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### Kartik Purnima



A long time ago, before the emergence of the Gupta Empire in Northern India, the Hindu calendar used to begin the New Year in autumn. This was an ancient Vedic tradition dating back millennia, wherein the term autumn was synonymous with year. As the lunisolar calendar would shift with relation to the backdrop of the stars and seasons due to a phenomenon known as precession of the equinoxes, the New Year would be periodically shifted backward to align with the seasons and keep with the beginning of autumn.

With the emergence of newer knowledge from Persia and the Middle-East during the Gupta Era, astronomer-mathematicians based in the city of Ujjain decided to move the New Year near the vernal equinox. It was resolved that Mesha Sankranti (point of transition of the Sun into sidereal Aries) was to be considered the solar new year, and the lunisolar month that contained the Mesha Sankranti, known as Chaitra, was to mark the lunisolar new year. The tradition has been since that time to celebrate the solar new year at Mesha Sankranti (currently around April 13/14), and the lunisolar new year at Chaitra Shukla Paksha.

Before this shift of the lunisolar New Year from the autumn to spring, the lunar month of Kartik marked the beginning of the year. However, curiously this shift of New Year's Day did not occur uniformly. While all other regions of India and all countries within the Indian sphere of influence shifted to the vernal New Year in Chaitra, Gujarat (particularly Kathiawad) and the Newar region of Nepal refused to change. To this day, therefore, the ancient Vedic tradition of celebrating New Year in autumn is carried out by Gujaratis where the Kartik Shukla Paksha marks the beginning of the Kartikadi Vikram Samvat, and by Newaris who mark the same as beginning of Nepal Sambat, both of which fall the day after Diwali.

### **Commandment of Shiva**

Now, there is more to this month Kartik than just the beginning of the ancient Vedic New Year. Kartik is arguably the holiest of month in the Hindu calendar, as Ramadan is to the Islamic calendar. Per ancient legends, Kartik was given prominence by none other than Shiva Himself. Upon the commandment of Shiva, it is said, that Ganapati was given the honor of being the first Deity to be worshipped. To ensure that His other divine Son should not feel left out, Shiva dedicated the first month of the year to Kartikeya, the Lord of discernment. While Ganapati was the first to be worshipped, Kartikeya-Murugan was the first to be remembered and commemorated in the New Year. In fact, in all traditions except the Tamil, the sixth lunar day in the bright half of Kartik (Kartik Shukla Shashti) is called Skanda Shashti, a special day for worship of Lord Kartikeya.



- [History](#)
- [Aims](#)
- [Concept](#)
- [Parenting](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Training Programmes](#)
  - October 11 **NEW!**
  - December 09
- [Expansion](#)
- [Development](#)
- [Syllabus](#)
- [Bal Vikas Administration](#)
- [Past Students](#)
  - [June 2010](#)
  - [September](#)
- [Home](#)

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~ May		download
~ June		download
~ July		download
~ August		download
~ September		download
~ October		download
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##### » 2009

~ December		download
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**Lord Kartikeya or Subramanya**

It is, therefore, per the commandment of Shiva Himself that the month when the full moon occurs on the asterism Kritika (Pleiades) and aptly called Kartik, is considered the holiest, the best and the first of months. The month of Kartik is still to this day considered a month when one looks within and finds divinity; a month when every action is blessed, and every wish fulfilled. It is a month of fasts, prayers, holy river dips, and introspection.

### **Kartik Purnima and the Lord's Diwali**



The height and glory of the holy month of Kartik is felt most prominently during its defining full moon festival. The full moon day of Kartik known as Kartik Purnima or Deva Diwali (the Lord's Diwali) commemorates a welcoming of the Lord, both as Shiva and as Vishnu depending on tradition, into our lives by lighting oil lamps much in the same way as the main Diwali festival fifteen lunar days prior commemorates the welcoming of the Divine Mother into our lives.

In Shaivite tradition, Kartik Purnima, the Lord's Diwali, is celebrated as the victory of the Lord over Tripurasura (the demon of triad cities). The festival is aptly also termed Tripuri Purnima. It is fairly simple to understand that the triad cities are nothing but anava, karma and maya, the triad impurities. Since the Lord lies beyond the triad impurities, He is considered the Victor over the triad. During the height and light of this festival, one is to have a full realization of the Lord, who exists deep within ourselves as the Atman, who has conquered the triad impurities, and who is ever liberated.

In Vaishnavite tradition, Kartik Purnima, the Lord's Diwali, is celebrated as the reemergence of the Lord from the allegorical chaturmasa (four-month) slumber. Per tradition, the Deities of Vishnu are considered to be in slumber from Shayani Ekadashi in Ashadh until Prabodhini Ekadashi in Kartik, four lunar days before Kartik Purnima. When Vishnu has awoken from His slumber, His icons once again exit the temple solitude and grace the world on Kartik Purnima. Slumber represents deep meditation, and emergence from the slumber represents realization. During the height and light of this festival, one is to realize the Lord, who exists deep within ourselves as the Atman, who has been realized through meditation, resulting in liberation.

### **Deva Diwali**

The major Diwali festival which occurs 15 lunar days prior during the new moon is Devi Diwali, the Goddess' Diwali. Only by passing through the Goddess' Diwali, can one reach the Lord's Diwali. During the main Diwali, Mahalakshmi is worshipped; during the Deva Diwali, Mahavishnu is worshipped. During the main Diwali, Mahakali is worshipped, during Deva Diwali Maheshvara is worshipped. The main Diwali is dedicated to Shakti, the Deva Diwali to Shiva. The main Diwali is dedicated to realization, the Deva Diwali to liberation. During the main Diwali, the Tirthankara Mahavira attained realization; during the Deva Diwali, Mahavira attained liberation. The main Diwali is dedicated to freeing oneself from fetters, the Deva Diwali is dedicated to becoming a liberated being (Guru Nanak Dev Jayanti). It is only by realizing Shakti (main Diwali), can one become liberated into Shiva (Deva Diwali); the holy lamps during both festivals are but a capture of the resplendence of realization and liberation into Paramashiva, the Divine Ultimate.

**"Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya"**