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NOWRUZ

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NOWRUZ in the Islamic Period	4
Customs and Traditions before Nowruz	11
Nowruz in Islam	14
Esfandgan Celebration Anniversary of Fertile Earth and Women	17
Norouz Across Various Lands	20
Nowruz History and Its Origins among Iranians	28
Happy Nowruz and New Iranian Year	30
Persian New Year's Table Celebrates Nature's Rebirth Deliciously	34
Major activities Of the department of holy shrines of Iraq	36

NOWRUZ IN THE

Compiled by: Mina Vakilinejad

Introduction

The Islamic conquest altered many Iranian traditions specifically associated with national ideology, imperial institutions, and Zoroastrian rituals. Although Nowruz was an established symbol of these three aspects, it did survive while less significant festivals were eclipsed by their Islamic rivals and gradually became abandoned by indifferent Mongol and Turkish rulers or hostile clerical authorities during Safavid and Qajar periods. Nowruz survived because it was so profoundly engrained in Iranian traditions, history, and cultural memory the Iranian Identity and Nowruz mutually buttressed each other, and the emergence of a distinctly Persian Muslim society—and later the emergence of a nation state with the advent of the Safavids—legitimized the ancient national festival and allowed it to flourish with slight modifications or elaborations. Indeed, as will be set out in subsequent sections, the incremental expansion of Nowruz ceremonies from the Safavids, through the Qajars, to the Pahlavi period enabled the court to parade its power and strengthened its attempts at forming a stronger central authority. Besides,



it explains the establishment of increasingly sophisticated and protocol-ridden royal audiences with all the pomp and ceremony they could muster. Like all rituals, therefore, it both manifested a belief or ideology and reinforced it through an annual recital. It was precisely because Nowruz was associated from the outset with cultural memories of the splendor and divinely bestowed power of the royal courts of pre-Islamic Persia that it was attractive to rulers, from the Ab-

basid caliphs to the Pahlavis. Along with its many ceremonies, and most notably that of gift exchange, it provided the rulers with an alternative source of affirming and enhancing their power and prestige through a strictly non-Islamic channel; for unlike religious festivals, they could appear and be celebrated as the focal point and the peerless heroes of the occasion.

While most of the traditions now associated with Nowruz have been inherited from the

ISLAMIC PERIOD



past usages, no comprehensive history of Nowruz in the Islamic period has been written. Such an account must be pieced together from occasional notices in general and local histories, brief records by geographers, and scattered references in works of poets and storytellers. Only for recent times do we have detailed information in the form of eyewitness reports by travelers and, more importantly, studies of contemporary practices throughout Persia and countries

affected by Persian culture. But even these are problematic, as the former category mainly describes court usages and the latter usually gives uncritical narratives embellished with rhetorical and, frequently, fanciful interpretations.

History up to the Safavid period. The Arabs captured the capital of the Sasanian Empire on a Nowruz day, taking the celebrating inhabitants by surprise (Ya'qubi, I, p. 198). Henceforth, the early Arab governors forcefully levied heavy Nowruz and Mehragān taxes on the conquered people (Jahšīārī, pp. 15, 24; Šuli, p. 219). The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs retained this onerous burden of taxation on their conquered subjects, but, at the same time, they also celebrated both Nowruz and Mehragān with considerable relish and pomp, thereby helping to keep alive Nowruz and its many traditions (Mas'udi, Moruj VII, p. 277; Tanuḳī, pp. 145-46; Ahsan, pp. 287-88).

Later, other Islamic dynasties of Persia did the same (for the Taherids, see Jāḥeẓ, p. 150; for the Samanids, see Biruni, tr. Sachau, p. 217), and the court poets praised the occasion and offered their congratulatory panegyrics. Yāqut reports (Boldān, Cairo, VI, p. 258; cf. Moqaddasi, p. 431) that the Buyid ruler

ʿAzod-al-Dawla (r. 949-83) customarily welcomed Nowruz in a majestic hall, wherein servants had placed gold and silver plates and vases full of fruit and colorful flowers. He sat on a costly seat (masnad), and the court astronomer came forward, kissed the ground, and congratulated him on the arrival of the New Year. Then the king summoned the musicians and singers and invited his boon companions. They entered and filed in to their assigned places, and all enjoyed a great festive occasion. Beyhaqi describes the lavish celebration of Nowruz at the Ghaznavid court (Beyhaqi, ed. Fayyāẓ, pp. 9, 12, 704, 751, 815), and some of the most beautiful descriptive opening passages of Persian courtly panegyrics (especially by Farroḳī, Manuĉehri, and Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salmān) are in praise of Nowruz. Their simple yet melodious rhythms suggest that they may have been accompanied by music. The melodies known as the "Nowruzi" airs, apparently inherited from the Sasanian period, included the Great Nowruz (Nowruz-e bozorg), Nowruz-e Kay Qobād, the Lesser Nowruz (nowruz-e ḳordakorḳārā), the Edessan-Nowruz (Nowruz-e rahāwi, comprising the Arabian and Persian melodies), and Nowruz-e Šabā (Dehḳodā, s.v. "Nowruz"; Boru-



mand-e Sa'id, pp. 302-8). In the 14th century, Ḥāfeẓ says that "the melody of the Nowruz breeze (bād-e nowruzi) rekindles the inner light, and the melody of the "Throne of victory" (tak̄t-e piruzi) inspires the song of the nightingale intoxicated by flowers."

The Nowruz festivities were by no means restricted to the royal courts. It was "a solemn feast through all of Persia, ... observed not only in the great cities, but celebrated with extraordinary rejoicings in every little town, village, and hamlet" (Lane, 1848, II, p. 462; see also Biḡami, I, p. 150; Farāmarz b. Kōdādād, I, p. 49; for testimonies of poets see Borumand-e Sa'id, pp. 253-

384). In Shiraz, Muslims and Zoroastrians celebrated Nowruz together and decorated the bazaars (Moqaddasi, p. 429). Biruni testifies that many ancient Nowruz rites were still observed in his time. People grow, he says, "seven kinds of grains on seven columns and from their growth they draw inferences as regards the crop of the year whether it would be good or bad" (Biruni, *Chronology*, tr. Sachau, p. 217). They held the first day of Nowruz as particularly auspicious, and the dawn the most auspicious hour (Idem, p. 217). Good omens appearing before Nowruz included fires and light glowing on the western bank

of the Tigris opposite Kalwāḡā, and on the Denā (text: dmā) mountain in Fārs. Tasting honey thrice in the morning of Nowruz and lighting three candles before speaking were thought to ward off diseases (Idem, p. 216). People exchanged presents (notably sugar), kindled fire (to consume all corruptions), bathed in the streams (Idem, p. 218), and sprinkled water on each other.

Ebn Faḡih (p. 165) specifies that "this ancient custom is still observed in Hamadan, Isfahan, Dināvar, and the surrounding regions," and the *Tarjoma-ye Taf-sir-e Ṭabari* (I, p. 148, n. 1) adds that in so doing people said: "May you live long! (zendabāšī! zend-abāšī!)." We may add that to this day traditional households sprinkle rose water on relatives and guests. According to Kušyār (apud Taqizāda, p. 191), the sixth day of Nowruz was called "Water-pouring [day]" (šabb al-mā') and was revered as the Great Nowruz and "the Day of Hope," because it commemorated the completion of the act of creation. Ġazālī (I, p. 522) strongly disapproved of Muslims celebrating Nowruz by decorating the bazaars, preparing sweets, and





making or selling children's toys, wooden shields, sword, trumpets, and so on."

In 897, the Abbasid caliph al-Mo'tazed (r. 892-902) forbade the people of Baghdad "to kindle bonfire on New Year's Eve and pour water [on passersby] on New Year's Day," but fearing riot he rescinded the order (Tabari, III, p. 2163). The Fatimid caliphs also repeatedly forbade the kindling of fire and sprinkling of water at Nowruz (Maqrizi, p. 394). Šābi described the rules issued against Nowruz celebration in the fourth century Baghdad as follows: "A Muslim was forbidden to dress like a *ḡemmi* [that is, people of the book, namely Jews, Christians, and Šābians, and by extension Zoroastrians], ... to give an apple to someone on Nawrüz to honor the day, to color eggs at their feast," and, in general, "sharing in jollifications on that occasion was condemned." Some non-Muslims "hired a special cook to work during the night to have the dishes fresh in the morning, gave parties for relatives and friends, at which they served green melons, plums, peaches, and dates if they were in season." Wom-

en bought special Nowruz perfumes, and "eggs were dyed in various colors. To sprinkle perfume on a man ... and tread seven times on him was a means of driving away the evil eye, laziness and fever. Antimony and rue were used to improve the sight during the coming year. Colleges were shut and the students played. ... Muslims drank wine in public and ate cleaned lentils like the *ḡemmis* and joined them in throwing water on folks." Respectable peoples threw water on each other in their houses

► **A particular custom was the enthroning of the "Nowruzian ruler" (mir-e Nowruzi, somewhat similar to the lord of misrule in Medieval Western literature and folklore).**



or gardens; the commoners did this on the street (Ketāb al-Hafawāt, tr. Tritton, pp. 144-45).

A detailed account of Nowruz celebration in the 10th-century Isfahan is given by Ebn Hawqal (p. 364): "During the Nowruz festival, people gather for seven days in the bazaar of Karina, a suburb of Isfahan, engaged in merriment; they enjoy various food and go around visiting decorated shops. The inhabitants and those coming from other places to participate in this festival, spend a good deal of money, wear beautiful clothes, and take part in gatherings for plays and merrymaking. Skillful singers, both male and female, take their places side by side on the riverside along the palaces. The whole atmosphere is filled with joy and happiness. Many assemble on rooftops and in the markets, engage in festivities, drinking, eating, and consuming sweets, not letting an idle moment to pass by. ... No one disturbs them, for their rulers have allowed this festival, and it is a well-established tradition. It is said that besides the abundance of fruits, drinks, and food brought in and sold for a meager

price, the expenses of the night of the spring equinox amount to 200,000 dirhams. As for the prices, 2,000-dirham weight of finest grapes costs a mere five dirhams" (see also the eyewitness description by Māfarrokī [tr., pp. 17-18] and the testimony of Nasafi, p. 168).

