

HOLI



Why is Holi celebrated?

Holi is a popular ancient and auspicious Hindu festival.

A vibrant spring festival known as the "Festival of Colours," signifies the triumph of good over evil. Holi celebrates the arrival of spring and the blossoming of love and for many, it's a festival day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships.

We commonly celebrate Holi by applying/throwing colours at one another and the power of colour is never more prominent than at Holi festival.

Together we celebrate Holi by touching one's soul through the colours of joy, happiness, love, peace and prosperity. Anyone and everyone are fair game, friend or stranger, rich or poor, men or women, children or elders.



Best time to celebrate?

Holi usually falls in the Hindu calendar during February or March.

Linking this to the Hindu luni-solar calendar month, Holi is celebrated at the end of winter, on the last full moon day.

Holi is a festival that takes place over two days

Day One is known as Holika Dahan and marks the burning of the Demon Queen Holika where the name Holi comes from.

By burning a bonfire this symbolises the fire that Holika sat in with her brother before she was burned. Communities will join together to light the fire, carry out rituals and sing.

The rituals include offering grains, coconut and other offerings to the fire, as these items burn they represent the removal of evil and ego whilst reinforcing the idea that faith, righteousness, and devotion will always prevail.

The Story of Queen Holika in Brief

- Hiranyakashipu was a powerful demon king who wanted to be worshipped as a god.
- His son, Prahlad, was a devoted follower of Lord Vishnu, which enraged Hiranyakashipu.
- The king's sister Holika, who had a magical cloak that made her immune to fire, sat in a bonfire with Prahlad on her lap, hoping to burn him alive.
- But because of her evil intentions and Prahlad's pure devotion, the cloak flew off Holika and protected Prahlad instead – Holika burned, and Prahlad was unharmed.



The Story of Queen Holika In More Detail

The story of Holika and Prahlad is of a King who was a wicked man: boastful, greedy and cruel. Everyone had to do exactly as he commanded. He even told his people that he was a god so that they had to worship him too. This king had a son called Prahlad, who was as kind as his father was cruel. He too believed that his father was a god.



One day when Prahlad was walking in the countryside he saw a woman on her knees. Her hands were clasped and her head bowed. She was praying: 'Lord Vishnu, who takes away fear. I surrender to you, great lord.'

Prahlad was angry. 'Woman, why do you pray to the Lord Vishnu when you know that your king is god.'



The woman turned her face to Prahlad. There were tears on her cheeks. 'My kittens have fallen into the well,' she said. 'I am praying that they will be saved.'

As she spoke a tiny miaow sounded from the well. To Prahlad's astonishment he saw a little paw clinging to its edge. Gently the woman picked up the kitten and put it down safely on the ground.

Then they heard another miaow, and another. One by one the kittens crawled out of the well. 'My prayer has been answered,' the woman cried joyfully and fell to her knees.

The Story of Queen Holika In More Detail

As Prahlad made his way home, he thought about what had happened. 'My father is not a god after all,' he thought. From this day forth I will worship Lord Vishnu.

When his father learnt this he was very angry. 'My son disobeys me. He must be punished!' He called the guards. 'Take my son and throw him off the tallest cliff in the land!'



So Prahlad was taken to a cliff and tossed over the edge. Down, down, Prahlad fell. As he fell he prayed to Lord Vishnu to protect him. And the god heard him so that his fall was gentle and he was not hurt.



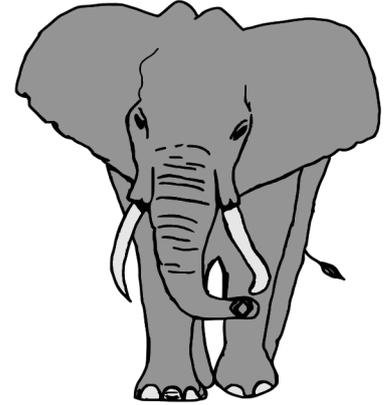
When he discovered that the prince was unharmed the king was furious. How could his son have survived such a fall? 'Very well,' he said. 'Toss him into a nest of snakes. Let us see how he manages to climb out of that one!'



