

Making the New Year Celebrations Meaningful

by Dr. Connie



Living in Japan for a number of years, Dr. Marcel and I especially enjoyed the rituals that comprised the New Year celebrations. We would wander over to the 13th century Buddhist temple, literally in our back yard, to take our turns in the ringing of the enormous bell that was rung 108 times at midnight. We participated in the ritualistic sipping of gold fleck infused sake poured from a tiny ceremonial pot into equally tiny sipping cups. There was the pounding of the mochi, the wandering around the neighborhood enjoying the special foods prepared for the visiting and reconnecting of the opening days of the new year, the first writing of the new year, and more.

Rituals like these bring meaning to otherwise ordinary days, help us connect with each other, remember the year that is passing, and set a tone for the year that is becoming. **No better time than the New Year to create meaningful rituals for you and your family.**

New Year's Eve can be a time for celebrating what has been, letting go of what is no longer serving you. **Gratefulness ceremonies, for example, are powerful.** Each person expresses to each other person something about that person for which the other person is grateful. **In fire ceremonies, habits and traits we would like to be rid of can be written on papers and burned in a burning bowl.** A ritual bath for the body and a ritual clearing of clutter and cleaning of the house, make room for the bringing in of the new on New Year's Day.

While New Year's Eve is generally a time of celebration, New Year's Day may be a time of reflection. Meditation provides a sound foundation for a reflective time during the day. I recommend intensive journaling ala Ira Progoff, collaging, brainstorming, visualizing, setting intentions, making use of Tarot or Runes or anything else that can help you access your own inner knowledge.

On your own? **Connect up with friends or family you rarely see and touch in to their lives.** The first email of the New Year, the first FaceTime of the New Year, the first phone call of the New Year. All have meaning if you give them meaning through conscious awareness and intention.

If you are in a family that doesn't have a tradition of special foods or events for New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, create a tradition. Imagine creative healthful fun foods, and recreate them year after year. How about a New Year's Day hike, a cell phone free day, a game day, a cooking together day, a day of service as a family? Or what about an "anything can happen day" when you all wake together to new possibilities?

Creating or participating in rituals gives a sense of culture and of belonging, lifts spirits, imbues meaning, brings purpose to our lives. **The energy you put into these ritual celebrations will enhance your mental, emotional, and physical health. Be creative and have fun!**