A particular custom was the enthroning of the "Nowruzian ruler" (mir-e Nowruzi, somewhat similar to the lord of misrule in Medieval Western literature and folklore). A commoner was elected as "king" and provided with regalia (often mockingly old and unseemly), a throne, court officials, and a number of troops, and he ruled for a few days and was fully obeyed. Then he was dethroned, beaten, and forced to flee (Qazvini, 1944; Idem, 1945). In some regions, particularly in Kurdistan, this ancient tradition is still practiced (Wilson, p. 245; Keyvān, p. 119; Bois, p. 477; Mostowfi, I, pp. 351-53).

Later History. The festive celebration of Nowruz during the Safavid period is well attested. In preparation to it, commanders, ministers, favored officials, rich merchants, and guild leaders were given pieces of land in the vast park of Bāḡ-e Naqš-e Jahān of Isfahan to decorate and illuminate. Each group set up tents with canopies of silk and brocade, and erected booths variously embellished; servants offered drinks and sweets to large crowds for several days. In the royal palace, a large table cloth (sofra) was spread on the floor of the Hall of Mirrors (tālār-e ā'ina), and on it

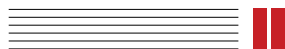


were placed large bowls of water and plates of various fruits, greeneries, sweets, and colored eggs. According to Chardin (II, p. 267), in keeping with an ancient Iranian tradition, on the eve of Nowruz people send each other colored eggs as gifts. The shah gave some five hundred of them to his womenfolk. The eggs are encased in gold and decorated with four miniature paintings. The shah sat at the head of the sofa, amongst the royal women he favored most, who were all bedecked in jewelry. They engaged in pleasant conversation, and then, at the shah's command, female dancers, mu-

sicians, and singers entered and entertained the audience. In another chamber the court astronomer was trying to determine the exact moment of "the turn of the year" (taḥwīl-e sāl, that is, when the Sun entered the sign of Aries at the vernal equinox). As soon as he gave the sign that the New Year had arrived, pages sent off firecrackers into the sky, and, seeing this, the household female servants let out cries of exultation thereby announcing the good news to the king and his companion. At the same time, the news was made public by some palace guards firing off their muskets and citadel



► **Nāder Shah Afshar (r. 1736-47) always celebrated Nowruz by holding a feast and distributing gifts and robes of honor, as did Karim Khan Zand (r. 1751-79) and his successors.**



guards their cannons, whereupon an official band occupying the center of the great town square (Meydān-e naqš-e jahān) beat on their drums and kettledrums and blew into their wind instruments (sornāy). Shouts of joy filled the air; eunuchs opened special bags of wild rue (esfand) and sprinkled seeds into the fire, causing the air to be pleasantly scented. The shah, as all other Iranians, gazed at a bowl of water the moment the year “turned,” believing that “water is the symbol of prosperity” (ābrowšanā’i-st, lit. ‘water is light’) and if one looks at it at the turn of the year he would enjoy happiness all year long. A few prayers (usually Qur’anic verses, extensively cited by Majlesi, II) were recited, and everyone wearing new clothes drank some water or rosewater, congratulated elders, kinsfolk and friends, and partook of sweets. Elders presented gifts to the members of household, relatives, servants, and friends, and distributed alms to the poor, dervishes, and local sayyeds (descendants of the Imams). In the palace, the shah held a great banquet with wine and music for military commanders, senior civil officials, foreign envoys and notable merchants. In other households elaborately prepared dinners were served, and in general everyone enjoyed the occasion with drinks, music, visitation, and exchanges of gifts and pleasantries. Children were particularly happy, and enjoyed the holidays running around, receiving various gifts, playing various games (specially the

“egg-cracking game,” similar to the children’s game of conkers played with chestnuts in the West), and watching polo, wrestling, and horse racing. The gifts exchanged depended on the status of the individuals. The shah sat in the audience hall and distributed gifts, usually gold and or silver coins placed in small colorful bags, to the courtiers, kinsfolk, household servants and foreign envoys. He received in turn precious gifts from his harem, ministers, representatives of social groups and professions, provincial governors, and envoys of neighboring countries. The usual “gifts” to the shah included slave girls (especially from Armenia and Georgia, some of whom ended up as royal wives and others were given to favorite officials), money, prized horses, and beasts of burden with precious saddlery (for the gifts exchanged between the governor of Fārs province and Shah ‘Abbās I see Arberry, p. 19). The shah and rich notables also ordered the slaughter of livestock according to religious rites and distributed the meat to the needy. During the following days, people went outdoors and spent the time in the open air playing, feasting, horseracing and, when possible, hunting.

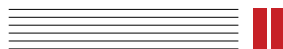
Nāder Shah Afshar (r. 1736-47) always celebrated Nowruz by holding a feast and distributing gifts and robes of honor, as did Karim Khan Zand (r. 1751-79) and his successors. In the Qajar period (1779-1925), the public practices were similar to the contemporary observances, but

the official celebration (salām, lit. 'greeting') underwent elaborations. Generally, the shah received guests consisting of kinsmen, military and civil officials, leading religious figures, tribal chiefs, poets, heads of various guilds, and, increasingly, foreign notables. Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96) began to regiment the festivities by introducing military bands, sending invitation cards, and holding salām into three audience sessions. The salām-e taḥwīl ('greeting for the turn of the year') started an hour before the turning of the year and lasted for about four hours. The table of haft sin was prepared in front of the Peacock Throne in the Museum Hall (tālār-e muza), and dignitaries gathered around it: military officials headed by the crown prince on the one side, civil officials headed by the chief finance minister (mostowfi-al-mamālek) on the other side; the leading clergy, Qajar princes carrying royal arms and insignia, and cabinet ministers headed by the prime minister (ṣadr-e a'zam) flanked the throne. The Master of Ceremonies announced the arrival of the shah, who appeared bedecked in jewelry and proceeded, among the bowing of the silent audience, to the throne and took his seat. The court orator (kaṭīb-al-mamālek) would read a sermon in praise of the Prophet and the first Imam until the court astronomer announced the turning of the year. The shah offered his felicitations first to the ulama and then to the officials, recited some verses of the Qor'ān, drank a sip of wa-



ter, and presented gifts (coins inside small red-silk bags) to the clergymen, who took their leave forthwith. Then the music band played cheerful tunes, and the shah distributed gifts to the audience and left for the inner quarter of the palace. On the second day, a general audience was held in the Marble Palace (salām-e 'āmm-e taḳt-e marmar). The shah and senior Qajar princes carrying royal regalia assembled, together with civil and military officials, received foreign envoys and presented them with gifts, paying particular attention to the Ot-

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toman ambassador. Then the shah sat on a bejeweled chair placed upon the Marble Throne, and his aid announced the start of the public ('amma) audience, whereupon music bands played, cannons roared, drums beat, and trumpets sounded. The poet laureate recited a poem in honor of Nowruz and in praise of the shah, and the official orator closed the ceremony with a flamboyantly eulogistic address. On the third day, the salām-e sar-e dar, a truly jovial public occasion, was held in the Marble Palace. The shah appeared on a balcony accompanied by officials as well as favorite womenfolk and attendants, and the public participated in the festivities. Ropedancers, keepers, and trainers monkeys, bears, and fighting rams entertained the crowd in front of the palace, and received their rewards. Court jesters made everyone laugh, and wrestlers fought for the highly coveted position of the supreme paladin (pahlavān-e pāyetakṭ), which entailed receiving a special armband. On the thirteenth day (sizdahbedar) people moved out of the towns and celebrated the end of Nowruz in parks, gardens, and along the streams.

In recent times, the official celebrations were condensed into one day of public audience, broadcast since the 1940s by the radio and since the 1960s by the television. These media have tended to standardize the Nowruz ceremonies and, consequently, a great deal of regional variations is fast disappearing.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS BEFORE NOWRUZ

Rahman Mehraby



Since ancient times, Iranians have observed various customs and traditions before Nowruz (Iranian New Year) and after that. These are a series of activities that take different forms in various parts of Iran. Below is a list of some activities people have been involved to get prepared for this annual festivity.

Main Customs and Traditions before Nowruz

There are several activities going on among Iranians before the new year starts including:

Nowruz Messengers

They are some groups of en-

tertainers who bring the message of the New Year at public places by singing, dancing, acting, etc to make people happy. Such tradition has had various names and forms at different parts of Iran. What has been common among all of them is the intention to bring happy time to the people regardless of the clothes they wear, songs they sing and appearances they make.

At such days before Nowruz and sometimes several days after the equinox, people give presents to one another and to those messengers who entertain the whole community.

To Get Prepared for Nowruz

In ancient times, Iranians who have been mostly farmers, planted seven types of seeds of wheat, barley, beans, corn, chickpeas, rice, etc on top of column-like cylinders so that the green plants could grow at the outset of the New Year. This could bring the good news of the blessed New Year ahead. The plant growing better could be a sign of better crop from that seed in the year to come.

Today people plant seeds likewise about 2 or 3 weeks before Nowruz at small plates or vessels. At the end of Nowruz holidays, they take them out of their homes and leave them in nature and sometimes throw them into the running water. Here are some of the customs and traditions before Nowruz:

Home Clean-up before Nowruz

This happens at all levels at homes. People take dust away from walls, floors, household stuff, etc. They also wash vessels, clothes, curtains, carpets, etc and bleach copper vessels and soothe-stricken walls. Old broken things are thrown out or given away. Instead, new stuff replaces them so that everything is renewed. This is done every year before Nowruz.

All such cleaning customs at home symbolize the removal of evil from home and living environment and prepare a clean home to welcome the spirits of their beloved ones who had lost their lives.

Chaharshanbeh Soori

The last Wednesday of the year is celebrated by fireworks one night before it comes. Soor means celebration. Among some Iranians like Kurds, it means red. Ancient Iranians celebrated the end of the year by setting up the red flames of fire at the roofs of their houses showing the way to the spirits of their lost ones so that they could reunite with them.

