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## The spiritual almanac

When I began working on this article, the first question that came to my mind, is what to include and what not to include? There are so many masters, so many festivities, so many days of significance, particularly in India. It was rather difficult to pick just some. I then decided to include those that make sense to me, for their deep significance.

### January

#### Pongal / Sankranti, 14th

**Tradition:** Pongal marks a new beginning and a fresh outlook to life. This is the end of the season of toiling for the farmers. To symbolise a bountiful harvest, rice is cooked in new pots until it boils over. Traditionally, the festival is celebrated for four days. On the first day, Bhogi, old clothes and other junk are thrown away and burnt, marking the beginning of a new life. The second day, the Pongal day, is celebrated by boiling fresh milk early in the morning and allowing it to boil over the vessel – a tradition from which the word ‘pongal’ was coined. The third day, Mattu Pongal, is meant to offer thanks to the cows and buf-

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ON YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

by Jamuna Rangachari

faloes, as they are used to plough the lands. On the fourth day, Kanu Pongal, people go out on a picnic and enjoy themselves.

**The mantra:** *Throw away one's baggage, focus on the present while looking forward to the future.* It would be wonderful if we could resolve to do this not just on Pongal but on each day of the year.

### February

#### Valentine's Day, 14th

**Tradition:** It is linked to romantic love, as St Valentine is a saint who helped paramours meet. However, its variants have people celebrating love in various forms.

**The mantra:** *Celebrate love in all its myriad hues.* Give messages of love to your parents, friends, children and all who are a part of your life. A spontaneous ‘jaddu ki jhappi’ or a message of appreciation to everyone you come across would make you realise how much love multiplies when shared.

### March

#### Mahashivaratri, 6th (in 2008)

**Tradition:** Mahashivaratri falls in the month of Magha of the Hindu calendar, which corresponds with February and March in the Western calendar. This year, it was on March 6th. On this night, people chant Lord Shiva's name, and meditate the whole night.

Shiva's third eye symbolises the psychic site of the soul, as it stands on the sixth chakra and the pineal gland. Unfortunately, in most of us, this powerful energy is atrophied and dormant

because of centuries of being cut off from the practice of meditation as a race.

**The mantra:** *Meditate on the third eye and connect to your inner self.* The third eye will open you up to your infinite potential and make you realise the truth of the Vedic mantra 'Shivoham, Shivoham'

## April

### Baisakhi, Vishu, Puthandu, Ronagali Bihu, Naba Barsha, 14th

**Tradition:** Punjab celebrates Baisakhi, Kerala celebrates Vishu, Tamil Nadu celebrates Puthandu, Assam celebrates Ronagali Bihu and Bengal celebrates Naba Barsha on this day. One very interesting custom in Kerala is Kani Kanal (first sight). Under this tradition, there is a prescribed list of items of prosperity and well-being that people see first thing on a Vishu morning. The custom stems from the strong belief that good things seen on the New Year day brings good luck for the entire year.

**The mantra:** Do not fall into the trap of wasting your energy on any negativity for, one of the eternal spiritual laws of life is – what you focus on, thrives. With this firm belief, please resolve to read, see and hear only positive messages and stories.

## May

### Buddha Purnima

**Tradition:** Celebrated in May on the night of the full moon, when Buddhists all over the world celebrate the birth and enlightenment of the Buddha over 2,500 years ago. Typically on a festival day, people go to the local temple or monastery, offer food to the monks, and listen to a Dhamma talk. In the afternoon, they distribute food to the poor. In the evening, they join perhaps in a ceremony of circumambulation of a stupa three times as a sign of respect to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The day concludes with an evening of the Buddha's teachings and meditation.

**The mantra:** The greatest teaching

of the Buddha is that no 'ism' is as powerful as one's own self. Meditate on the self and remember that the path to Buddhahood is open to all.

## July

### Guru Purnima, 18th (in 2008)

**Tradition:** Etymologically, the word guru comprises of the syllables 'gu' and 'ru', where gu means 'darkness', and ru means 'the destroyer or dispeller of that (darkness)'. Hence a guru is one characterised as someone who dispels spiritual ignorance (darkness), with spiritual illumination (light). Salutations are offered to our gurus on the full moon day in July, which falls on 18th in 2008.

**The mantra:** We are surrounded by gurus all around us, be it in the form of nature, animals and birds or other human beings. Let us resolve to learn from each of them with reverence and humility.

## August

### Independence Day, 15th

**Tradition:** The day India became free from colonial rule. The unique, non-violent struggle made it a triumph of the right principles and a victory of peace.

**The mantra:** Apply ahimsa in thought, word and deed for a worthy life.

## September - October - November

### Eid-ul-Fitr

**Tradition:** Eid-ul-Fitr, occurs as soon as the new moon is sighted at the end of the month of fasting, namely Ramadan.

Fitr is derived from the word 'fatar' meaning breaking. Fitr has another meaning derived from another word 'fitrah' meaning alms. After a month of introspection and fasting, the festival is celebrated with festivity and the giving of alms to the poor.

**The mantra:** Self-examination and austerity, the true purpose of Ramadan is essential for us at all times. When practised along with devotion, it has the power to bring in great serenity in our lives.

## Navaratri, Sept 30-Oct 8 (in 2008)

**Tradition:** Navaratri or the Festival of Nine Nights is a tradition that honours the Goddess. It will be celebrated from September 30 to October 8, this year. On the first three days, Goddess Durga is worshipped, the next three days Goddess Lakshmi, and the last three days Goddess Saraswati. There is a reason for this sequence. Durga symbolises the courage to walk on the right path and the knowledge of right and wrong; this must necessarily be the first quality that one must have, Lakshmi symbolises abundance which one prays for next. Lastly, Saraswati symbolises knowledge. It is only when knowledge comes after we have a sense of right and wrong and our material needs are met that we will use this knowledge for the right purpose.

**The mantra:** *Discriminating between right and wrong, having enough for our needs and acquiring knowledge to use it for good purposes.* Isn't this what we all need for a meaningful life?

## Deepavali, Oct 28th (in 2008)

**Tradition:** Lakshmi Puja, the return of Lord Ram to Ayodhya, the defeat of Narakasura, the Nirvana of Mahavira – the legends associated with Diwali are many. Most of all, however, it is associated with gaiety and light all over India.

**The mantra:** Dispel darkness and usher in light in all aspects of your life.

## December

### Christmas, 25th

**Tradition:** The birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated all over the world on December 25, and not just by Christians, as a day of giving, sharing and caring.

**The mantra:** Celebrate the joy of giving, and experience the joy in it. Not just on Christmas but every day of the year.

There are many, many more such days. Why don't we remember the essence of each one of them, all through the year, ushering in an era of celebration of the spiritual kind? ☺

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