

Welcome The Year Of OX

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When Chinese Lunar New Year arrives on January 26, some will greet the Year of the Ox with traditional foods that are thought to bring good luck while others will look to the Chinese zodiac for signs as how to best approach and understand the coming year.



Tradition says that what you do on the first day of the new year will influence the rest of the year.

This is why Chinese custom says we should greet one another with lucky words. In Mandarin, people wish one another a prosperous New Year by saying “Gongxi Facai,” or “Gong Hay Fat Choy,” in Cantonese. People also eat foods that symbolize good fortune. Round foods, for instance, are said to bring good luck because their shape represents fullness; steamed dumplings resemble ancient Chinese golden ingots.

The Symbolism of the Year of the Ox

According to the Chinese calendar, the year 4707, makes this the Year of the Ox, (牛), one of the 12-year cycle of animals according to the

Chinese Zodiac. The animal is believed to be the main factor in each person's life that gives them their traits, success and happiness. While each of the 12 animals has a different personality and different characteristics, it is said to put its imprint not only the person with that sign but the year itself.

The ox represents prosperity through fortitude and hard work. People born under the sign of the Ox are said to be dependable, calm, methodical, patient, hardworking, logical, resolute, ambitious and tenacious. A born leader, this person may be reticent but when they do speak they are often quite eloquent. People born under the influence of the Ox are said to have a lot of common sense, though they can be naive about affairs of the heart. When it really counts, however, an Ox person will not let you down.

According to Chinese folklore, this is a good time for all of us to heed the Ox's best qualities. This means 2009 is a good year to embark on new endeavors in a cautious yet determined manner. It means too that the person who is steadfast can find good fortune hidden below the

surface. This makes it a time for prudence, a time to avoid unnecessary risks and spur the temptation to seek short term gain. From the point of view of the Chinese zodiac, success can be achieved this year, but through mindful and conscientious effort.

The Chinese Zodiac

Every year is assigned an animal name or "sign" according to a repeating cycle: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Boar. Therefore, every twelve years the same animal name or "sign" would reappear.

People in China view one's sign with the same range of seriousness and skepticism as people here view their horoscope. Nonetheless, the animal signs serve a useful social function for politely inquiring as to another person's age. Instead of asking directly how old a person is, people simply ask what is his or her animal sign. This places the person's age within a cycle of 12 years, and with a bit of common sense, one can deduce the person's exact age.

According to Chinese legend, the twelve animals quarreled one day as to who was to head the cycle of years. The gods were asked to decide and they held a contest: whoever was to reach the opposite bank of the river would be first, and the rest of the animals would receive their years according to their finish.

All the twelve animals gathered at the river bank and jumped in. Unknown to the ox, the rat had jumped upon his back. As the ox was about to jump ashore, the rat jumped off the ox's back, and won the race. The pig, who was very lazy, ended up last. That is why the rat is the first year of the animal cycle, the ox second, and the pig last.

Fireworks, Tangerines & Other Lucky New Year Customs

New Year is a time when cities across China reverberate for three days straight with the roar of firecrackers, a custom thought to dispel bad spirits. People also place lucky couplets written on red banners alongside and above their front door. Friends exchange mandarin oranges or tangerines, fruit that in Chinese have the same sound as the word for *gold*.

Chinese is a language rich in homonyms so many traditional new year's dishes have a double entendre. For example, the word peanut, *sheng* has the identical sound as the word for *life*, which is why people prepare dishes with lots of peanuts, which like long, uncut noodles, symbolize long life. The word fish, *yu*, has the same sound as the word for *surplus*, so it is also eaten on the New Year because it is said to usher in wealth, happiness and good fortune.

The Jade Emperor & the Kitchen God

Back in the time when our parents were growing up, Chinese families in our native town in Sichuan, greeted the New Year by offering sweet cakes to the Kitchen God whose duty is to report on a household's conduct to the Jade Emperor, the head guy among the Chinese deities. Some believed that if you made your cakes especially sticky, the Kitchen God's mouth would be stuck shut and he would be unable to report on any of the family's bad deeds.

In those years, most homes kept a picture of the Kitchen God on the wall. Some families would smear honey on the kitchen god's lips to ensure that his report to the Jade Emperor would only be filled with sweet praise.

Another reason to eat the sweet, glutinous moon cakes after they had been offered to the Kitchen God is because their gooeyness is thought to symbolize the family "sticking" together.

We look forward to working together in the New Year. You have our best wishes for health, prosperity and happiness.