

## Nyilo: New Year of Shar and Wang Region

Nyilo (ཉི་མོ།) is Bhutanese winter solstice and it roughly falls in 11<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month and coincides with early January. Nyilo literally means ‘the return of the sun’. It is the day from which the duration of sunlight time increases, signifying the start of longer days. It is considered to be the most auspicious day of the year for the Bhutanese. The people have traditionally believed that on Nyilo, past mistakes may be erased and karmic value of good deeds can multiply.

Nyilo, observed as the new year of the people of Shar and Wang region in western Bhutan. Loday (ལོ་ལོ།) is celebrated as a part of Nyilo. From the Buddhist perspective, Loday is a type of celebration aimed at blocking certain paranormal misfortunes from befalling the region and thereby promoting peace and prosperity in the region for the entire year to come. Nyilo is considered more sacred than any other day and all people are discouraged from taking part in negative activities. In Paro and Haa, Loday comes a day ahead of Lomba (ལོ་ལོ།) and in Wang and Shar regions it falls one day ahead of Nyilo.

The term Loday means ‘prosperous year’, however, it is also referred to the special performance conducted by a group of children and young men on the eve of the Nyilo and Lomba festivals. The village children gather into smaller groups and proceed from house to house, singing Loday incantations. The children participating in Loday Jangni (ལོ་ལོ་འགྲུ་རྩི།) are known as Loday Jangme (ལོ་ལོ་འགྲུ་མི།). The farmers offer gifts to the children and these gifts are called *tendrel gi tsul* (རྩི་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ།) or token of auspiciousness. In return, they chant words of prayers to bring good fortune to their locality in the new year. In general, Loday is a well-wishing activity and children in the villages participate in it in masses. Loday verses contain words of prayers and good wishes for the coming new year. Nyilo is a break for the villagers between their hectic farming schedule, where men enjoy archery, *degor* and *khuru* matches.

In Loday, children have a predominant role compared to adults. Children are usually considered as a medium through which lucks are brought into families. When a baby is born to a family she or he not only brings happiness in the family but also brings merit or *sonam*. It is said that even a small good deed done on this particular day is more beneficial than a huge merit accumulated at other times. Many people claim that Loday existed in Bhutan much earlier than Zhabdrung’s arrival in the country. This was based on the fact a verse in the Loday incantation contains a vivid description of a prototype Bhutanese farmhouse built of rammed muds, which were already there in Bhutan before Zhabdrung’s arrival in 1616.

During the Loday recitation, each child carries a different type of container allocated for particular food. One child carries a *sipa* container for holding butter, another carries *bangthra* container for meat, and the other carries another *sipa* for holding salt and one

carries a sack for rice. They stop before every house and chant the Lolay prayer. The head of the family, usually the housewife gives rice, dried meat, cheese and butter after the children have completed their incantation. The children will then accept the gift gracefully before proceeding on to rest of the houses in the village. They stop at every door and chant the Lolay words. This goes on until the last house in the village. At the end of the day, they gather together and use whatever they have collected for a party on the next day. Usually the children spend the following day out in the wild in a selected spot having a party. During Nyilo, the men play an inter-village archery match called *choda* (ཕྱགས་མཛད་), which goes on for three to four days.

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