

Happy New Year

All around the world people celebrate the coming of a new year and time with traditions from their country. Although the celebrations are not always held on the same day, they often include traditions of religious celebrations, special prayers and blessings, beautiful costume parties and parades of celebration. Not just a holiday of merriment many countries have customs of forgiveness, and practices said to bring good luck and fortune in the new year. Learning about the traditions practised in other cultures is a fun way to gain respect and acceptance for others sometimes appear different then we are. It is also a positive step to teaching children to be non-prejudice in a fun way as well.

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In Chinese culture, Tsao-Chun is the name of their Kitchen God who also travels to heaven to report of their deeds. Homes are cleaned spotless and decorated to appease the Kitchen God. On New Years Day gifts are exchanged and some homes make a "money tree" which is decorated with old coins and paper flowers. The third day of celebrations, the Lion Dance begins and continues until the fifth day. Men dress in lion costumes and dance in a parade. Dancers climb on top of each other to form a human ladder to reach "lucky money" that is tied in high places. The Dragon Dance is also held on the third day of the New Year. Families open their doors to let the dragon bring luck into their homes. Firecrackers are thought to scare away the evil spirit Shan-sau.

In Ecuador "Ano Viejo" is celebrated by creating a fake person or dummy. The scarecrow looking person will be completely dressed and stuffed with old newspapers and firecrackers. The dummy is usually placed outside the home. He represents something that happened during the last year. At midnight each family lights the dummy on fire. As the dummy goes up in smoke the firecrackers also go off to add to the festivities. The old year is forgotten and the new year begins.

It is a good sign to find your door heaped with a pile of broken dishes at New Years. In Denmark old dishes are saved year around to throw them at the homes where their friends live on New Years Eve. Many broken dishes were a symbol that you have many friends!

Lasting 13 days, "No Ruz" begins in March because spring begins in March. People plant miniature container gardens and receive new clothing to eat a special meals of eggs and pilaf. This meal is believed to bring them good luck. Friends go visiting and bring gifts of fruit, flowers and coloured eggs. They gather together to watch for special things to happen at midnight. People kiss each other and say "May you live for a hundred years". On the last day of the celebrations known as "Sizbah Bi Dar" people in Iran take picnics to the country where they throw the garden containers into a stream or water to signify throwing away their bad luck.

As you can see many countries have traditions that they believe will bring good luck for the new year. In Puerto Rico children enjoy throwing pails of water out the window at midnight. Some believe that this rids their home of any evil spirits! In Spain when the clock strikes midnight the people eat 12 grapes. One grape for every stroke of the clock to represent each month in the year. Each grape is said to bring good luck in the new year. Switzerland believes good luck comes from letting a drop of cream land on the floor New Years Day. While in France people eat a stack of pancakes for luck and good health. Belgium farmers wish their animals a Happy New Year for blessings. Armenian women cook a special bread for their family. The bread is kneaded with luck and good wishes pressed into the dough before it is cooked. In Northern Portugal children go carolling from home to home and are given treats and coins. They sing old songs or "Janeiro's" which is said to bring good luck. Romanians had a tradition of listening to hear if the farm animals talked on New Years Day. If the animals talked it was considered bad luck so they are relieved when they do not hear any talking animals. In Bolivia families make beautiful little wood or straw dolls to hang outside their homes to bring good luck.