Prahlad was taken to the snake pit. How he trembled when he looked in and saw the hundreds of snakes twisting below him. How thick their bodies were - as thick as a grown man's arm. As he was pushed in he prayed to his god. The snakes hissed and curled round Prahlad's body, but were unable to hurt him.

The Story of Queen Holika In More Detail

When he learnt that Prahlad was unharmed, the king became even more angry: 'Put him amongst a herd of elephants!' he shouted. 'But first taunt them so they become angry and trample him.' He rubbed his hands gleefully. 'This time, he will not escape,' he chuckled.



As soon as they saw Prahlad, the elephants raised their trunks and trumpeted loudly. Prahlad tried not to show his fear as they charged towards him. Again he prayed to his god to protect him. And to the watchers' astonishment, as soon as the elephants reached Prahlad, they stopped still and lowered their trunks, nuzzling him gently.

'What am I to do?' the king said to his sister that night, when the news of his son's escape reached him. 'How am I to get rid of him?'



The king's sister, whose name was Holika, wanted to see Prahlad dead as much as he did.

'Leave it to me,' she said to him. 'I have an idea. In the morning I will build a giant bonfire and walk into it – and dare Prahlad to follow me.'



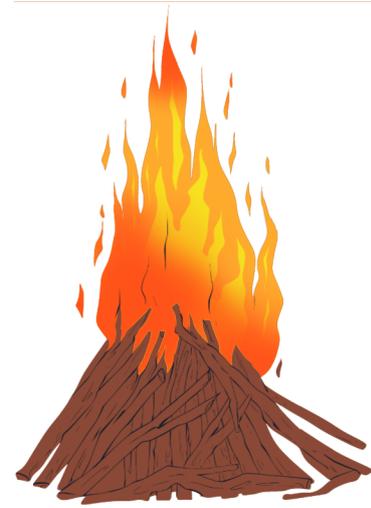
'You will be burnt alive,' the king said, aghast.

'Not I,' she smiled. 'The flames cannot harm me. I have magic powers that will protect me.'

'Then that is indeed a good plan,' smiled the king. At last he would be rid of his son.

The Story of Queen Holika In More Detail

In the morning, Holika ordered her servants to build a huge bonfire in front of the palace. Men and women ran to and fro, gathering sticks. Then a burning torch was held to the sticks. The sticks were very dry and the flames leapt up quickly. Soon a fire was burning merrily. It was so hot and burned so fiercely that no one dared stand close to it.



As the flames leapt ever higher Holika called Prahlad to her. 'My boy,' she said to him. She pointed to the bonfire. 'Let us see who is the bravest. Show your courage one more time. Follow me into the fire.'

And with that Holika marched into the flames. Her magic powers kept her from being harmed. But now Lord Vishnu was watching over Prahlad, as he had done many times before. Praying to his god, Prahlad followed her into the fire. As the flames grew higher, Lord Vishnu took away Holika's magic powers and granted them to Prahlad instead.



There was a sudden whoosh as the flames caught Holika. In a trice all that was left of her was a few glowing embers. But Prahlad stood in the midst of the fire, unharmed by the roaring flames.

And to this day, at Holi time, fires are lit and as they look into the flickering flames people remember the story of Holika and Prahlad and how good triumphs over evil.



Day Two is Holi (Dhulandi) is the main Holi day where coloured powder and water is thrown and the communities come together. Uniting people off all classes, caste, age groups and generation's to come together and celebrate oneness for humanity.

In India this is a national holiday like Easter and Christmas where everyone plays with holi colours in the streets and roads of India including open parks, and outside temples. From throwing coloured powders, carrying water guns and coloured water-filled balloons for their water fight. Anyone and everyone is fair game, friend or stranger, rich or poor, man or woman, children and elders.



Groups carry drums and musical instruments, go from place to place, sing and dance. People move and visit family, friends and foes, first play with colours on each other, laugh and chit-chat, then share Holi delicacies, food and drinks. In the evening, after sobering up, people dress up, visit friends and family.



The colours of Holi are associated with the emotions and feelings we feel

- RED = Anger
- GREEN = Jealousy
- YELLOW = Happiness
- PINK = Love
- BLUE = Vastness
- WHITE = Peace
- ORANGE = Sacrifice
- VIOLET = Knowledge

