A House of Lords

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> of November, 2009, 5.00pm

### **Introduction**

Diwali or “Festival of lights” is an occasion of joy, prosperity and brightness. It is a significant festival for Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains. While in Hinduism, Diwali signifies victory over Darkness, it marks the attainment of nirvana by Mahavira, in Jainism. Sikhs often represent Diwali as a ‘Day of Freedom.’

The festival has emerged as a prime tourist attraction of Varanasi and present a breathtaking spectacle as millions of diyas are lit on the ghats and sent floating the river waters. A large number of people, including Indian and foreign tourist, congregate on the ghats and take boat rides to witness the spectacle. Since the day also marks ‘Kartik Purnima’, millions of Hindu devotees take a dip in the river Ganga. The event is also beamed live on TV and singing and dancing events also take place on various ghats.

For Hindus, Diwali is a five day extravagant affair. Dhanteras, the first day, is considered auspicious to buy Gold, household articles and specially utensils for kitchen. On this day, People gift “golden leaf” as it signifies prosperity and luck. Choti Diwali is the day when Lord Krishna killed Narakashura and freed the world from fear, according to the Legend. Laxmi Pooja or the actual Diwali is celebrated with a Pooja dedicated to Goddess Laxmi. Padwa is dedicated to the household cattle, where a pooja is done for them and are fed with goodies. Bhai Duj is a special day for siblings where the Brother visits the Sister’s house to celebrate the day with them.

Diwali day starts with an oil bath, after which everyone wears new clothes and sits down for a pooja of Goddess Laxmi. The whole house hold is lit with diyas in the evening and everyone, adults and kids alike play with crackers. Diwali day also sees lots of cashew studded milk sweets and other sweets. Friends and relatives visit each other to share wishes and Diwali Gifts. It emphasises on the

joy of giving and sharing like all other festivals. This festival is celebrated not just in India, now but is a global festival.

There are some negative aspects to Diwali like incorrigible shopping, needless purchases and vulgar display of wealth which marks every Diwali. All these trends are propagated by market-driven forces. Most Indians put up a spectacular display of blinking lights, fire-crackers and blaring loud music. This is a form of indulgence and is a waste of money while billions of people around us live in abject poverty.

It is time we started pondering whether Diwali is just revelry or a very deep-seated faith in addictive consumerism, an urge to possess and an equally inescapable desire to flaunt and display ones belongings.

## **Conclusion**

How can we make multifaith festivals meaningful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially to the younger generation and teach them the rights/wrongs of this world.

Our role as human beings is to be a trustee of this planet. While celebrating Diwali, we should ensure that we do not destroy our precious planet but use this festival to improve and enrich our life, heritage and culture. I wonder if some of you have read the article in the Economist of November 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 issue. In it, the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon, said to an audience of spiritual leaders of all faith, I quote, 'you are the leaders who have the widest, largest and deepest reach. You can make a huge difference in tackling the climate change crisis by linking up faith and green issues and save the planet for future generations.

In conclusion, let me say that celebrating festivals including Diwali is one of the greatest uplifting experiences one can have. If you go back in time in your childhood, one of the high points of a child's life is to attend festivals along with the family, relatives and friends of different faith and religions. It was a constant source of joy, happiness and creativity. It can be a great learning curve for multiculturalism – a recipe for peace, prosperity and a safer future for all of us.

### **Biography: Vijay Mehta**

Vijay Mehta is president of VM Centre for Peace [www.vmpeace.org](http://www.vmpeace.org) , Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity [www.fortuneforum.org](http://www.fortuneforum.org) , Chair of Action for UN Renewal [www.action-for-un-renewal.org.uk](http://www.action-for-un-renewal.org.uk) and co-Chair of World Disarmament Campaign. He is an author, a champion for truth and global activist for peace, development, human rights and environment. Some of his notable books are The Fortune Forum Summit: For a Sustainable Future, Arms No More, and The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century.

His latest book is on Global Warming and is called 'Climate Change IQ,' which is available to download free of charge in electronic form from the website [www.climatechange365.co.uk](http://www.climatechange365.co.uk)

He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum charity held three summits in London in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007. The guest speakers in 2008 were Ted Turner, Founder of CNN, Amritya Sen and Sir James Mirrlees both Nobel Prize winning Economists.

Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer, Irish Times and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet.