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The Losar eve is a very busy day. The final touch of cleaning is done. All the decorations of the festival have to be finished. All the offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are neatly put in line. The butter lamps, the seven offering bowls are all nicely filled with offerings.

First Day: All the family members rise up as early as 3 O' clock in the morning. Wash up and put on the best clothes, and first drink the *Chang-kol*, boiled chang. (Chang is a home brewed alcohol). Before going to bed on the Losar eve, *Chang-kol* is made ready to be boiled in the morning. Raisins, dried apricots, sugar, butter and Tsampa are added to the chang and then boiled.

After that tea, ceremonial rice, yogurts and drama follow. Then the main meals are prepared. So eating and drinking continues all day long into the second day. Whatever, you eat or drink on this day, the first portion is made offering on the family altar. If the family has a family lama living near by they go to him to pay homage. They also go to the near by monasteries to make offering and light butter lamps. So the first day of Losar is also known as the Lama Losar.

On the third day people put up prayer flags at the individual family homes as well as at a public places with all the community participation. Singing and dancing pertinent to Losar are also performed.

The International Festival of Raleigh is marking the 25th anniversary in 2010. The festival's anniversary theme is *Global Celebrations*. To highlight this milestone the Tibetan culture exhibit is showcasing the celebration of Tibetan Losar.



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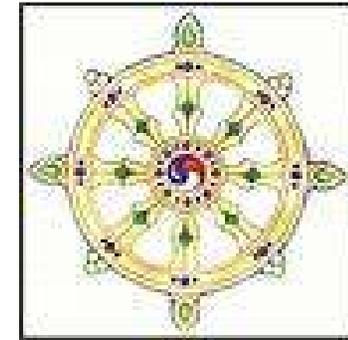
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We support His Holiness the Dalai Lama's non-violent Middle Path Approach to Sino-Tibet issue.

Losar – Tibetan New Year

What is Losar and Where it is Celebrated

One of the most celebrated festivals in Tibetan culture is the Losar. Lo means year or age and Sar means new or fresh. Therefore Losar means New Year. This festival is celebrated in every Tibetan home regardless of whether one is rich or poor, religious practitioners or laypersons, nomads or farmers, merchants or laborers. Losar is celebrated in all the traditional three provinces of Tibet plus some parts of countries such as Nepal, Bhutan and India. Sikkim, Ladakh, parts of Arunachal, in particular, where Tibetan culture is practiced.

When it Started

The celebration of Losar predates the advent of Buddhism in Tibet. The first Losar was said to have celebrated during the reign of Pude Gongyal, the 9th king of Tibet, roughly 150 BCE.

Cycle of Counting

Tibetans follow a lunar calendar. A year is associated with one of the 12 animals and five elements with gender, e.g. year 2137 is Male Iron Tiger (2010). In 2011 the Tibetans around the world will celebrate the 2138 Losar of Female Iron Rabbit. With the combination of 12 animals and five elements the counting goes on a 60 year cycle.

This is to say that a child born in 2010 which is a Male Iron Tiger, the next Male Iron Tiger will happen only in 60 years. The first day of the Losar is the first day of the first month of the year. Losar falls between February and March. This is because in every four years there appears a double month year.



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Celebration

The main theme of this event is **merry making** – eating, drinking, exchanging gifts and inviting into each others homes. Before 1959, Losar in Tibet was celebrated at least for 15 days. Now-a-days in exile in India and Nepal, Tibetan refugees celebrate the Losar for three days. Tibetans living in the western countries celebrate it mostly for one day only.

Preparation

The preparation of Losar festival begins way before the Losar starts. Cleaning is one of the main features of this festival. Painting the house a fresh, cleaning the surrounding area, washing all items of clothing and dusting off every corner of

the home, office or business precede weeks before Losar.

Gu-tor: The day before the Losar is a great event. On the 29th of the last month of the ending year, monasteries perform a special ritual called Gu-Tor. The monks make a life size figure of a demon. They perform the puja during the day and towards in the evening, monks carry the figure with chanting, drums, symbols and dhung/gyaling. They burn the figure signifying that whatever negativities have been accumulated during the forgoing year are now burned and purified so that the New Year starts on a clean slate.

Gu-thuk: Similarly in the homes of every family, Gu-thok is prepared on the 29th of the last month. Gu-thuk is a big feast itself. Gu means nine, referring to the 29th and Thuk means soup. The Gu-thuk is made of whole wheat cooked days in advance and then add as many different kinds of beans, vegetables, and meat cut in size of fists. On top of that Bak-ril are added. Bakrils are cooked dough. Inside the Bakril, people put all kinds of stuffs. Gu-thuk is the dinner on the 29th day.

When Gu-thuk is served, everyone gets a Bakril with each of the first three servings. While having the soup, each one opens the Bakril. If one of the family members gets *chilli* in the bakril, this means this person is a chatterbox. The opposite of this is *butter* which denotes politeness. Similarly, one who gets *white Conch* denotes compassionate and one who gets *charcoal* means black hearted, so on and so forth. Each person opens the Bakril while all the others are eager to see what he/she gets and then make fun of the meaning of the stuff in the Bakril to the character of the person.