

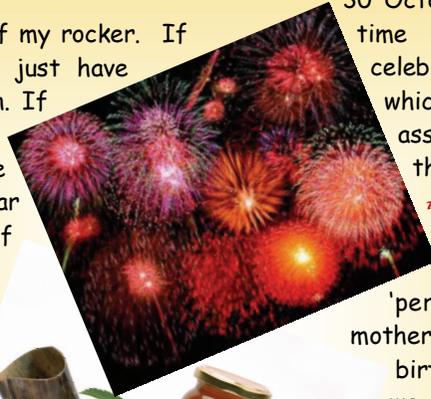


Happy New Year!

No, I'm not completely off my rocker. If you are Jewish, you will just have celebrated Rosh Hashanah. If you are Gujarati, Marwari or Nepali, you will be celebrating the New Year during Diwali, at the end of this month. If you had lived in Paris from 1793 to 1805 or in 1871 your year would have started on the Autumn equinox, about 24 September.

New beginnings?

I was fascinated by the different emphases each of these cultures draw from their new year celebrations. At Rosh Hashanah, although the stimulus is remembering God as creator, the focus seems to be on submitting to him—both as judge of our sins and as sovereign over our future. Diwali, on the other hand, signifies the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, good over evil, and hope over despair. The festival marks the beginning of a new fiscal year—and though I'm not certain if this



connection comes with the tax man, families typically puja to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Reconciliation

The now deceased Murador Aboriginal tribe of Western Australia celebrated New Year on 30 October. For them it was a time of reconciliation and celebration of friendship, in which a prime focus was assessing times past and the year ahead.

A personal calendar

I think we need to be conscious of our own 'personal calendar'. My mother celebrates her 80th birthday this October—and we are happy to take on board that sort of anniversary—weddings, first dates and so on. But I think it could be healthy to pick up some of the aspects of other New Year festivals—taking time both to look back and evaluate, and to look forward with purpose.

But what I would want to include most of all is the spiritual dimension. Do you have a date on which you assess your relationship with God? Have you got any 'older' spiritually in the past year? It is not a mistake that Christians talk about being 'born again': do you have a spiritual birthday?

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