

HAPPY LOSAR! TIBETAN NEW YEAR
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Losar, the Tibetan New Year, is always celebrated on the day after the New Moon that marks the beginning of the year. Leading up to Losar is a week-long intensive practice for the dharmapalas, the fierce protector deities, ending in two days (all-day) of chanting for the Mahakala protector.

Yesterday, on the actual day of the New Moon, it is traditional to have a fire puja, with a large outdoor bonfire into which all kinds of blessed substances are tossed, especially juniper branches. Such a bonfire was held yesterday at KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra) monastery in the mountains above Woodstock, New York. My wife Margaret was there participating in the event. I am minding the home front and taking care of our dog.

Today, Wednesday February 22nd is Losar and Tibetans everywhere celebrate it with feasting, dancing, and other festivities. Great amounts of food are prepared, in particular Khapse, the fried fritter, which are stacked, log-cabin style, sometimes several feet high. And there is the ever-present Tibetan tea, a combination of water, tea, butter, and salt, always a welcome taste when we were in the cold of Tibet.

I offer a cup of tea to everyone on this New Year. May your year be a happy one and everything you do benefit all sentient beings, including yourself.

And I will leave you with a little story that I have told here once before.

It was back in the 1980s. We were hosting one of the great Tibetan eminences at our center, a very rare event. Next to someone like the Dalai Lama, His Eminence is as high a personage as you would ever meet. He was with us for almost a week.

Anyway, the local news crew had been here and His Eminence, Margaret, and I were sitting around in our living room, probably serving him tea.

All of a sudden some of my kids rushed into the room, very excited and upset. It seems the neighbor's cat had found the nest of baby birds in a tree just outside our house and was about to kill and eat them. Of course I was expected to do something about this and I did.

I jumped up, went into the back room, grabbed a BB gun that I had bought (because it was very weak but still worked) and ran outside. Without thinking, I completely forgot about His Eminence, who was left just sitting there.

When I got outside, sure enough there was this cat many feet up in the crotch of a tree sitting directly in front of a nest of tiny baby birds. He had his front paws folded back under his breast as cats like to do and he was contemplating carnage and his next meal.

Of course, this was terrible and while the kids cried I aimed that BB gun and fired off a shot. The BB hit the cat in the side and it just bounced off. The cat felt the impact but never moved a muscle. It just sat there watching the babies. I fired off a few more rounds but they too had no effect. Things were getting worse.

All of a sudden someone was tapping on my shoulder. I turned around and was looking right into the eyes of His Eminence who was standing there before me. He simply said "Give me the gun."

Then it struck me: what was I thinking. Of course, I shouldn't be harming this cat and, with lowered eyes, I handed the gun over to him and he took it from me. I felt terrible. And then he said to me:

"Where is the cat?" I sheepishly pointed up to where the cat sat, still watching the baby birds. His Eminence without a thought raised the gun and fired a single BB right at the cat, at which time the cat leaped straight up into the air and ran down the tree and away.

His Eminence then looked at me and laughed. And that is a story on this Tibetan New Year's day.

Enjoy!