

MY KARENNI NEW YEAR'S TRADITION

By Cecilia Pomeh

The Karenni tradition is to wash your body with boiled shikakai and soaptree bark on New Year's Eve to wash away the bad things as you ring in a new year. I make the hair wash with the shikikai and lemon. We boil a big pot and only use ingredients in odd numbers for good luck. The soaptree bark makes the hair very soft, like a conditioner. The whole family participates in the hair and body washing, including the young and old.

We also light candles for happiness and to welcome the new year. The candles are unscented, white, and shaped in a small cylinder. We light candles in odd numbers, like 3, 5, or 7, again for good luck. Afterwards, we pray together with family to say that we are thankful for everything God has given us. Unlike on Christmas Eve where we pray in Church, for the new year we pray at home with family. We stay up past midnight so that we experience the change in the year.

In the morning, we cook a big meal and eat together. I am the one who does the cooking every New Year's Day. We eat rice, chicken, vegetables, beef, and shrimp. I also make a spicy sauce, which we eat with salad. My daughter, who is 13-years-old, made the sweet jello for dessert. It is a tradition I do every year to bring in good luck for my family and me. Along with Christmas, New Year's is one of my favorite holidays.