Water Sprinkling Games

Another tradition before Nowruz is water sprinkling games. Women used to go to water springs to bring water home to sprinkle it over everything. They believed this would bring freshness and health to their lives. Some Kurds fetch water from a spring before sunrise in jars and jumped over them three times. They made up their eyes with charcoal, drank from these jars and offer them

and stand at crossroads and corners for overhearing what others say. If they heard pleasant happy words, it would indicate a happy blessed year was ahead of them. If bitter and sorrowful words were heard, they wouldn't reach their goals and their wishes wouldn't come true.

Decent girls and women, who had wishes like getting married, walked out at night with



Another tradition kept by the people is to put 3, 5 or 7 heaps of dry bushes and thorns in a row, set them on fire and jump over them one after another. In various parts of Iran, they sing different songs while jumping. The content of all such short songs are focused on giving away their pain, sorrow and illness to gain health, happiness and fresh lives. Then, ashes are thrown into running water.

to their neighbors and friends. Some women trim their fingernails or cut a little of their hair and left them to rivers so that water took their misery and pain away.

Eavesdropping

An interesting custom among Iranians before Nowruz is eavesdropping. Girls and women who would like to get married, go on pilgrimage, journeys, etc, used to go out

copper bowls and hit them with spoons at the threshold of seven doors without saying anything. The house dwellers knew they had certain wishes and replied with putting certain things like nuts, cookies, rice, legumes, etc at their bowls.

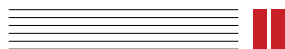
Refusing to give away anything would mean to those women that their needs wouldn't be met. Receiving something, on the other hand, had the opposite meaning of the former.

Unlocking the Lock

According to various local customs and traditions before Nowruz, single girls who wanted better luck in getting married, went through different rituals. Sometimes, a mother chased her daughter with a piece of burning wood. It was symbolic of giving her away to her husband.

Sometimes, girls took bath in a particular spring to get married or married women did the same

► **Women used to come together with a narrow-spout jar and everyone threw some object into it. Another woman wrote some love poems on small pieces of paper and threw them into the same jar.**



thing to push out the bad luck from their home and win their husbands' love.

Several similar works were carried out at the night before the last Wednesday of the year to unlock the locked happiness of their lives.

Jar Breaking

The women, who wanted to keep away evil from their household, went to the roof or some designated tower in their com-

munities to throw down a new (not used) jars to break them. They believed this could keep their families safe.

Taking Amen by Jars

Women used to come together with a narrow-spout jar and everyone threw some object into it. Another woman wrote some love poems on small pieces of paper and threw them into the same jar. Then, a very young girls (who wasn't grown up yet), was asked to take out an object and a piece of paper. The poem would say something about the life of the owner of the object.

Breaking Spells

Some made a particular liquid mixture with vinegar and sprinkled it at four corners of their houses, the rooms and the entrance to break the spells and let the blessing flow in their lives.

Chaharshanbeh Soori Soup

If someone was ill, his/her family made a votive soup at the night before the last Wednesday of the year. Some of it was given to the ill person and the rest was distributed among the poor. This was to bring back health to the ill person by some charitable act.

Distributing Chaharshanbeh Soori Nuts

Some nuts were bought by the women who had particular wishes. They bought a combination of seven different nuts, cleaned and unshelled them to eat the kernels with family, relatives and friends. While having the nuts, they narrated a particular story.

Today this tradition is just to have something to eat and enjoy.

Remembering the Deceased

This pre-Nowruz tradition, like in many other nations, has got roots in the antiquity. Even in different religions, people tend to remember the beloved ones they have lost in specific days. In some areas of Iran, people still keep this tradition in various ways. Some light up lanterns or put some fire on the roofs and turn on lights sooner at the last day of the year and keep them going until the dawn of the first day of the New Year.

In some other areas, firework on hilltops and outdoor is the tradition to remember the deceased. Other forms of such remembering are like burning candles at different corners of home. In particular cities, illumination of shops and fireworks symbolized such occasion. Today firework at the night before the last Wednesday of the year, Chaharshanbeh Soori, is another form of this tradition.

Conclusion

In general, people have been keeping several customs and traditions before Nowruz indicating the end of the old and the beginning of the new. They need to remember the dead ones and keep living in happiness and health.

Once a year, people get prepared for another year at Nowruz, 21st of March, by keeping such customs and traditions. This creates a state of bliss and joyfulness in everyone.

Source: destination Iran

Nowruz in Islam

Anousheh Mireskandari



The word 'Nowruz' is a compound word; No and Ruz together mean New Day, and it is the name of the first day of the first solar month, 'when the Sun in Aries'. In the original Pahlavi (ancient language of Iran) word it means the tip of ruch or the tip of the day. Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī in his definition of Nowruz says: 'It is the first day of the month of Farvardin and the reason it is called New Day is that it is the forehead of the year ...'. Historians and scholars have differed about the status of Nowruz. It is believed that from the time of the migration of the Aryans to the Iranian Plateau and bordering with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, they divided the year into two parts and the celebrations of Nowruz and Mehregan (harvest festival) were the beginning of these two sections. Nowruz was celebrated marking the summer solstice and the Mehregan was celebrated marking the beginning of winter.

The emergence of Islam and its peaceful dealing with other religious beliefs and rituals, including ceremonies and

rituals of the Iranian people, resulted in Nowruz to remain untouched. It was only due to the gradual conversion of Iranians to Islam that the scale of these celebrations was reduced. Over the time, when some customs and traditions would be contrary to the past beliefs, Iranian tried to rediscover their ancient characters and symbols through Islamic characters; in another words, they mixed their Iranian traditions with their Islamic belief. Islamic traditions associate Nowruz with the day when angel Gabriel appeared to Prophet Mohammad (S), the day of Ghadeer and the day of the re-emergence of The Lord of our Time, Imam Mahdi (aj). On the other hand, in Iranian ancient belief, Nowruz is the day when the Creator finished the creation of the world and is the day when Man was created. In addition to no-opposition stance of Islam in regards to the rituals of Nowruz, and further confirmation of it, continuation of commemoration of Nowruz during the Islamic period can also be attributed to the Persians continuing interest to preserve

their ancient heritage. According to Bertold Spuler, a Persian historiographer and geographer; Muslims, especially at the time of Omar II (Omar ibn Abdulaziz) tried to ignore Nowruz celebrations, but this custom was so deeply associated with the Iranian people's thought and feelings that soon Nowruz successfully found its own place and with the rise of the Abbasids, and later the Shi'i Buwayeds it widely spread, becoming a regular tradition in Mesopotamia. It was also celebrated in Syria, Egypt and North Africa but not regularly.

After the spread of Islam and its adaptation by the people of Iran, Nowruz found its way to expand to wider range of people even amongst non-Iranian tribes, such in Indian continent and North Africa. The respect for Nowruz in Shi'i Islam, although not exclusive to Shia, is very noticeable. Nowruz has been highly regarded. Alameh Majlesi in *Assamae va al Alam* has narrated one of the sayings of Imam Sadiq (a) as follows: 'With the beginning of Farvardin, human was created, and this day is an auspicious day for praying to seek dreams, to visit the nobles, acquiring knowledge, marriage, travelling and good business. In this blessed day the sick will be cured, the babies are born hassle free and sustenance will increase.' Majlesi also talks about another narration from Imam Musa Kadhim (as) which says: 'In Nowruz Allah made a covenant with His servants to worship Him and not to allow any partner for Him. To welcome, His mes-

► **The holiness of the New Year moments in the eyes of the people is so colourful and real that they make pilgrimage to holy shrines of Imams and their families.**

sengers and obey their rulings. This day is the first day that the fertile wind blow and the flowers on the earth appeared. The archangel Gabriel (a) appeared to the Prophet, and it is the day that Abraham (as) broke the idols. The day Prophet Muhammad (S) held Ali (as) on his shoulders to destroy the Quraishies' idols in the house of God, the Kaaba.' Regardless of the Abbasid dynasty ups and downs they managed to maintain their political and religious influence in the Muslim world for more than five centuries, and the endorsement by subsequent Caliph has contributed to celebration of Nowruz, its expansion and continuity.

Nowruz in the Safavids period adopted an Islamic pattern, so separating its ancient Iranian roots from its Islamic traditions would have been extremely difficult. Nowruz had certain gran-

deur in Abbasids and Safavids courts and Islam perfumed the great celebration of Nowruz with its Islamic traditions. In addition the most symbolic rituals of Nowruz which is the preparation of 'seven S' has both ancient and Islamic roots. In his research 'Nowruz and the Philosophy of Seven S' Mohammad Ali Dadkhah explains: 'Number seven, is sacred and part of the elite. The choice of this number in the preparation of Nowruz is very significant. In the ancient Iran this number was associated with seven holy immortals. In astronomy number seven is the house of dreams, and accomplishing wishes is promised in the seventh abode.' Alameh Majlesi in regards to the importance of number seven says: 'The heaven and Earth each have seven levels and each level is guarded by an angel.' He also says: 'If at the time of New Year, one recites seven verses of Qur'an which starts with letter S, one would be protected against any afflictions'. The holiness of the New Year moments in the eyes of the people is so colourful and real that they make pilgrimage to holy shrines of Imams and their families. For example in Iran people go to Shiraz for Shahcheragh and Ali ibn Hamze (as); to Mashad for Imam Redha (as), to Qum for Lady Masoumeh (as) and to city of Ray for Shah Abdulazim (as). Although Nowruz in Iran has attained an Islamic identity, and that the majority of population in Iran is Muslim, nonetheless this has never stopped the followers of other re-



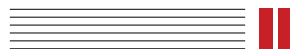
ligions enjoying the celebration of Nowruz all the same.

Nowruz Invocation

Unfortunately there are no mentions of the New Year invocation in known supplication books, which means there are no reliable evidences in Sunni or Shia sources about it. But Alameh Majlesi in his book *Zad al Maad* mentions the existence of some reports in some less known sources. One of which is the following invocation that is highly recommended to be recited repeatedly. O Moulder of the hearts and vision, O Master of the night and day, O He who changes stratagem and status, Transform our situation to the best condition

The above invocation at the time of Safavids was a regular prayer for the New Year. The fact that recitation of supplications or Qur'an and performing of prayer for the coming of a new year actually did happen, itself, is a sign of the Islamisation of this festivity.

