

# CELEBRATION TIME

## RAMADHAN DEEPAVALI

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**T**wo very special periods in the lives of the Muslim and Hindu communities are to be celebrated during the months of September and October. On 24 September, with the sighting of the new moon, the month of Saum (fasting) for the Muslim community commences, traditionally known as Ramadhan. And on 21 October the special festival of lights - Deepavali or Dipavali - celebrated by Hindus the world over follows - a festival that can last for several days. (See display on page 40.)

In a country with so many diverse cultures such as ours, it is only fitting that we all endeavour to learn more about each other's religions. Librarians are in the perfect position to create a deeper understanding and knowledge among library users - which in turn can only but ensure a more harmonious spirit among all. This information could also be used for school assignments.

## RAMADHAN month of fasting

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Human Resource Section

Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar. With the sighting of the new moon the month of Saum (fasting) must be observed. In Arabic the word Sieyaam (fast) means abstinence from indulgence, meaning to intend abstinence from food, drink, smoke and sexual relations from true dawn till sunset. Fasting has three rules:

- ☛ the Nieyah (intention) to fast that day
- ☛ nobody else can do it for you
- ☛ say the Nieyah (intention) before sunrise of the day.

Allah (God Almighty) says in the Holy Qur'ân, 'O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed on those before you, in order that you may attain righteousness.' (Sûrah 2 Al Baqarah Verse 183.)

The month of Ramadhan in which the Qur'ân was revealed, is a guide for mankind and gives the criteria for right and wrong. The person observing the fast should avoid food, drink, smoke and sexual desires with his wife and should not behave foolishly and impudently. Fasting also teaches one self-discipline, self-control and patience.

Fasting enables one to become humble and fearful of Allah's (God Almighty) punishment. It is also the best way to purify and correct one's inner self, as it not only cleanses the body, but also gives the organs a rest. During the fast one experiences a higher level of

consciousness and humility and a noble way of thinking increase. Fasting is an act of love for Allah (God Almighty) and shows that the followers of Islam are truly the servants as they obey his injunctions by caring for the poor and the needy. Fasting thus teaches the rich to become considerate, kind, gentle and merciful; brings people closer to their Creator and instils in their hearts respect for the favours of the Creator. Fasting builds one's character as one experiences the same pains as the poverty-stricken communities.

For those who fast the month of Ramadhan and follow it up with the six days of Shawaal, is as though he/she had observed the fast for the whole year.

The wonder of the month of Ramadhan is that it is being observed by all Muslims around the world.

By fasting one becomes aware that one's gaze must be lowered, to exclude all that is Garaam (forbidden). One must also refrain from idle talk, or listen to Fietnah (gossip). Fasting implies not only abstaining from food, drink, smoke or sexual activities, but also from lies, falsehood and evil talk. The observer of the fast is in the act of Ibaadah (worship) even if he/she is asleep. Those who fast will experience two types of happiness: firstly when they break the fast, they will be happy that they observed the fast, and secondly they will experience happiness on the day of judgment to meet the Creator, as only Allah (God Almighty) knows what the reward would be.

When one is ill or travelling, the same number of days which one did not observe the fast, has to be made up on other days, but need not be on consecutive days. Allah (God Almighty) does not intend to create hardship as one should magnify Allah (God

Almighty) for having guided one so that one may be grateful to Him.

If somebody argues with a fasting person, he should say to him, twice, 'I am fasting.' The Prophet Mogamat (peace be upon him) says, when one fasts with lemaan (character) then one submits oneself to Allah (God Almighty). The rewards of a fasting person of good deeds are multiplied ten times. (Sahih Al-Bukhâri, Hadith No 118, Vol 3.)

### Types of fasting

*Sieyaa-moel Mafrud (Compulsory fasting)*

Observing compulsory fast shows that one submits to the demands of Allah (God Almighty). For example, Month of Ramadhaan, Kaffaarôh - atonement for sin; Nather - oath that was made.

*Sieyaa-moel Masnoon (Voluntary fasting)*

There are great rewards in observing voluntary fast. For example, 10th Muharram, Arafat (not people on Arafat, but families at home to fast on that day), Mondays and Thursdays.

