T
HE essence of our culture has
been to turn every aspect of
life into a celebration. Slowly,
as the economic condition of the
country declined, our festivals have
diminished in number. But during the
reign of Rama, we are told life was a
celebration 365 days of the year!

So, if people ploughed the land
one day, that became the occasion
for a ploughing festival. If they were
planting, it was a planting festival. If
harvesting, a harvesting festival, and
so on. Making each day a cause for
celebration brought joy into everyday
life. Without this dimension of joy,
life often turns burdensome.

When I was young, I enjoyed
festivals because they meant no
school! They also meant good food
and sometimes an afternoon cricket
match. Apart from that, they had little
value for me. But later when I moved
into a village and started a farm, I
suddenly realised the importance of
Indian festivals, the colour, vibrant-
ness, joy, sanity and equilibrium they
brought to people’s lives, how they
got everybody—men, women and
children—collectively involved in a
beautiful way.

Making each day into a festival
takes a tremendous sense of zest and
involvement. This involvement, this
total passion for everything one is in
touch with right now, is crucial for life
to flower into an ultimate possibility.

Every spiritual tradition has talked
of compassion. Compassion essen-
tially means an all-encompassing
passion.

It means doing whatever you’re
doing right now—whether
taking the next breath or the next step
—with total involvement and pas-
son. Without involvement, there can
be no life. Unfortunately, somewhere
along the way, people started talking
detachment instead of involvement.

Spirituality, a
dimension of joy

The fear of involvement happened
because involvement turned selective.
The moment you identify only one
area of involvement in your life, you
naturally get entangled. As soon as
you start calculating about life, every-
thing slowly starts moving away from
the essence of who you are. Your very
nature is involvement. But your mind
calculates, and creates a separation.
The separation happens because it is
the nature of the intellect to discrimi-
rate. The instrument of the intellect
is useful for survival. But when you
don’t know where to use it and where
to not, it separates you from the very
life process itself.

There has always been much talk
about love and compassion in all spir-
itu al traditions because these qual-
ities bring pleasantness to the psycho-
logical process. A blissful psychologi-
cal situation brings the mind in tune
with the rest of the life-process, which
is always all-inclusive. It moves one
from self-preservation towards self-
expansion, which is where our life
energies want to head.

Diwali, the festival of lights, her-
alds the arrival of the darkest part of
the year. We are now entering that
phase of the year when the northern
hemisphere receives the least amount
of sunlight. Even in terms of spiritual
practice, the period after the summer
solstice was seen as the half of the
year to be dedicated to spiritual sad-
hana, and the period after the winter
solstice as the time to flower. Later,
this came to be interpreted in terms
of work and harvest by agricultural
communities.

For the spiritual practitioner, it
is after crossing 60 per cent of the
journey that the dark night arises.
That’s when the big doubts come: ‘Oh
God, have I wasted my whole life?’
Symbolically, therefore, we have this
festival when more than 60 per cent
of the year is over. The coming phase
is considered to be the most challeng-
ing. That is why we light up and cele-
brate our triumph over darkness. And
hence the symbolism of the Goddess
slaying the demon king and vanquish-
ing the forces of darkness.

The quality of your life does not
depend on how much you harvest.
It depends on how joyfully you live.
A festival just provides you with an
excuse to celebrate. Diwali brings that
aspect into your life—sets fire to you a
bit! It reminds you that the spiritual
process does not have to be a strug-
gle. If every day could be an unbridled
celebration, there would be no need to
teach spirituality to anyone.