► **Islamic rituals of Nowruz In Mafatih al Jinan, which in the past decades has been one of the greatest books for religious recommended acts of worship, we read that the Prayer of Nowruz is a prayer combined of recitation of Al -Fatiha, Al-Qadr, Al-Kaferoon, AlTawhid, Al-Falagh, Al-Nass and many other chapters of the Holy Qur'an.**



The concept of Eid (festivity) in Islam

The word Eid in the Holy Qur'an has been mentioned only once in the verse 114, chapter 5 (Maa'idah). `Said Jesus son of Mary, O Allah! Our Lord! Send down to us a table from the sky, to be a festival for us, for the first ones and the

last ones among us and as a sign from You, and provide for us; for You are the best of providers` (114:5) Eid on its own is a verb; it means to return. Return of happy anniversaries and commemorations are also called Eid. According to Islamic Law, Eid is a day in which a benefit or interest is gained and a day when a special prayer is performed and people congregate. The days of AlAzha (Qurban) and of Al Fitr are also Eid days. Verse 114 of Chapter 5 (Maa'idah) where Prophet Isa (as) asked for food from Heaven is taken as the day of miracle and that day is considered for all human as Eid. Eid, in this verse is referring to a Divine blessing descended from heaven in the form of a tray, or trays of delicious and edible food, so it became a sign for people to commemorate such day every year and bring joy and happiness repeatedly. Also repetition and return of such days could return same blessings which give us, human, another chance to make connection with God and remembering Him in our hearts and by our tongues.

Islamic rituals of Nowruz In Mafatih al Jinan, which in the past decades has been one of the greatest books for religious recommended acts of worship, we read that the Prayer of Nowruz is a prayer combined of recitation of Al -Fatiha, Al-Qadr, Al-Kaferoon, AlTawhid, Al-Falagh, Al-Nass and many other chapters of the Holy Qur'an. It is similar to a prayer which not only has the forms of Friday

prayer but also the attributes of the prayers of Ghadeer Khum. Mafatih Al Jinan narrates from Imam Jafar Al Sadiq(as): 'When Nowruz comes, make Ghosl (ceremonial wash) , put on your clean clothes, and fragrant yourself with best perfumes, so when you are free of all other prayers, perform a four-rakaat prayer, each rakaat one Salam and in the first rakaat after Sura Al- Fateha ten times Sura Al-Qadr, and in the second rakaat after Al-Fateha ten times Al-Kaferoon. In the third rakaat after Al-Fateheh ten times Al-Nass and Al-Falaq. After prayer prostrate in gratification.' As we can see the rituals of Nowruz is the same as rituals for any other Islamic Eids of which its supplication starts with offering salutations to the messenger of Allah and his progeny and all the messengers of God. Nowruz has always been celebrated by Iranians. Its customs, despite the thousands of years, has never been demolished or forgotten. Nowruz has been a festivity celebrated by all the tribes, ethnic groups or religions that existed and lived in the Iranian Plateau for centuries and today many other countries, influenced by the culture of Iran such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and even some central Asian countries such as Kurds of Turkey, Iraq and Syria celebrate it too.

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ESFANDGAN CELEBRATION ANNIVERSARY OF FERTILE EARTH AND WOMEN

Reza Moradi Ghiyasabadi



The month Esfand, particularly its fifth day which is called "Esfandrouz" in all Iranian calendars has been regarded as the month and day of celebrating fertile earth and women in Iranian culture.

The Persian word "esfand" is derived from the Pahlavi word "sependarmad" and Avestan word "sepantaharmaiti" whose core is "armaiti" to which the word "sepant/ seband" is added for more respect and celebration.

'Armaiti' is usually considered as "modesty and calm" but it does not seem correct and many researchers have not accepted it. In his Early Zoroastrianism, L. Molton has considered it as "aramata" meaning "the mother of the earth" which is close in meaning to the Sanskrit and vedai word "aramti" meaning "earth". In Zoroastrian "gatha" (poem 45, section 4) the word has been used as "earth" describing "dogedar" (Ahuramazda's daughter), the same word which is used by Zoroast for his daughter, "porochista" (in



translations done by Bartolome, Darmester and Pourdavood). In the Sanskrit translation of 'neriosang' from the same section of Avesta, "arameiti" is also translated to "earth" and in the Pahlavi text "zandva human yasn" it is used in the same way. This name is current in Iranian Armenians too. They regard 'sepan-darmad' as "sepan-darmat" and consider her as "the goddess of fertility".

Therefore, "arameiti" or "sepan-taharameiti" in early times was the name of "earth", particularly "fertile earth" or "the mother of earth". Then it was hinted at the supporting angel of earth. After that he became one of "am-shasepandan" or "ahura'scom-

panions".

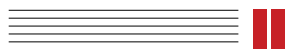
The author believes that the Mesopotamian goddess "sarpanto" or "eroa" who was the wife of "mardok, the great god, has a common origin with sepan-darmat. Because eroa was the goddess of fertility and its meaning was fertility. In ancient Mesopotamia, after that "kasian" migrated there, a custom named "hashado" was conducted which was a symbolic marriage of mardok and eroa. Other customs were also conducted related to the "sacred marriage". Any way, if arameiti had not meant modesty and calm, but meant the mother of earth, we should not neglect the link and relationship between "calm" and "mother bosom" in In-

do-European languages.

As in ancient beliefs, the earth was regarded as fertile and nurturing like women and all creatures were nurtured in its bosom, they presume its gender as female. It is from this origin that such beautiful terms as "mother of homeland" and "motherland" has been derived. Our ancestors considered the earth as woman or mother and the sky as man or father. Such terms as "mother of earth" and "father of sky" have the same origins. No doubt, they felt some resemblance among woman and man on the one hand and earth, sky, rain and growing plants on the other. Also we know that in ancient Iranian beliefs, the mankind generation



► **Nowadays this celebration is still held in some central areas of Iran, including Eghlid, Kashan and Mahalat. On this day, women cook a kind of soup named “asheesfandi” for satisfying their fertility goddess.**



or the first man and woman of the world, named “mashi and mashianeh” were created from the roots of a plant named “mehrgiah” at the heart of the earth. In fact, the earth or sependarmat was regarded as the mother of mankind generation.

There are numerous functions for aremiti and sependarmat in Iranian culture and literature. In Zoroaster’s “gatha” it is mentioned eighteen times. Zoroaster calls its help for clean life, for fertilizing farms, pastures and animals, for emerging a good governor and for helping his daughter “Porochista” in choosing her husband. In Iranian myths, s/he suggested Manuchehr to make an arc-and-arrow for ArashKamangir in order to expand Iran’s territory for next generation. The Pahlavi text “sad darbandahesh” regards him as the companion for writers as the creators of thought. Plutark said that Acmenid king, Adrdashir the Second demands Sependarmat to cure his wife, Atousa and he helps them. All Avesta, particularly “farvardinyesh” is full of words praising for women and earth.

It is mentionable that the three words of armeiti, zamin and zan are of ancient Arian or Indo-European words which were current in many Indo-European languages with some structural and syntax differences. I should also mention that the word “zan” (woman) is related to life but the word “mard” (man) to death. Our ancestors regarded woman as alive and full of life due to her fertility but they regarded man as

sterile and his death as the end of life. Because of such a belief they considered the generation from their mother. This was not related to matriarchy. Even in Ilamian period during which matriarchy did not exist, people introduced themselves using their mother name.

Naming the last month of winter as “esfand” or “sependarmat” is also originated from the fertility of earth. It is in this month that the first sprouts grow from the earth and promise the new fertility of earth.

Thus Iranians regarded this month, particularly its fifth day (namely “esfandruz” from “esfandmah”) as the day for celebrating the fertile earth and woman. In this day, men conducted some ceremonies for their wives and gave them some gifts (unfortunately there are not any information about these ceremonies).

Nowadays this celebration is still held in some central areas of Iran, including Eghlid, Kashan and Mahalat. On this day, women cook a kind of soup named “asheesfandi” for satisfying their fertility goddess. The ceremony is held in the countryside of Kashan in such villages as Nashlaj, Esrak and Niasar on the first day of Esfand. In her book about the history of Zoroastrianism, Mary Bois reports that until recently, Kermani Zoroastrians went to the deserts and killed a lot of insects and birds that damaged their farms.

NOROUZ

ACROSS VARIOUS LANDS



Norouz is not celebrated only in Iran. Different nations across the Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Indian Peninsula celebrate it but they have different ceremonies or even mythologies about it. Here we explore some of these resemblances and differences.

Celebrations of spring are a natural out-growth of the Earth's rhythms. In most of the Silk Road countries, Norouz announces the joyful awakening of nature after winter and the beginning of the

agricultural cycle of cultivating, planting, and harvesting. Norouz traditions are similar throughout the region, and have varied little over the centuries, except to embrace Islam. Unlike the western New Year traditions, Norouz is celebrated during daytime hours within the family circle. March 21 is the main celebration, but for the next 13 days it is common practice to visit friends and relatives, buy and plant seedlings of fruit trees and have cheerful gatherings in the fresh spring air.

Traditionally, it is also a time to «clean up» one's life.

People tidy up their homes, wash rugs and draperies, decorate with flowers, and buy new clothes that they will use for visiting. On the day of Norouz, all housekeeping - including the preparation of the meal, careful cleaning of the home and the arrangement of blossoming branches from apricot, peach, almond or pomegranate trees - must be completed before the rising of the morning star. Chil-

dren enjoy the holiday because they often get presents of money, as well as blessings, from their elders.

The activities of the first 13 days of the New Year are considered harbingers of the year to come. For this reason, it is traditional to end quarrels, forgive debts and overlook enmity and insults. It is a time for reconciliation, when forgiveness and cheerfulness are the dominant sentiments. As with the celebration of the Chinese New Year, there are traditions associated with the first visitor to the house during Norouz. To ensure good luck for the coming year, this person should have a «happy foot»; he or she should be kind, gentle, witty, and pious and have a good reputation.