*Sieyaa-moel Mugarram (Forbidden fasting)*

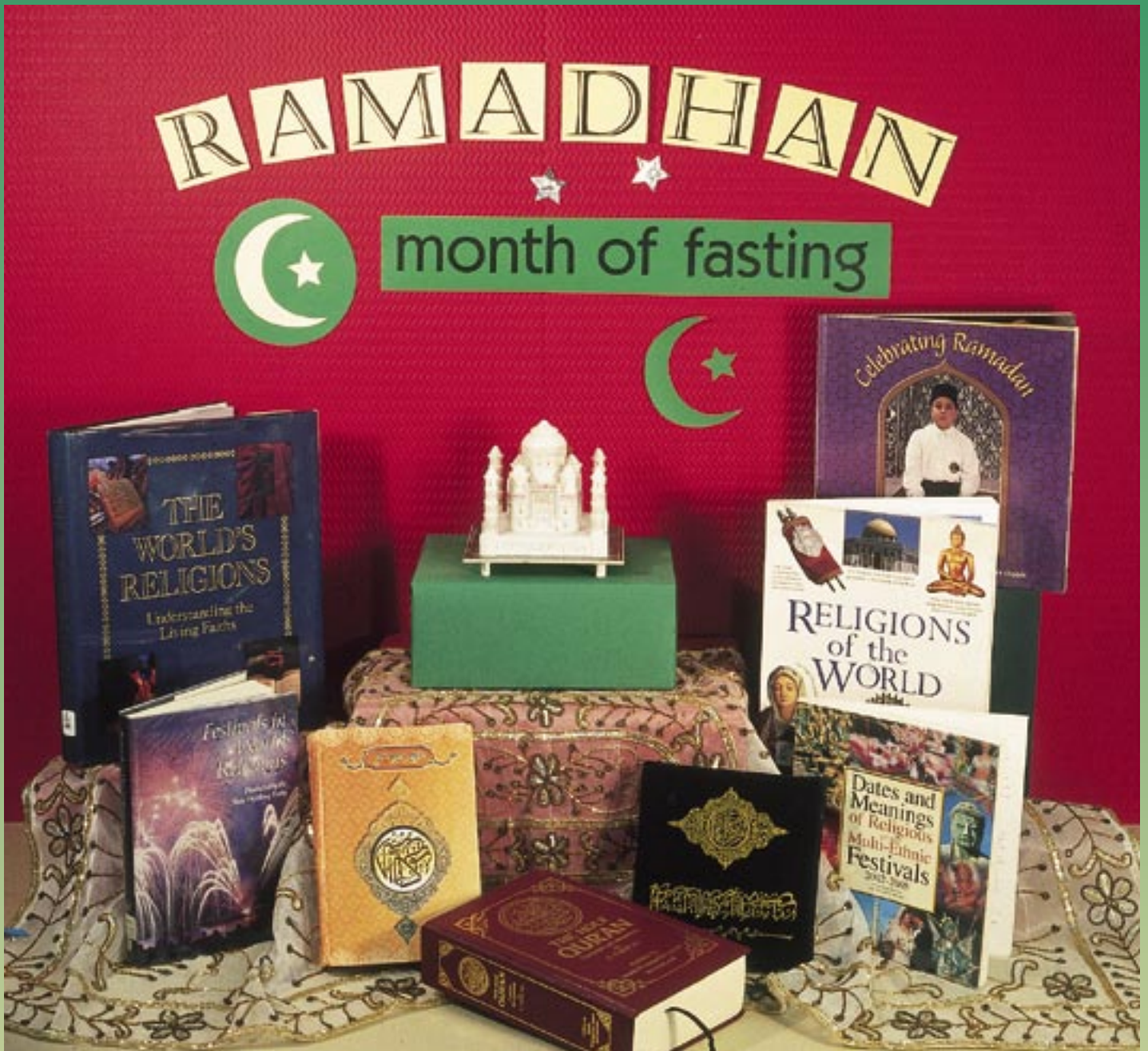
It is a sin to observe fast on these days. For example, Days of Eid (Celebrations of end of Ramadhaan and end of Pilgrimage) and Days of Tasreeq (for the people who perform the lasts day's Pilgrimage).

