

Why the Camel Rolls in the Ashes

A great many years ago, Buddha began assigning an animal to each of the years of the 12-year Mongolian calendar. When he had finished assigning eleven animals, Buddha paused to consider which animal should be allotted the twelfth and final year.

On hearing this, the camel and mouse, neither of whom had been selected, rushed to see Buddha. Bowing respectfully before him, each presented himself as a worthy candidate. Buddha listened in silence as each animal argued his case.

When the animals were finished, wise Buddha, not wishing to offend either of the deserving animals, quietly told the camel and the mouse that they would have to resolve the matter themselves in a friendly and honest way.

The big camel and the tiny mouse, after much discussion, finally agreed that they would settle the issue with a contest. The first to see the light of the new morning sun the very next day would be the winner, and the winner would enter the Mongolian calendar forever.

That night, in the darkness in the middle of the wide-open steppe, the camel took up a position facing east. The mouse, who had asked the camel if he could sit on his hump, fixed his eyes on a faraway snow-covered mountain to the west. Both animals restlessly awaited the rising of the morning sun.

At dawn, when the great sun began its slow ascent, one thin early ray glanced off the snowy western mountain top. The mouse yelled out. 'I see it! It's the sun! I win!'

'What?' cried the camel, knowing the sun rose in the east. 'Why, you little trickster! You cheated! You'll pay for that!'

The terrified mouse scurried down the camel's hump seeking safety in a nearby pile of ashes. The camel ran after him and threw his heavy body on the ground, rolling back and forth on the ashes, hoping to smash the treacherous little mouse.

The camel did not squish the mouse that time but he is certain that one day he will. Whenever he sees a pile of ashes he thinks the mouse could be hiding underneath, he snorts, stamps his feet and falls onto the ash pile, rolling back and forth attempting to squash the wily little mouse.

And so, the mouse entered the 12-year Mongolian calendar and the camel did not. Buddha felt sorry for the camel and told him he would not be forgotten. In fact, the camel would be represented in the Mongolian calendar by possessing one feature of each of the twelve different animals. To this day, if you look closely at the camel you will see that Buddha kept his word, because the camel has:

The ears of the mouse

The stomach of the cow

The paws of the tiger

The nose of the rabbit

The body of the dragon

The eyes of the snake

The mane of the horse

The wool of the sheep

The hump of the ape

The head-crest of the rooster

The crooked hind legs of the dog