In Iran and the small communities of Kurdistan, Iran and Northern India, where Zoroastrianism has retained a strong influence amongst the populace, traditions require that the Norouz celebratory table contain specific elements. First, there must be a mirror, which reflects the past and shows the future so that people can make reasonable plans. Next, there must be candles. The flames hark back to the sacred nature of fire in the Zoroastrian religion, and personify the light and energy of a righteous life. The table must also contain an incense-burner for aromas and a water-filled vessel in which a live fish is placed to symbolize a happy life full of activity and movement. Most tables also include coins, fruit and a copy of a sa-

cred book, such as the Koran. Various types of food and plants must be on the table, including seven dishes that begin with the Farsi letter «S» and seven dishes that begin with the letter «sh». These include vinegar, sumac berries, garlic, sprouted wheat, apples, berries of sea-buckthorn and fresh herbs as well as wine, sugar, syrup, honey, sweets, milk and rice.

► **A few weeks before the New Year, Iranians thoroughly clean and rearrange their homes.**

They make or buy new clothes, bake pastries and germinate seeds as signs of renewal.



Norouz in Iran

In harmony with the rebirth of nature, the two-week Persian New Year celebration, or Norouz, always begins on the first day of spring. On that day - which may occur on March 20, 21, or 22 - Norouz celebrations include many traditions and wonderful foods.

Norouz ceremonies consist of a series of symbolic actions dating back to ancient times, including:

- Cleaning of the environment, cleansing of the self, confession

of sins, the exorcising of devils, or divs, from the house and the community.

- Forgive yourself and your enemies and a time for making up relationships.

- Dowsing and re-lighting the fires.

- Processions to borders, seas, and rivers.

- Disruption of the normal order of things with boisterous parties.

A few weeks before the New Year, Iranians thoroughly clean and rearrange their homes. They make or buy new clothes, bake pastries and germinate seeds as signs of renewal. Troubadours, called Hadji Firuz or heralds of rebirth, disguised with makeup and wearing red satin outfits, sing and dance through the streets with tambourines, kettle drums, and trumpets to spread good cheer and the news of the coming New Year. The celebration of renewal is attributed to the Sumerian god of sacrifice, Domuzi, who was killed at the end of each year and reborn at the beginning of the new year. The Hadji Firuz's disguised face represents his return from the world of the dead, his red costume symbolizes the blood and tragic fate of the legendary Prince Siavush and the rebirth of the god of sacrifice, while his happiness and singing represent his joy at being reborn.

In every Persian household a special cover is spread onto a carpet or on a table. This ceremonial setting is called sofreh-ye haft-sinn (literally "seven dishes' setting," each one beginning with the Persian letter sinn). The



number seven has been sacred in Iran since antiquity, and the seven dishes stand for the seven angelic heralds of life-rebirth, health, happiness, prosperity, joy, patience, and beauty. The symbolic dishes consist of sabzeh, or sprouts, usually wheat or lentil, representing rebirth. Samanu is a pudding in which common wheat sprouts are transformed and given new life as a sweet, creamy pudding, and represents the ultimate sophistication of Persian cooking. Sib means apple and represents health and beauty. Senjed, the sweet, dry fruit of the wild olive,

represents love. It has been said that when the wild olive is in full bloom, its fragrance and its fruit make people fall in love and become oblivious to all else. Seer, which is garlic in Persian, represents medicine. Somaq, sumac berries, represent the color of sunrise; with the appearance of the sun Good conquers Evil. Serkeh, or vinegar, represents age and patience.

To reconfirm the hopes and wishes expressed by the traditional foods, other elements and symbols are also placed on the sofreh. Books of tradition and wisdom are laid out: usually a

copy of the holy Koran; and/or a divan of the poems of Hafez. A few coins, representing wealth, and a basket of painted eggs, representing fertility, are also placed on the sofreh. A Seville orange floating in a bowl of water represents the earth floating in space, and a goldfish in a bowl of water represents Anahita, one of the angels of water and fertility, which is the main purpose of the Norouz celebration. The fish also represents life and the end of the astral year associated with the constellation Pisces. A flask of rose water, known for its magical cleansing power, is also included on the sofreh. A bowl of fresh milk, representing nourishment for the children of the world. Pussy willow branches, pomegranates, figs, and olives, representing time. Nearby is a brazier for burning wild rue, a sacred herb whose smoldering fumes are said to ward off evil spirits. A pot of flowering hyacinth or narcissus is also set on the sofreh. On either side of a mirror are two candelabra holding a flickering candle for each child in the family. The candles represent enlightenment and happiness. The mirror represents the images and reflections of Creation as we celebrate anew the ancient Persian traditions and beliefs that creation took place on the first day of spring, or Norouz.

On the same table many people place seven special sweets because, according to a three-thousand-year-old legend, King Jamshid discovered sugar on Norouz (the word candy comes from the Persian word for sugar, qand).

These seven sweets are noghls (sugar-coated almonds); Persian baklava, a sweet, flaky pastry filled with chopped almonds and pistachios soaked in honey-flavored rose water; nan-e berenji (rice cookies), made of rice flour flavored with cardamom and garnished with poppy seeds; nan-e badami (almond cookies), made of almond flour flavored with cardamom and rose water; nan-e nokhod-chi (chick-pea cookies), made of chick-pea flour flavored with cardamom and garnished with pistachios; sohan asali (honey almonds), cooked with honey and saffron and garnished with pistachios; and nane gerdui (walnut cookies), made of walnut flour flavored with cardamom and garnished with pistachio slivers.

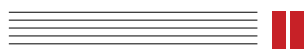
On the eve of the last Wednesday of the year (Shab-e chahar shanbeh sury, literally "the eve of Red Wednesday" or "the eve of celebration"), bonfires are lit in public places and people leap over the flames, shouting, "Sorkhi-e to az man o zardi-e man az to!" (Give me your beautiful red color and take back my sickly pallor!). With the help of fire and light, symbols of good, celebrants pass through this unlucky night - the End of the Year - and into the arrival of spring's longer days. Tradition holds that the living are visited by the spirits of their ancestors on the last days of the year. Many people, specially children, wrap themselves in shrouds to symbolically reenact the visits. By the light of the bonfire, they run through the streets, banging on pots and

pans with spoons and knocking on doors to ask for treats. This ritual is called qashogh-zany and reenacts the beating out of the last unlucky Wednesday of the year. In order to make wishes come true, it is customary to prepare special foods and distribute them on this night: Ash-e reshteh-ye nazri (Noodle Soup); a filled Persian delight, Baslogh, and special snacks called ajil-e chahar shanbeh soury and ajil-e moshkel gosha. The last, literally meaning unraveler of difficulties, is made by mixing seven dried nuts and fruits-pistachios, roasted chick-peas, almonds, hazelnuts, peaches, apricots, and raisins.

A few hours prior to the transition to the New Year, family and friends sit around the sofreh-ye haft-sinn. Everyone sings traditional songs, and poems of Hafez and verses from the Koran are recited.

Exactly at the moment of the equinox, my father would recite a

► **According to the ancients, each of the twelve constellations in the zodiac governed one of the months of the year, and each would rule the earth for a thousand years, after which the sky and the earth would collapse into each other.**



prayer for the transition, wishing for a good life, and we would all re-peat after him out loud.

Then traditionally the oldest person present begins the well-wishing by standing up and giving out sweets, pastries, coins, and hugs. Calm, happiness, sweetness, and perfumed odors are very important on this day of rebirth, since the mood on this day is said to continue throughout the year. An old saying goes, "Good thought, good word, good deed to the year end, happy indeed."

The New Year celebration continues for twelve days after the equinox occurs. Traditionally, during the first few days, it is the younger members of the family who visit their older relatives and friends in order to show their respect. Sweet pastries and delicious frosty drinks are served to visitors, and there is a general air of festivity all around. The children receive gifts, usually crisp new notes of money; in America, dollar bills. In the remaining days, the elders return the visits of the younger members of the family.

According to the ancients, each of the twelve constellations in the zodiac governed one of the months of the year, and each would rule the earth for a thousand years, after which the sky and the earth would collapse into each other. The Norouz celebrations, therefore, lasted twelve days, plus a thirteenth day (representing the time of chaos) celebrated by going outdoors, putting order aside and having parties. On this thirteenth day, called Siz-deh bedar or outdoor thirteen, entire families leave their homes



to carry trays of sprouted seeds in a procession to go picnic in a cool, grassy place. Far from home, they throw the sprouts into the water, which is thought to exorcise the divs and evil eyes from the house and the household. Wishing to get married by the next year, unmarried girls tie blades of grass together. There is much singing, dancing, eating, and drinking. With this, the Norouz celebrations are completed. The traditional menu for the No-

rouz gathering on the day of the equinox usually includes fish and noodles. It is believed they bring good luck, fertility and prosperity in the year that lies ahead.

- Noodle Soup – Ash-e reshteh, noodles representing the Gordian knots of life. Eating them symbolically helps toward unraveling life's knotty problems.

- Rice with Fresh Herbs and Fish - Sabzi polow ba mahi, fresh herb rice representing rebirth, fish representing Anahita, one of

the angels of water and fertility. Or rice with noodles, dates and raisins, or rice with barberries, candied orange peels and carrots.

- Herb Kuku - Kuku-ye sabzi, the eggs and herbs represent fertility and rebirth.

- Bread, Cheese, and Fresh Herbs–Nan-o panir-o sabzi khordan, representing prosperity.

- Wheat Sprout pudding – Samanu, representing fertility and rebirth.

- Sprout Cookies – Kolucheh-ye Javaneh-ye Gandom, representing prosperity and fertility.

- Ice in Paradise - Yakh dar Behesht, representing nourishment for the children of the world.

- Saffron Sherbet and Saffron Tea with Rock Candy – Sharbat-e Zaferan va Chai-e Zafaran ba nabat, representing sweetness and light.

- Baklava, Chick-pea Cookies, and Sugar Coated Almonds

– Baqlava, Nan-e Nokhod-chi, Noghl, representing prosperity.

