



Nowruz from the Viewpoint of Islam

Historians and researchers are of the difference of opinion about the origin of Nowruz. It seems that after migrating to the Iranian Plateau and bordering on the Mediterranean civilization the Aryans divided the year into two parts, each of which began with a revolution, and the two festivities of Nowruz and Mehregan marked the beginning of these two revo-

lutions. That is, at the time of the summer revolution they celebrated Nowruz, and at the time of the winter revolution, they celebrated Mehregan. Some research scholars believe that both Nowruz and Mehregan festivities existed in Iran even before the arrival of the Aryans and were celebrated by the pre-Aryan tribes living on the Iranian Plateau.

Nowruz is the only festivity that has continued from ancient times with great grandeur and with a lot of related myths and ceremonies. The greatness of Nowruz can be found everywhere from the carvings of Persepolis to various literary and artistic works written in Arabic and Persian. One of the oldest and greatest sources that have dealt with this legendary fes-

tivity is the book “Al-Baqiyah” by Abu Reyhan al-Biruni (d. 440 AH) in which he has written:

“The year is of four seasons for the Persians and they have certain festivities in each season the dates of which change in the leap years. One of these feasts is Nowruz which coincides with the first day of the month of Farvardin. It is a great day and because it marks the revival of nature they say it was on this day that the world was created.”

The advent of Islam and its peaceful treatment of other religions and denominations, including the religious and national beliefs of Iranians was the reason that ancient Iranian customs did not disappear from the Islamic society of Iran and only their scope was reduced due to the gradual acceptance of Islam by Iranians. Furthermore, along with the religious beliefs of Islam, certain Arabic myths and stories, too, began to spread among the masses.

Over time and when some traditions and customs came to be in clear contradiction with the beliefs and customs of the past, Iranians would try to blend the Iranian national traditions with Islamic traditions. As a result, from among the many pre-Islamic Iranian festivals, what continued to survive among Muslim Iranians is Nowruz, which is the greatest of national festivities of Iranians.

Although Islam’s respect for Nowruz is not limited to the Shiites, is so pervasive among them that even some narrations honoring Nowruz have been quoted from the Shiite Imams. For example, in his “Al-Sama ‘al-A’lam” Al-

lameh Majlisi quotes the following hadith from Imam Ja’far Sadiq (as) about Nowruz.

“Adam was created at the beginning of the month of Farvardin and that day is auspicious for seeking God’s blessing, the fulfillment of wishes, meeting kings, gaining knowledge, getting married, and traveling and trade. On that blessed day, sick people are healed, babies are born easily and man’s subsistence increased. “Ma-

jlesi also quotes another hadith about Nowruz, which is attributed to Imam Musa Kazim (as), having said: “This day is very ancient. On the day of Nowruz, God Almighty made a covenant with His servants to worship Him and not to associate partners with Him, and to embrace the religion of His messengers, and to accept their commands and abide by them. And that is the first day when the sun shone, winds blew and there



were flowers on the earth. It is the day on which Gabriel descended on the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) and it is also the day that Ibrahim broke the idols, the Prophet carried (Imam) Ali on his shoulders to remove the idols of the Quraysh from the House of Ka'ba."

In addition to the fact that Islam does not oppose the Nowruz religion and beyond that its recognition by Islam, the continuation of the commemoration of Nowruz in the Islamic era can be attributed to the intense interest of Iranians in preserving their ancient heritage.

As stated by the renowned German Iranologist, Bertold Spuler, from among the old Iranian festivities, Nowruz (beginning of the new year) and Mehregan (marking the end of summer and beginning of autumn) have been celebrated according to the old calendar. Thus, following the advent of Islam in Iran and the spread of this religion in a wide area from the Indian subcontinent to North Africa, Nowruz found the opportunity to spread among non-Iranian communities.

Nowruz has always been given importance from the time of the Prophet of Islam. According to the testimony of history, Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and Imam Ali (as) and the caliphs of Islam honored Nowruz and was of special grandeur in the Abbasid court and after Islam, the great Nowruz was of special glory after being mixed with Islamic traditions. Great Iranian dynasties such as the Samanids, the Daylamites, and the Ale-Ziad were very attached to the preservation and protection

of national traditions, and during Nowruz, following the tradition of their ancestors, they would hold public meetings. Safavid kings also made great efforts to celebrate Nowruz, and the people, too, performed Eid ceremonies.

