A World Worth Illuminating



For environmental scientist Parth Jhaveri, Diwali's light carries a promise to cherish our cultures and natural world.

In Parth Jhaveri's old family photographs, his father had a stunning mullet.

There he was at the heavy metal festivals of the 1980s: an immigrant from India, young enough to be discovering a new country while still discovering himself. He would later become a father who worked ski patrol in the mountains and taught his children to swim in the Pacific Ocean. At home, the family would celebrate Diwali.

To Parth, these were never competing versions of life. The great outdoors and the Diwali holiday, the heavy metal music and the Indian family traditions, they all belonged together.

"That is part of us thinking about our careers, our culture, our world as a whole. The Venn diagram of it all is a circle," he says.

It is an expansive way of describing identity. It also offers a way into understanding his work. Ask Jhaveri about marine ecology, and he will eventually tell you about his family. Ask him about Diwali, and he will bring you back to the natural world. Follow either conversation long enough, and you arrive at the same conviction: the world's richness and vibrancy need to be appreciated and preserved.

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For Jhaveri, who describes himself as not religious, the Diwali celebration remains deeply meaningful. Diwali carries the possibility of new beginnings with intention. There is the brightness of the celebration, the warmth of family, the familiar preparations that make a season personal. His early-November birthday often falls near the festivities, giving this time of year an additional sense of renewal.

He prefers to think of it as a refresh. Everything that came before still belongs to him. The celebration creates room to consider how he wants to carry it forward.

It reaches into his working life.

Jhaveri is an environmental scientist whose path began in the mountains and along the beaches of Southern California. He grew up swimming, skiing, and surfing, finding a particular peace beside the ocean.

Raised vegetarian, and now vegan for more than a decade, he grew up with a sense that human life belonged within a larger living world. Respect for other beings was part of the household's ordinary understanding of how to live.

Studying ecology and evolutionary biology deepened that connection. Graduate work in marine ecology gave it direction. For his master's research, he examined how people damage tide pools—a meeting place between human curiosity and vulnerable marine life. The question was practical. What happens when we visit a living place? What do we disturb? What might we learn to do differently?

Today, at environmental consulting firm ERM, he manages projects involving energy infrastructure and sensitive coastal environments. His work puts him in a practical role in shaping how human needs affect the living world around them.





When Jhaveri explains the connection between Diwali and his environmental work, he begins with what we grow accustomed to losing. In ecology, shifting baselines describe how successive generations can come to accept diminished environmental conditions as normal. The world we first encounter becomes our reference point. We may never know the abundance that preceded us.

Jhaveri thinks about birdsong, insects, forests, coral reefs. He thinks about what a child growing up today will understand the world to be. Then his language becomes more personal. He means biodiversity. He also means energy, culture, difference, the pleasure of encountering something unfamiliar. In his telling, these forms of richness illuminate one another.

Diwali gathers that wish into a celebration. Wear bright colors. Arrive with warmth. Make room for light. His work gives him another way to act on it.

For Jhaveri, culture and work are inseparable. There is hope in his ambition. He wants future generations to encounter something extraordinary—and have enough opportunity to recognize its value.

His invitation extends to the greater world. Notice the different tree species beyond your window, the rocks gathering along the coast, and the tide pools that change every day. Learn about the people whose clothes, food, and experiences differ from yours. Appreciation needs opportunities to take root.

This Diwali, Jhaveri will return to the familiar brightness of family celebration. The light and color he welcomes there are also what he hopes to preserve in the larger world.

His hope is that we will keep learning to notice it too: While its colors remain, while its differences can still surprise us, and while there is so much here to love.

“We want us to experience what the world has to offer,” he says.

