

## 2021 is the Year of the Metal Ox.

For over a decade, the kiai (energy) year began well before the calendar year, let alone the lunar year. This time, we are just days into the push-pull-pull-pull of Ox. The Ox is eager to begin and has spent an entire month pushing out and breaking free of the thrashing Rat. Whew! We are cheering for you, Metal Ox!

With a steady rhythm and determined orientation to the horizon, the Ox is prepared to pull heavy loads of work and responsibility. All around are the evidence of unfinished business, human suffering to alleviate, brokenness to repair. We are faced with the same facts and conditions. The kiai of the Ox, however, means more work and less thrashing about. Anyone hoping for dramatic shifts and quick pivots will be disappointed. It is a year of wide turns and the gradual taking of ground. (An Ox does not pivot.) It will be important to look, plan, and execute ahead to take advantage of the momentum gained by wide, resolute turns.



In most cycles, a person born under the same sign has an average and familiar year. This phenomenon occurs because the kiai of the year reinforces natural tendencies and there will be scant natural tension to interrupt habits. For the Ox in an Ox Year, this translates to a good and productive year which, in excess, could become burdensome if the Ox assumes that only the Ox is assuming responsibility. If the Ox “owns” the year and shares its story and tasks along the way, more may be accomplished.

The Sheep and Tiger will experience disappointments, arising from their expectation that the quieter environment will yield magical results. For the Sheep, the calm is a welcome relief, but can also encourage procrastination and unfinished business will quickly pile up. The Tiger will come upon many opportunities in the more settled times, but the Tiger’s natural ambition can overshoot the methodical rhythm of the year. Even with these frustrations, both Sheep and Tiger will recoup and have no worse than an average year.

The Boar, Dog and Rabbit will have highs and lows that equate to net positives, each to their own nature and without much trauma. The Boar is only in peril if the habit of assertion pushes the Boar’s projects ahead too rapidly, in which case the kiai of the Ox Year will require a redo or tactical abandonment. The Dog will have a busy year with early momentum, and then find the habit of suspicion a distraction that chases others’ motivations that simply do not exist in the straightforward Ox kiai. The steady pace of the Ox Year, ordinarily confining for the Rabbit’s carefree nature, will be freeing after the chaos of the Metal Rat. To take advantage of having room to breathe, the Rabbit must pay attention to the direction and tasks that forward momentum require.

The Snake, Rat, Monkey and Horse will have more ups than downs and steady progress... provided they lift their heads and take notice of an actual horizon. For the Snake, the drop in atmospheric pressure presents a calm path toward Snake-like endeavors, if and only if the Snake takes a more direct path than usual. After respite, the Rat will rebound quickly to the year's more logical path, assuming making choices among the too many things to do. The Monkey's natural creativity must be combined with the strategy of maps, schedules, processes of their making. Anything appearing as a shortcut will fall short. For the Horse, the pathway will be simple and appear as an open field. While serious purposes are achievable, the Horse will be surprised that others are not likely to follow the Horse's lead.

The conditions and rhythm of the Ox Year are the most advantageous for the Rooster and the Dragon. The Rooster's love of structure and routine works well with this year's energy and it will be an especially active time. But the Rooster needs to pay attention to strutting, crowing, and taking on too much or burnout will force the Rooster to the sidelines. For the Dragon, relative stability allows for the joyous tackling of many small and large tasks. Even the Dragon's fun can be dampened if distracted by the drama that continues to unfold in the community and close relations.

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The New Year's "prediction" has been a part of the tradition at Daihonzan Choen-ji for at least 25 if not closer to 30 years. It is not a part of Zen tradition, so why? Tanouye Rotaishi understood the Chinese horoscope and I Ching practices as an understanding of universal energy across time and, therefore, an important guidepost for a training that is "Kiai First". The New Year's recitation is not a prediction as much as it is a forecast – a forecast of the pattern and condition of the prevailing universal energy as it may play out over the year, and the interaction of this energy with human characteristics and habits. Tanouye Roshi would sternly remind us that we are not animals, and nothing in the forecast is a predetermined fortune or misfortune. If you know a storm is coming, or

that it will be a gloriously sunny day, how may you prepare for it and take the most advantage of its conditions to live well and with purpose? Moment by moment, day by day, year by year.



The prevalent energy of the Year of the Metal Ox will be less chaotic, more determined. It is arriving at an important time – one in which there is so much work to do. Destruction will not disappear with calmer winds and gentle light. We are, instead, gifted with greater possibilities to face our kuleana – sacred responsibility – with discipline and grace, to be tired and satisfied at year's end.

*Norma Ryuko Kavelokū Wong Roshi, January 1, 2021 in Kalibi Valley, with deep mahalo to Tanouye Tenshin Rotaishi and Stephen Dogi Kow Roshi*