Norouz in Kurdistan

Norouz or Nûroj (Kurdish: Norouz/Nûroj) refers to the celebration of the New Year holiday of Norouz in Kurdistan. Norouz is celebrated throughout the countries of the Middle East and Central Asia such as in Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Turkey by Kurds. In Kurdish legend, the holiday celebrates the deliverance of the Kurds from a tyrant, and it is seen as another way of demonstrating support for the Kurdish cause. The celebration is commonly transliterated Norouz by the Kurds and coincides with the spring equinox which falls mainly on 21 March and the festival is held usually between the 18th and 24th of March. The festival currently has an important place in the terms of Kurdish identity for the majority of Kurds, mostly in Turkey and Syria. Though celebrations vary, people generally gather together to welcome the coming of spring; people wear colored clothes and wave their flag.

Kurdish Mythology: Story of Zahak

In *The Meadows of Gold* by Muslim historian Masudi, and *Shahnameh*, a poetic opus written by the *Sharafnameh* of medieval Kurdish historian Sherefxan Bidlisi, Zahhak is an evil king who conquers Kurdistan and whose serpents grow out of his shoulders. The Zahak's rule lasts for a thousand years during which two young Kurdish men are sacri-

ficed daily to provide their brains to the serpents to alleviate the pain that Zahak felt. The man who was charged with slaughtering two young people each day would instead kill one person a day and would mix their brains with that of a sheep, thus saving one young man a day. As discontent grows against Zahhak's rule, the nobleman plan a revolt, being led by Kawe (or Kawa), a blacksmith, who has lost six sons to Zahhak. Therefore, the saved young children (who according to the legend were ancestors of the Kurds) are then trained by Kawa into an army marches to Zahhak's castle where Kawe kills the king with a hammer; eventually Kawa instates Fereydu as king. According to Evliya Çelebi, the district (*sancak*) of Merkawe in Shahrazur (Sharazur) is named after the blacksmith Kawe who overthrew Zahhak. The 12th century geographer Yaqoot Hamawi, mentions Zor son of Zahhak (Aji Dahak) as founder of the famous city of Sharazur.

According to Kurdish myth, Kawe lived for 2,500 years under the tyranny of Zahhak, an Assyrian who is named Zuhak or Dehak by the Kurds. Dehak's evil reign caused spring to no longer come to Kurdistan. March 20th is traditionally marked as the day that Kawe defeated Dehak. He is then said to have set fires on the hillsides to celebrate the victory and summon his supporters; subsequently spring returned to Kurdistan the next day.

This legend is now used by the Kurds to remind them that they are a different, strong people,

and the lighting of the fires has since become a symbol of freedom.

Norouz is considered the most important festival in Kurdish culture, and is a time for entertainments such as games, dancing, family gathering, preparation of special foods and the reading of poetry. The celebration of Norouz has its local peculiarities in different regions of Kurdistan. On the eve of Norouz bonfires are lit. These fires symbolize the passing of the dark season, winter, and the arrival of spring, the season of light.

Norouz in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Norouz festival is traditionally celebrated for 2 weeks. Preparations for Norouz start several days beforehand, at least after *Chaharshanbe Suri*, the last Wednesday before the New Year. Among various traditions and customs, the most important ones are:

Haft Mawa: In Afghanistan, they prepare Haft Mawa (Seven Fruits) instead of Haft Sin which is common in Iran. Haft Mawa is like a Fruit salad made from 7 different Dried fruits, served in their own syrup. The 7 dried fruits are: Rai-sin, Senjed (the dried fruit of the oleaster tree), Pistachio, Hazelnut, Prune (dry fruit of Apricot), Walnut and whether Almond or another species of Plum fruit.

Samanak: It is a special type of sweet dish made from Wheat germ. Women take a special party for it during the night, and cook it from late in the evening till the daylight, singing a special song: *Samanak dar Josh o ma Kafcha*

zanem - Degaran dar Khwab o ma Dafcha zanem

Mala-e Gul-e Surkh (Persian: میله ی گل سرخ): The Guli Surkh festival which literally means Red Flower Festival (referring to the red Tulip flowers) is an old festival celebrated only in Mazari Sharif during the first 40 days of the year when the Tulip flowers grow. People travel from different parts of the country to Mazar in order to attend the festival. It is celebrated along with the Jahenda Bala ceremony which is a specific religious ceremony performed in the holy blue mosque of Mazar that is believed (mostly by Sunnite Afghans) to be the site of the tomb of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph of Islam. The ceremony is performed by raising a special banner (whose color configuration resembles Derafsh Kaviani) in the blue mosque in the first day of year (i.e. Norouz). The Guli Surkh party continues with other special activities among people in the Tulip fields and around the blue mosque for 40 days.

Buzkashi: Along with other customs and celebrations, normally a Buzkashi tournament is held. The Buzkashi matches take place in northern cities of Afghanistan and in Kabul. Special cuisines: People cook special types of dishes for Norouz, specially on the eve of Norouz. Normally they cook Sabzi Chalaw, a dish made from rice and spinach, separately. Moreover, the bakeries prepare a special type of cookie, called Kulcha-e Norouza, which is only baked for Norouz. Another dish which is prepared mostly

for the Norouz days is Maha wa Jelaba (Fried Fish and Jelabi) and it is the most often meal in picnics. In Afghanistan, it is a common custom among the affianced families that the fiancée's family give presents to or prepare special dishes for the fiancée's family on special occasions such as in the two Eids, Bara'at and in Norouz. Hence, the special dish for Norouz is Maha wa Jelaba.

Sightseeing to Cercis fields: The citizens of Kabul go to Istalif, Charikar or other green places around where the Cercis flowers grow. They go for picnic with their families during the first 2 weeks of New Year.

Jashni Dehqan: Jashni Dehqan means The Festival of Farmers. It is celebrated in the first day of year, in which the farmers walk in the cities as a sign of encouragement for the agricultural productions. In recent years, this activity is being performed only in Kabul and other major cities, in which

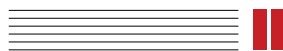
the mayor and other high governmental personalities participate for watching and observing.

Norouz in Republics of Caucasus and Central Asia

As Turks and other nomadic peoples moved into Central Asia and areas around Persia, they adopted the celebration of Norouz. Just as the Saxon holiday of Ostara was embraced by Christianity and become Easter in the West, Norouz traditions, which had grown strong roots in the life of Eurasian farmers and townspeople, survived the coming of Islam to the area 1,400 years ago. Today, Navrus is celebrated widely and colorfully in Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the western provinces of China, as well as the Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iraq and the Tatars and Bashkirs in southern Russia. In the last ten years, the Central Asian republics have recognized Norouz as an official holiday. Its celebration is marked by concerts in parks and squares, trade fairs and national horseracing competitions.

In the western provinces of China, both Turkish and Chinese people celebrate the holiday of Norouz by wearing bright cheerful clothes and going to the temple with flowers and a small clay figure of a buffalo. A large bamboo buffalo is constructed near the temple and covered with paper painted in red, black, white, green and yellow, which symbolize the five elements of the universe (fire, water, metal, wood

► **Buzkashi: Along with other customs and celebrations, normally a Buzkashi tournament is held.**



and earth). Near the temple people break clay figures down and burn the bamboo buffalo.

Central Asia has its own Norouz traditions. From ancient times, the holiday was celebrated in agricultural oases with festivals, bazaars, horseracing, and dog and cock fights.

Today, Uzbeks still serve a traditional meal of «sumalyak», which tastes like molasses-flavored cream of wheat and is made from flour and sprouted wheat grains. Sumalyak is cooked slowly on a wood fire, sometimes with the addition of spices. Sprouted grain is a symbol of life, heat, abundance and health.

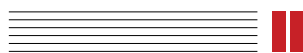
On March 21, Kazakh and Kyrgyz households fumigate their homes with smoke from the burning of archa twigs (a coniferous tree of Central Asian that grows mainly in mountainous areas). This smoke is said to make malicious spirits flee. The main holiday dishes for Turkic Central Asians are pilaf (plov), shurpa, boiled mutton and kok-samsa pies filled with spring greens and the young sprouts of steppe grasses. According to tradition, people try to make the celebratory table (dastarkhan) as rich as possible with various dishes and sweets. Everyone at the table should be full and happy to ensure that the coming year will be safe and the crop will be plentiful. The holiday is accompanied by the competitions of national singers and story-tellers, competitions of horsemen and fights between strong men.

Tadjiks, whose ethnic roots are more Persian than Turkic, have

slightly different traditions. In a Tadjik household, the owner of a house or his elder sons must prepare fried shish kebab and a sweet pilaf made of rice and other cereals. These dishes symbolize the wish for the coming year to be as «sweet» and happy.

Some mountain settlements have a special custom. Before the holiday, young men will try to secretly clear out the cattle shed of a prosperous man with a marriageable daughter. If they succeed, the owner must treat them generously; however, if they fail, they must treat the owner. In Afghanistan, Norouz is called «Ruz-e-Dekhkan», the Day of the Peasant, or «Ruz-e-Nekholshoni» the Day of Planting Trees. Before going to their fields, farmers arrange parades with songs and dancing, and traditional instruments. The horns and necks of oxen that will be used for the first plowing of spring fields are sometimes rubbed with aromatic oil.

► **Norouz and other spring celebrations indicates the significance we still attach to the beginning of a new agricultural year and the triumph of life and warmth over the long cold winter. So, wherever you are next March 21, celebrate life!**



In southern Russia, the Bashkirs probably adopted the celebration of Norouz from Persian tribes that once lived in the Ural Valley. The weather in these territories is not yet spring like in late March, so the holiday is somewhat different than in other regions. First, young men in a community collect products for the making of a common meal and embroidered

«prizes» for the winners of running, dancing and singing competitions that will be held. On the day of Norouz, ceremonies are performed to cajole the natural forces and spirits of ancestors into assuring a successful new year. In addition to the common meal, each family cooks a celebratory dish from buckwheat groats and sweets.

Throughout the world, many other cultures have long celebrated the coming of the spring equinox. In Egypt, both Moslems and Christians celebrate the coming of spring on the Monday after Coptic Easter. This holiday, called Sham el Nessim, is thought to have its roots in ancient Egypt, when it was celebrated at the spring equinox just like Norouz. Ancient Slavs, the Japanese and many Native American tribes also have historical holidays that were tied to the spring solstice. The longevity of Norouz and other spring celebrations indicates the significance we still attach to the beginning of a new agricultural year and the triumph of life and warmth over the long cold winter. So, wherever you are next March 21, celebrate life!