*Sieyaa-moel Makroeh (Will be rewarded, but not punished if one doesn't)*

Should one wish to fast on these days, one will be rewarded, but will not be punished if one doesn't. For example, fasting only on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Traditionally the month of Ramadhaan is a very exciting month for Muslims. At sunset when Muslims are allowed to break the fast at the call for prayer, it is a very spiritual moment. Nutritional foods and drinks are prepared as families all gather to spend time together while breaking fast. Afterwards, young and old, male and female gather at the different Mosques and religious institutions to observe prayers and recite the Holy Qur'ân. The intentions are to complete the reciting of the Holy Qur'ân as many times as possible within the Ramadhan period. Thereafter the Nieyah (intentions to fast that day) is mentioned by the lemaan (leader) and the congregation follow.

This is the lifestyle of all Muslims for a period of 29 to 30 continuous days.



## DISPLAY GUIDELINES

We were fortunate to have had help from Najawa (author of the article on Ramadhaan on the facing page) with the selection of items for this display. She suggested a range of colours which are traditional for this festival.

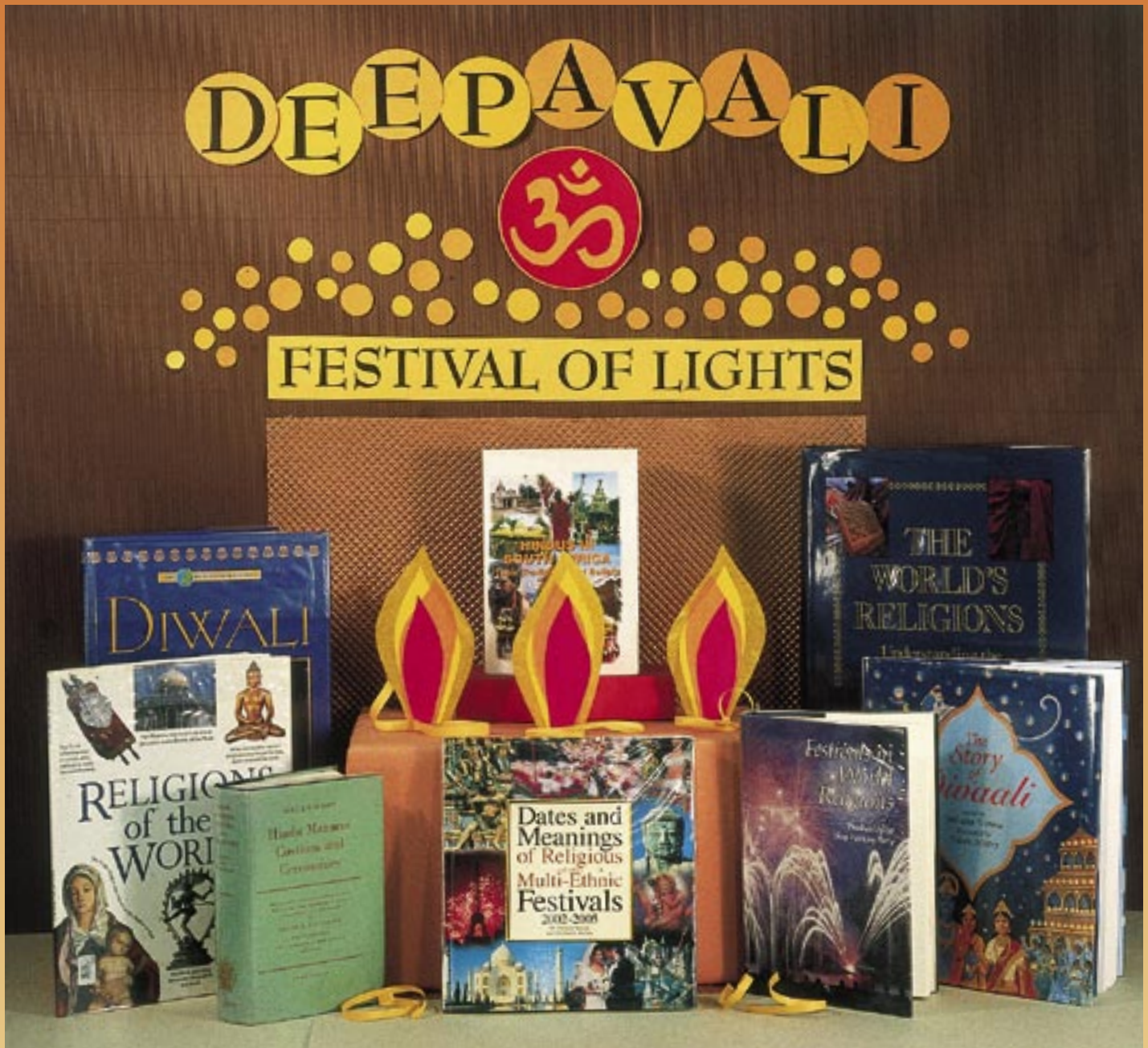
We have used a deep red background which presents a good contrast for the cream background of the lettering plus the green and cream logo. Note the echo of the moon and star in green which are in fact the pieces cut from the green circle of the logo, which had the cream colour placed at the back. Extra stars were cut from tin foil to add a sparkle.

