



Nomadic New Year or Tsagaan Sar (图)

<http://www.firstlight.cn> 2010-08-30

Tsagaan Sar or White Month is one of Mongolia's two major and long-awaited holidays, the other being Naadam in July. For Mongols, Tsagaan Sar is not only an ancient holiday marking the end of winter and the beginning of a new year's cycle, but is also a time for unification and reinforcing social bonds.

Preparations for the festive start well ahead of time. Several families usually gather in the eldest man's gher (round, felt covered traditional dwelling), where the holiday will take place.

Since the holiday means all relatives, neighbors, friends and guests will be treated to a lavish meal, women make more than a thousand buuz and dumplings. Ready dumplings are lined on wooden plates and put outside. The next day, the frozen buuz are ready to be steamed. Families all across the country stock-up on food, dairy products, mild milk vodka and other specialties for the occasion.

Bituun - last dinner of the outgoing year. bituun, meaning "to close down", takes place on the last day of the lunar month. Beforehand, all the business of the past year must be wrapped up; debts paid and good relationships restored.

"Our family began preparations almost one month ago," says D. Batdelger, a herder in Binder soum of Khentii province. "First of all, I repaired and cleaned out all the sheds, including the shelter for the cattle. And I've made a trip to town for New Year gifts and food supplies... Both my wife and I have had our hands full."

The hostess of the gher, Odiima, is bustling around the stove, cooking the New Year dinner.

"One is supposed to see in the New Year wearing all new clothes," she says. "So, this year I made new dels (national dress) for my husband, children, grandchildren, and myself.

"My daughter and I have made plenty of buuz and banshi (steamed meat dumplings and lamb patties) for the holiday as well as baking buov (biscuits). And yesterday, of course, we did a thorough cleaning so that on Tsagaan Sar there would not be a speck. And then bituun begins - the last dinner of the outgoing year. That evening, one must try all the dishes: boiled meat, a variety of milk products, meat dumplings and dessert... That means a long dinner late into the night. Usually airag (a mild beverage made of fermented mare's milk, often called "white beer"), mild vodka and tea with milk are served with the dinner.

Tradition states that before starting the meal, the host parts with the old year in a symbolic ceremony. Having placed a leg of lamb on his plate, he slices it and gives everyone a piece. Then he breaks the bone and draws out the marrow, thus symbolizing the opening of the New Year.

Dinner is lively: adults tell funny tales, sing and play with the children. Everyone has to feel cheerful and full of food, so that the family will also feel content in the next year. Even dogs are given extra bones to fill them up.

The arrival of the New Year is hailed early in the morning. In February, it is light at about 8 a.m. but everyone is up by 6 a.m. Batdelger, his wife, their children - all dressed in their new dels - step outside the gher. They raise their hands in the air and greet the first sunrise of the New Year.

And the ritual of congratulations begins. First all the family members come up, one by one, to Batdelger, the oldest man in the family. They place their hands out, palms up, and he places his palms down. The youngest person must bow and tell him: "May you be healthy and happy!" This greeting is called zolgo. From New Year's Day until the end of February, all Mongols will congratulate each other this way.

When the ritual is over, the hosts and their guests go into the gher where a special table is set. In the very centre is placed a huge plate with boiled meat and a back of lamb on top. Before beginning the meal, Batdelger's eldest son presents his mother with a blue khadag (long silk scarf) symbolizing respect and a wish for happiness.

Then the host cuts off pieces of lamb, serving the eldest first. It is customary for the diners to try a spoonful of rice with raisins first. The women pour airag and milk vodka. During the course of the meal, each person should drink at least three small cups.

The first day of the New Year is spent visiting and congratulating neighbors, relatives and friends. Batdelger is respected in the area, so everyone feels obliged to visit him. Each guest brings the host a present and wishes him a happy New Year. Visitors come all day long. When guests leave the gher, each is given a small present. The hostess and her daughters take turns at the stove steaming buuz and serving guests.

Towards the evening, guests will arrive and continue a day-long lavish feast with talk, songs and special new year games. The party breaks up well after midnight. Having said good night to everyone, Batdelger quietly said:

"Let all be happy in the New Year,

Let there be no suffering,

Let there be no hatred."

All of the first month of the New Year is considered a holiday and the visits and congratulations continue. It is necessary during that month to visit parents no matter where they live. One is well fed during every visit, which popular belief states will bring prosperity throughout the year.

I reach the shepherd A. Sedet. His gher is crowded with people. According to tradition, I had to first greet the hosts in the holiday zolgo h manner and give gifts. Then greeting all the others present, I asked them in turn "How have the flocks withstood the winter? Have the sheep fattened up?" In answer, I was told: "Thank you, well. The sheep have fattened." Another part of the holiday ritual.

"The holiday is only beginning," says the host. "On the first Sunday of the New Year the traditional horse races will take place, and until then we will feast..."

"Who will watch the sheep then?" I asked.

"We shepherds are clever," he smiles. "Before the holiday we graze them in distant pastures, but for Tsagaan Sar we bring them nearer to home, so it's not difficult to keep an eye on them. Besides, children help out and we can fully enjoy the New Year."

[存档文本](#)