NOWRUZ

HISTORY AND ITS ORIGINS AMONG IRANIANS

When no agricultural activities were possible in Winter, each individual used to go home and try to keep warm on his/her own. The end of Winter and beginning of Spring, when it got warm again

and the people, most of whom were farmers, could get out and come together for work and produce food, the time for togetherness started. This could be a solid reason for Nowruz celebration!

Nowruz & Mythology

According to the ancient myths, when Iranian mythological king, Jamshid, ruled in Iran for 1000 years, everything was good. Food was abundant, lies didn't exist, plants didn't go dry, people didn't suffer from extreme cold and hot weather conditions, nobody got old, jealous, etc.

During such time and at the beginning of first day of the first month of Spring, Jamshid sat on his throne decorated with gems and put on a crown encrusted with jewels, against the East. When the Sun started shining at him and the throne, people saw him glittering like the Sun. Therefore, this brought plenty of happiness and joy to the nation. They celebrated that day and called it a new day, Nowruz. The happy ceremonies took five days and everyone celebrated the New Year and the revival of nature.

Nowruz & History

Since 3rd millenium BC, Nowruz was commemorated with joy in Iranian plateau, but not in the Eastern half of Iran. At the same time, it was celebrated in the Mesopotamia. Nowruz history doesn't originally go back to a Zoroastrian nor an Aryan tradition.

Nowruz Celebration by Ancient Iranians

There was another festivity popularly celebrated after the time of harvest around early November. During that time, Iranian calendar had 7 months of Summer and 5 months of Winter. Mehregan was at the end of Summer and the beginning

of Winter. The cause of joy was the crops harvested, meaning food for people.

Nowruz and Mehregan were celebrated in several other adjacent countries. For example they were popular among Semites, Arabs of Medina, etc. These annual celebration have continued till now in various countries.

When you study Nowruz history, you find out it wasn't a Zoroastrian festivity, because Avesta, the holy book of Zoroastrians, hasn't mentioned it. On the other hand, it wasn't celebrated at the Eastern half of Iran, where the main concentration of Zoroastrians used to live. One fact is for sure: Nowruz was celebrated in Persepolis.

Nowruz Festivity in Ancient Calendars

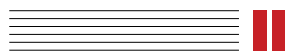
In Achaemenian era, people and officials commemorated Nowruz in form of an annual tradition everywhere – at home and in Persepolis. Some researchers believe that during early Achaemenian era, Mehregan was celebrated in Fall, but under Darius I, the beginning of Spring was determined to be the time for the annual festivity in Persepolis.

The Persian king was sitting in a particular direction and specific spot in Persepolis so that daylight could shine at his face at sunrise. This is why Persepolis is known as the throne of Jamshid and Iranians call it Takht-e-Jamshid.

In Parthian and Sassanian



► **Under Seljuks, when Turk authorities were very much against Nowruz festivities, Iranian calendar went through several manipulative changes.**



eras, various calendars caused the day of Nowruz to move to other days as the calculation for different calendars were not the same.

Iranians continued celebrating Nowruz even after Arabs' invasion, which brought Islam to Iran. Arab caliphs weren't happy about this at all, but Iranian Muslims kept on honoring and celebrating their national

rituals.

Under Seljuks, when Turk authorities were very much against Nowruz festivities, Iranian calendar went through several manipulative changes. Eventually, a group of mathematicians were assigned a project to correct the calendar including Omar Khayyam. They fixed Nowruz time at the beginning day of Spring, almost the same as 21st of March, when Iranians celebrate Nowruz these days.

When Safavids ruled in Iran from 16th to 18th centuries, Nowruz celebration was mixed with some Islamic rituals. Religious leaders narrated traditions from Imams to approve that the prophet Mohammad and others did great things at such a day. Therefore, today Iranian Shiites celebrate Nowruz as an annual Iranian-Islamic event and even recognize it as a holy and blessed day.

HAPPY NOWRUZ

AND NEW IRANIAN YEAR

Firouzeh Mirrazavi



Originating in Iran's ancient history, Nowruz is celebrated by more than 300 million people worldwide on March 21, the day of the spring Equinox, which marks the sun's crossing of the Equator and the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. Nowruz is as one of the oldest and most cherished festivities celebrated for at least 3,000 years.

Nowruz is a messenger of peace, friendship, benevolence for the humankind and admiration for the nature not only for Iranians, but for several nations and tribes who adorn this ancient festivity and celebrate it. Nowruz is an opportunity for rethinking, restarting and remaking.

Nowruz is the spiritual heritage of humankind and the Iranians will be most delighted if the world nations

enjoy this heritage and take advantage of it. Nowruz is the message of peace and friendship by the Iranians for the whole world.

Nowruz is a strong testimony to Iranian rich civilization, national characteristics and history. It proves how a nation with its irreversible determination to endure, and even flourish, through periods of devastation, political chaos, hardship and oppression.

For centuries, Persians have applied the Nowruz spirit to every dark challenge that has come their way. This spirit has made Nowruz far more than just a New Year celebration over the course of history.

Nowruz is a relic of ancient times. A memory of old tales and epics, a celebration of rebirth and rejuvenation. Spring has arrived and the previous

year with all its events, good or bad, has passed. Renewed hope anticipates new achievements.

In harmony with rebirth of nature, the Persian New Year Celebration, or Nowruz, always begins on the first day of spring, March 21st of each year. Nowruz ceremonies are symbolic representations of two ancient concepts - the End and Rebirth.

Nowruz (Norouz) in Persian means "New day". It is the beginning of the year for the peoples of Iran (Greater Iran, including: Afghanistan, Arran (Republic of Azerbaijan) and Central Asian Republics).

It begins precisely with the beginning of spring on vernal equinox, on or about March 21. Tradition takes Nowruz as far back as 15,000 years--before the last ice age.

It is not exactly known when and how the festival of Nowruz emerged. Some historians believe that natural changes in weathers gave rise to the festivities. Some consider it a national festival, while others regard it as a religious ritual.

According to Zoroastrians, the month of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian solar calendar) refers to Faravashis, or spirits, which return to the material world during the last 10 days of the year. Thus, they honor the 10-day period in order to appease the spirits of their deceased ancestors. The Iranian tradition of visiting cemeteries on the last Thursday of the year may have orig-

inated from this belief.

According to lexicographer Mirza Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, ancient Iranians celebrated a feast called Farvardegan (Farvardyan) that lasted 10 days. Farvardegan was performed at the end of the year and was apparently a mourning ceremony and not a celebration welcoming the rebirth of nature. In ancient times the feast started on the first day of Farvardin (March 21) but it is unclear how long it did last. In royal courts, the festivities continued for one month.

The festival, according to some documents, was observed until the fifth of Farvardin, and then the special celebrations followed until the end of the month. Possibly, in the first five days, the festivities were of a public and national nature, while during the rest of the month it assumed a private

and royal character.

Undoubtedly, the Nowruz celebrations are an ancient, national Iranian custom, but details of it prior to the Achaemenid era are unknown. There is no mention of it in Avesta - the holy book of Zoroastrians.

In the ancient times, Iran was the cradle of civilizations for thousands of years and regarded as one of the most powerful countries in the world. As time passed, the Empire of Persia disintegrated gradually due to the invasions by the enemies of this land.

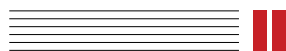
As a matter of fact, many glorious cultural, historical, festivals and customs have faded away and only traces of them have remained and several centuries of our homeland history is still in a "state of oblivion, darkness and ambiguity."

Currently, after several thousands of years, Iranians and the people of nine other countries enthusiastically celebrate the Nowruz festival, irrespective of their age, language, gender, race, nationality or social status as this festivity knows no boundary.

The oldest archaeological record for the Nowruz celebration comes from the Achaemenid period over 2500 years ago. They created the first major empire in the region and built the Persepolis complex in southern Iran. This magnificent palace/temple complex was destroyed by Alexander the Great.

Throughout their often stormy history, Persians have en-

► **The oldest archaeological record for the Nowruz celebration comes from the Achaemenid period over 2500 years ago. They created the first major empire in the region and built the Persepolis complex in southern Iran.**



dured hard times of civil wars, devastations, and political chaos. They have celebrated the height of human civilization and scientific and military achievements through the spirit of Nowruz.

Such a unifying spirit has often made Nowruz the target of much animosity by foreign invaders and anti-national forces throughout the history of Iran.

King Jamshid is said to be the person who introduced Nowruz celebrations. Some 12 centuries later, in 487 B.C.E., Darius the Great of the Achaemenian dynasty celebrated the Nowruz at his newly built Persepolis in Iran. On that day, the first rays of the rising sun fell on the observatory in the great hall of audience at 06-30 a.m., an event which repeats itself once every 1400 years. The Persepolis was the place the Achaemenian king received on Nowruz, his peoples from all over the vast empire. The walls of the great royal palace depict the scenes of the celebrations.

We know the Iranians under the Parthian dynasty celebrated the occasion but we do not know the details. It should have, more or less, followed the Achaemenian pattern. During the Sasanian time, preparations began at least 25 days before Nowruz.

Twelve pillars of mud-bricks, each dedicated to one month of the year, were erected in the royal court. Various vegetable seeds--wheat, barley, lentils,



beans, and others--were sown on top of the pillars. They grew into luxurious greens by the New Year Day.

The great king held his public audience and the High Priest of the empire was the first to greet him. Government officials followed next. Each person offered a gift and received a present. The audience lasted for five days, each day for the people of a certain profession. Then on the sixth day, called the Greater Nowruz, the king held his special audience. He received members of the Royal family and courtiers. Also a general amnesty was declared for convicts of minor crimes. The pillars were removed on

the 16th day and the festival came to a close. The occasion was celebrated, on a lower level, by all peoples throughout the empire.

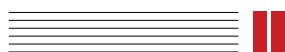
During the first two centuries of Islam in Persia, the festivities were not observed with much earnest due to sociopolitical transformation. Gradually, greedy Omayyad caliphs, intending to boost their income through gifts, revived the custom.