The Ramadhaan lettering must be cut to the same depth, however the width can vary due to some letters being wider than others. Note that the letters are placed in a semi circle to match the logo circle.

As a focal point we used a lovely white miniature mosque ornament supplied by Najawa, and placed it on a box covered in dark green paper to create more contrast. It is also customary for beautifully-decorated fabrics in gold, bronze and silver threads and sequins to be used at this time on tables. We have placed this over the large red central box and draped it amongst relevant books with a Qur'an in the centre front.

See templates and Deepavali display and article overleaf.





## DISPLAY GUIDELINES

**D**eepavali is truly a festival of lights, and to create the effect of a row of lights the Hindus use hundreds of wicks placed into small bowls of wax, something similar to a tealight.

We have used circles in this display to portray the points of light. They are placed at different levels to add movement made by flames.

The display is easy to assemble as you have the templates for the lettering and logo. We have used a dark brown background to achieve good contrast with the choice of the colours of yellow and orange for the heading. If you do not have the cardboard use a dark wooden panel or wall as background.

Enlarge and copy the lettering onto alternating shades of yellow and orange which will add more depth to the effect

of circles of light, which are continued on a small scale as a group beneath the logo.

Using real flames of light could be a fire hazard in your library, therefore I made three flames from tissue paper. Cut a basic leaf shape from white cardboard then repeat this shape slightly larger in yellow tissue paper to overlap the card. Then another smaller leaf in orange, followed by an even smaller leaf in deep purple in the centre. These layers can be lightly glued on top of each other with glue stick. Using tissue paper allows the colours to blend into each other, thereby simulating the movement of flames of light. Anchor your completed flame to a film container filled with sand (to prevent it from falling over) by using a blob of Prestik. This will keep it firmly upright. The large box covered in orange paper forms a solid platform for the flames as a central point, around which relevant books are placed.

# DEEPAVALI

## Festival of lights

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### Correspondent

**D**eepavali or Divedi, the Festival of lights is an important Hindu festival celebrated during the month of Kartik (October/November).

Deep means 'light' and Avali means 'row', so Deepavali means 'row of lights'.

For some it is a three, and others a four-day festival. It commences with the Dhan-Teras or the 13th day of the dark half of Kartik, followed by the next day, the Narak Chaudas, the 14th day and by Deepavali prayer on the 15th day.