The celebration of Nowruz in the Safavid period can be evaluated especially by looking at the hadiths narrated by the great narrators of this period such as Allameh Majlisi about Nowruz. It seems that during this period, Nowruz had acquired a completely Islamic character and it was difficult to separate the ancient and Islamic elements in this glorious festivity.

In his book "Zad al-Ma'ad", Majlisi reports on the prayer for the beginning of the year, the repeated recitation of which has been recommended in the narrations. Therefore, according to this report, the prayer for the beginning of the year had been customary in the Safavid era.

In any case, regardless of what the prayer for the beginning of

the year was like before the Safavid era and in which of the hadith sources this prayer has been quoted, the very essence of praying or reciting the Holy Quran or even performing salat at the time of the change of the year indicates the Islamization of Nowruz. Some scholars even believe that the phrases of the prayer for the delivery of the year are taken from Quranic phrases or the hadiths and narrations that have been quoted in the most authentic Shiite sources such as "Al-Tahdhib" of Sheikh Tusi.

Moreover, the greatest symbol of Nowruz, which is "Haft Sean", has ancient and Islamic philosophy. In his recent research work entitled "Nowruz and the Philosophy of Haft Sean", Mohammad Ali Dadkhah has written that the number seven is a chosen and sacred one. The choice of this number on the Nowruz table is very significant. Ancient Iranians associated with the seven "Emshaspand" or the seven holy immortals. In astronomy, the number seven is the house

of dreams and gives the glad tid- ing of the attainment of hopes in the seventh house.” Allameh Ma- jlisi says: “The sky has seven floors and the earth is of seven floors and seven angels are entrusted with the responsibility of protect- ing those who recite seven verses of the Holy Quran that start with the letter “Sean” from earthly and heavenly plagues.”

According to some Islamic narra- tions, Nowruz is the day on which Gabriel was descended to Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), the day of Ghadir is bent, and it will be the day of the reappearance of Hazrat Sahib al-Zaman (aj). In ancient Iran- ian beliefs, it is the day when the Creator of the world finished the creation of the world and the day He created man.

The word (Eid) is mentioned in the Holy Quran only once in Verse 114 of Surah Al-Ma'idah when Je- sus Christ Asked God Almighty: “O Allah! Our Lord! Send down to us a table from the sky, to be an Eid 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.”

Islamic Customs of Nowruz

In the book Mafatih al-Janān, which has, in the past decades, been one of the greatest books for the public to perform religiously recommended acts of prayer and worship, mention has been made about Nowruz salat, which is a prayer with the recitation of Surah Al-Fatihah and Surahs Al-Qadr, Al-Kafirun, Al-Ikhlās, Al-Falaq, and Al-Nas, and is very similar to the salat which has been recommended to be performed on Friday and Eid Al-Ghadir.

Similarly, in his book, Bihar al-Anwar, Allameh Majlesi has quot- ed the following narration about Nowruz:

“Nowruz is the day when Noah’s ark landed on Mount Judi, the day that Gabriel descended on the Prophet (pbuh), the day when the Holy Prophet (pbuh) carried (Imam) Ali (as) on his shoulders to

remove the idols of the Quraysh from the top of the Ka’ba, the day when the Prophet (pbuh) went to the valley of the jinns and took al- legiance from them, it is the day when he took allegiance from the people for (Imam) Ali (the day of Ghadir Khum) and is the day on which the Imam of Time (aj) will defeat “dajjal”.

Imam Ja’far Sadiq (as) has been quoted in the book Mafatih al- Janān stating:

“On the day of Nowruz, make ghusl (major ablution), put on your cleanest of clothes, and perfume yourself with the best of fragrant scents. When you have finished ob- ligatory prayers, offer four rak’ats of salat and recite Surah Al-Fatihah and ten times Surah Al-Qadr in the first rak’at, Surah Al-Fatihah and ten times Surah Al-Kafirun in the second rak’at, Surah Al-Fatihah and ten times Surah Al-Falaq in the third rak’at, and Surah Al-Fatihah and ten times Surah Al-Nas in the fourth rak’at and completing the salat pros- trate in thanksgiving and recite this prayer.”

As can be observed like any Is- lamic eid, this day, too, begins with ghusl, wearing new clothes, wearing perfume, and fasting and has a recommended salat similar to the prayers of other Islamic fes- tive occasions.

وَيُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ
مَنْ مَعْلَمَاتٍ يُؤْتِيهِنَّ حِكْمًا