Nonetheless, Iranians have always been enthusiastic about preserving this custom, especially when they were under foreign domination.

Omayyad rulers, known for their tribal fanaticism, left no



► A major part of the New Year rituals is setting a special table with seven specific items present, Haft Sin (Haft chin, seven crops before Islam).



stone unturned to annihilate the traditions and cultural heritage of conquered lands.

According to the historian George Zeidan, Persians would pay 5,000 to 10,000 silver coins for permission to celebrate Nowruz during the reign of the Omayyads. Iranians made strenuous efforts to celebrate the occasion even though they had to pay a high price. Omayyad rulers greedy for wealth and power sought to strengthen their hegemony, apparently only resorting to Islam as a shield to protect their interests.

The festival was so glorious and sacred that even the most ruthless rulers used to grant general amnesty to captives and prisoners. The dignity of Nowruz is captured as Ahura Mazda on its splendid glory says: "On the day of Farvardin, even the infernal-dwellers return to this world to visit their families."

A major part of the New Year rituals is setting a special table with seven specific items present, Haft Sin (Haft chin, seven crops before Islam). In the ancient times each of the items corresponded to one of the seven creations and the seven holly immortals protecting them.

Today they are changed and modified but some have kept their symbolism. All the seven items start with the letter S; this was not the order in ancient times. Wheat or barley representing new growth is still present. Fish the most

easily obtainable animal and water are present. Lit candles are a symbol of fire. Mirrors are used today, origin unknown.

These were expensive items in ancient times and were made from polished metal. It is unlikely that all households would have one. Zoroastrians today place the lit candle in front of the mirror. Wine was always present. Today it is replaced by vinegar since alcohol is banned in Islam.

Egg a universal symbol of fertility corresponding to the mother earth is still present. Garlic is used to warn off bad omen. Samano a thick brownish paste is present today. It is a nutritious meal and could have been part of the feasts. Coins symbolizing wealth and prosperity, fruits and special meals are present as well.

Ferdowsi the great Iranian epic poet described this auspicious event in Shahnameh:

On Jamshid as the people jewels streamed, They cried upon him that New Year beamed On Farvardin Hormuz in this bright New Year Bodies were freed from pain all hearts from fear New Year new king the world thus rendered bright He sat resplendent on the throne in light The International Day of Nowruz was registered on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on February 23, 2010.

Iran Review



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sentencing spring

5- Samanu (sweet pudding), representing fertility

6- Sabzeh (sprouts), representing rebirth

7- Sekeh (coins), representing prosperity

Other words beginning with the letter “s” can also be used, such as the spice sumac, its brilliant gold color representing the sunrise, or senjed, a dried fruit of the Lotus tree, representing love.

Some families even add a little more flair. Haftseen tables can also include a Quran, a book of poetry, a mirror and candles (reflecting into the future), a goldfish swimming in a bowl (representing life), painted eggs (representing fertility), and all kinds of sweets and fruits.

For many families, Nowruz means preparing special dishes like smoked fish and herbed rice. Speaking to Tell Me More host Michel Martin, Iranian-American actress Nazanin Boniadi, of the hit TV shows *Scandal* and *Homeland*, says

► **In 2010, the United Nations first recognized International Nowruz Day, as it is celebrated in countries around the world, including Afghanistan, Albania, India, Iran, and Turkey**

food plays an important part in her Nowruz celebrations.

“I love the sabzi polo mahi, which is fish and herbed rice,” she says. “It’s a massive tradition in our house to have that.”

Chef and author Donia Bijan, who was born in Iran, told Martin last year that all that chopping of parsley, cilantro and dill for that dish was the hardest part. “It certainly teaches you

that good cooking does require a lot of patience,” she says.

Other dishes include soup with noodles “that symbolize unraveling the difficulties in the year to come,” as NPR commentator Bonny Wolf has reported, and of course, eggs represent fertility in practically every culture. One personal favorite is karaf, an exquisite celery, mint, dried lime and beef stew served over white rice.

Nowruz is also a time for spring cleaning, buying new clothes, visiting friends and relatives and renewing bonds. On the 13th day of the New Year, the celebrations finally end. Since the 13th is an unlucky day, entire families go on picnics and take with them the sprouts (sabzeh) from the haftseen table. The sabzeh is thrown into flowing water, symbolizing a “letting go” of the misfortunes of the coming year.

In 2010, the United Nations first recognized International Nowruz Day, as it is celebrated in countries around the world, including Afghanistan, Albania, India, Iran, and Turkey. Here in the U.S., the day is celebrated across many diaspora communities from New York to Chicago, Florida to Texas.

In southern California, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art has set aside two days of festivities including a short film festival, a display of the traditional haftseen table, and, for the first time, a traditional tribal Persian costume parade for all ages.

Npr.org

MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOLY SHRINES OF IRAQ

The department of holy shrines of Iraq, After many years of work, has begun huge projects in the holy shrines of Najaf, Karbala, Kazemein and Samera with the help of sincere donators and lovers of Ah-lulbayt (as) and there are still so many ongoing projects and activities done so far:

Najaf:

Projects in progress:

1- The project of development of the Shrine with the name of Lady Fatima (as)

The plan is called yard and the yard of Hazrat-e-Zahra (SA) and non-religious pilgrimage started in two parts. So that placement next to the monument and shrine valuable least 400 years old, has formed a single coherent entity. The spirit of the original architecture of the building set with the existing building of ancient template, which according to the needs of people & the need to meet the goals of pilgrimage service, designed by professors of Shahid Behesti university of Tehran, relying on the pilgrimage dimension & in every part of it the consideration is to provide comfort & ease of use for pilgrims of Imam Ali (AS). with construction of the court yard & the yard of Hazrat-e-Zahra (SA), the capacity of pilgrims



will increase 10 times than the old shrine. General infrastructure of pilgrimage floor area is 109 thousand square meter. & the non-pilgrimage infrastructure will be about 97 thousand square meter, with alongside spaces such as porches will reach to 220 thousand square meter.

2-Maintenance of dome of the Shrine

Finalized Projects:

1- The project of repairing & installation of the Gareeve inscription on dome of the shrine of Imam Ali

The Gareeve inscription dome of Imam Ali (AS) is 276 years old while separated from the dome for over 30 years. With the request of the province of the holy shrine of Imam Ali from

the reconstruction staff of holy shrines 12/March/2007, the reconstructing project became on the agenda.

2- Golden porch reparation of holy shrine of Imam Ali

todian to provide background to preserve this precious heritage. The program started from 2012, simple molds repaired in the shrine in situ method of amalgams & with mercury ox-

the shrine of Imam Husain (as) with the title of "Meraj"

After 700 years that the project conducted to the Iranians & Kerman's reconstruction campaign. The dome of the holy shrine heightened to 7.5 meter . The designing of the project done by the professor Salajegheh, one of the professors of Kerman University, & within this project, the 4 wide columns, converted into 8 columns with smaller dimensions. . These days the researches on geometrical situation are in progress & the prefabricated frame structure of the dome is in creating progress & the phase of researching on building adobes of dome are still in progress.

2-Designing and constructing the yard of Aghile Bani Hashem of Lady Zeinab from the shrine to the camp-ground

3 - Minimizing the occupied place by old columns around the metal shrine of Imam Husain(as) 4 – Planning for finalizing the development of both shrines in Karbala

Projects in progress:

1-Constructing and equipping the hospital of Imam Zain Al-Abedin (as) with 120 bed

This project for ease use & the welfare for the pilgrims & bystanders of the holy shrines of Karbala in a field with 5067 square meter extent & infrastructure of 11.961 square meter, 6 floor, with 17 specialized section, started in 2009 & with completion in physical building



The golden porch & it's parts is one of the most beautiful & important sections of the whole Imam

Ali's holy shrine which the dictatorship of Ba'ath regime brought a lot of damage to it. Losses incurred on the scrolls led the restructuring plan for its restoration of the Holy Shrines of staff and experts would be submitted to the shrine cus-

ide, & then the porch inscriptions in 3 executive section which consist of simple golden inscriptions, inscriptions with golden porch background, inscriptions with implications of the verses & titles with azure field are repaired & classified.

The Holy Karbala:

Planned projects:

1-Elevation of the dome of

, the project is at equip & complete the staff. The location of the construction building has 950 meter from the north holy shrine of the Ghamar-e-Banihashem (AS)

Finalized projects:

-The project of maintenance, strengthening and reconstruction of the shrine of Imam Husain (as) by the title of "Ya Husain"

The installation project of "Ya Hossein" design, is from complex of projects that done after consideration the needs of restoration & renovation of holy shrines, done by the campaign of rebuilding the holy shrines, & its divided into 5 section:

1- the interior walls of the shrine 2- the columns surrounding the shrine 3- the column for the door of the Habib Ebne Mazaher 4 - The installation of stones on walls & the floor of the Bab-Al-Ghebleh dome of the holy shrine 5- Also the building the shrines of the Ibrahim-al-Mojab & Habib Ebne Mazaher has been considered

Kazemein

Projects on progress:

1-Development project of the shrine of Imamain Al-Javadain (AS)

2--Reconstruction of Safawiyeh mosque which is located on the north of the shrine 3--Gilding the porch of Bab Al-Ghibla and the porch of Bab Al-Ghoraish

4--Gilding of four big minarets of the shrine

5--Construction of the ark of the graves of Imamain Al-Javadain (AS) Finalized projects:

1--Replacing the stones of floor, body and the rooms of the yard of the holy shrine of Imamain Al-Javadain (AS)

2--Strengthening, gilding and replacing the bricks of dome of the shrine of Imam Javad (AS)

Samera

Projects on progress:

1- Building the new metal shrine & four golden doors of the shrine of Imamain Askariyain (as)

2- Building four arcs of the graves of Imamain Askariyain (AS)

3--Reconstructing the porch of Bab Al-Ghibla of the shrine of Imamain Askariyain(as) 4--Construction of 160 restrooms for the shrine

which hopefully can provide a more pleasing place for the Pilgrims and can also help in preserving this precious Legacy of Islam. therefore we are going to mention some of the works.





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