There are various origins attributed to this festival. Some hold that they celebrate the marriage of Lakshmi with Lord Vishnu. In Bengal, the festival is dedicated to the worship of Kali. It also commemorates that blessed day on which the triumphant Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, the demon-king of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

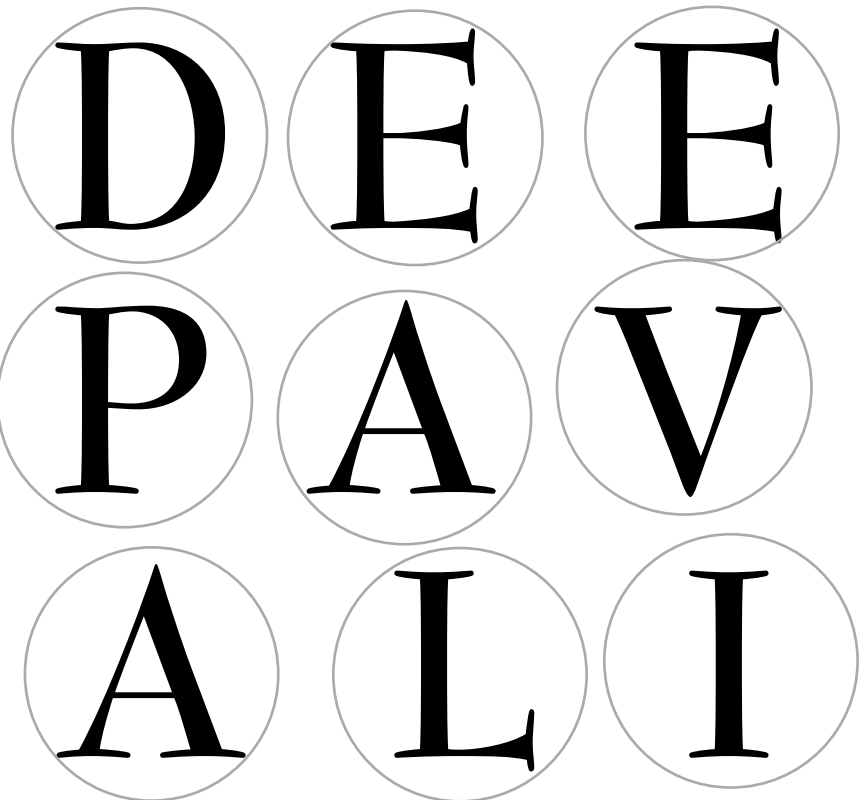
Preparations for Deepavali usually start two to three weeks before the festival.

On the day that the festival starts, homes are cleaned and decorated by day and illuminated by night with earthen oil-lamps. Some people will even renovate their homes for the festival.

On the morning of Deepavali, people generally take an oil bath (symbolic of having had a bath in the holy Ganges) and greet each other with: 'Have you had your Ganges bath?' New clothes are worn and women will be clad in silk saris or Punjabi suits. In some cases employers will buy new clothes for their employees. Hindus particularly dislike dressing in black on that day as black is considered inappropriate for a festival. Everybody partakes in the eating and exchange of sweet meats. Hindu merchants in the north of India open their new account books on this day and pray for success and prosperity during the coming year. Children light firecrackers and a general sense of festivity abounds. On the first day of Deepavali people don't go visiting but stay at home to receive guests. Certain Hindus will go to the temple to pray for happiness and prosperity and will pay their respects to the elderly.

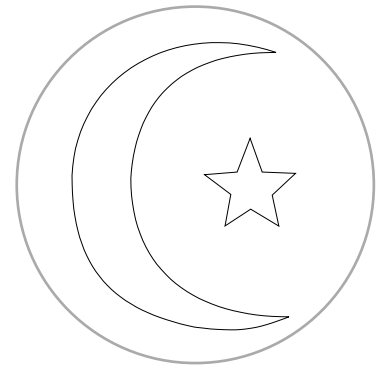
During this period people forget and forgive the wrongs done by others. There is an air of freedom, festivity and friendliness everywhere. The festival brings about unity and instils charity in the hearts of people.

Waking up during the Brahmamuhurta (at around three o'clock in the morning) is considered a great blessing from the standpoint of health, ethical discipline, efficiency in work and spiritual advancement. Ideally, the sages who instituted this custom, cherished the hope that their descendants would realise its benefits and make it a regular habit in their lives.



## FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

### month of fasting



Templates for both displays  
Enlarge to suitable size on  
photocopier