



Celebrating Nowruz

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

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Cover Illustration by Farzana Cooper



Ten thousand years ago, the Iranian king, Jamshid Peshdadian, started the festival of Nowruz (meaning “new day” in Persian) to celebrate the coming of spring. It symbolized the triumph of good over the evil, as light literally took over the darkness of winter. The coming of spring was especially significant for the farmers in ancient Iran as it heralded warmer weather when farmers could begin sowing their fields and animals gave birth to their offspring.

In the modern world, Nowruz is widely celebrated in countries like Azerbaijan, Albania, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, India, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China (Xinjiang and other regions), Kosovo, Macedonia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Northern Caucasus), Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan. In 2010, the General Assembly of the United Nations announced 21 March as the International Day of Nowruz.

Nowruz is not a one day celebration. People prepare for it for several weeks, starting with “spring cleaning” their homes. The New Year is welcomed at the exact time when the lengths of the night and day are equal, which is at the Vernal Equinox. As the solar year is 365 days, five hours, 49 minutes and 4 seconds, Nowruz does not fall on the same day each year but moves between March 19th and 22nd in the Gregorian calendar, although traditionally the holiday is on March 21. At the exact moment of the New Year, the oldest person in the family hugs each family member and offers them sweets and gifts of coins.

Celebrations include setting a thanksgiving table laden with Nature’s bounties, such as wine, honey, fruit, flowers, pots with growing grains, sweets, painted eggs, coins, goldfish, and candles, to represent prosperity, sweetness, and the beginning of new life.

Festivities continue for thirteen days. The first few days are spent visiting members of the family and friends, feasting and exchanging gifts. On the last day, people have picnics in parks or on river banks to spend a day in nature. The sprouted grains are thrown into running water to carry away any bad luck that the family has seen in the past year. **

Nowruz Greetings

*Nowruz
Mubarak*

Happy New Year

*Nowruz
Pirooz*

Wishing you a
prosperous New Year

*Sud Saal beh
in Saal-ha*

Wishing you a100 more
happy New Years





King Jamshid, the Shining One



Iran, Tabriz, Safavid period, 1520s
Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper
From the Ebrahimi Family Collection

Tradition takes Nowruz [Parsi-Zoroastrians say it as Navroz] as far back as 10,000 years, before the last ice age. King Jamshid (Yima or Yama of the Indo-Iranian lore; also known as Jamsheed, Jamshed) symbolizes the transition of the Indo-Iranians from animal hunting to animal husbandry and a more settled life in human history.

During the reign of King Jamshid the people lived peacefully. People had already learned to tame sheep, goats, dogs, and horses. They got wool and milk from the sheep and goats, the dogs protected their homes from wild animals, and horses carried them over long distances.

However, winters were difficult for the people because the snow and chilly weather made it difficult for them to go hunting for pheasants, rabbits, and deer. King Jamshid taught his people how to collect and plant seeds to grow barley and oats. He also made the ploughshare out of stone and wood, which made sowing seeds easier. He showed people how to bring water from the river to their fields through a series of canals. He helped them store grains so they would have food during winter, and seeds to plant once the snow thawed and spring came. Besides grains, the people also learned to grow vegetables.

The first villages sprung up during King Jamshid's rule. Now that people did not have to travel from place to place to hunt animals, they could stay in one place and grow their own food in one place year after year. They did not have to live in caves anymore. They used clay they found near the river banks to make pots and urns to store the grain, and to make bricks to build houses. People stayed close to one another to help each other during planting and harvesting seasons.

Seasons played a vital part then. Everything depended on the four seasons. After a severe winter, the beginning of spring was a great occasion with Mother Nature rising up in a green robe of colorful flowers and the cattle delivering their young. It was the dawn of



abundance. King Jamshid is said to be the person who introduced Nowruz celebrations. This is why we sometimes call this holiday Jamshidi Nowruz. According to legend, Ahura Mazda warned Jamshid that a severe winter was coming where great mounds of snow would destroy every living creature. Jamshid built a fort to keep his people and safe, and within the fort's walls he kept every kind of animal and plant. Everyone survived the cold and chilling winds to welcome spring. On that day, Jamshid sat on his throne decorated with gems and facing the East. He put on a crown encrusted with jewels. When the Sun started shining at him and the throne, people saw him glittering like the sun. People called him the "shining one". The ceremonies for surviving the darkness of winter took five days and everyone celebrated the revival of nature and a New Day – *No Rooz*. Since the last 10,000 years, this festival marks the beginning of spring and falls on the day of the Vernal Equinox (March 21), when the night and day are of equal length.

King Jamshid's time was called the "reign of splendor". Gold and silver and precious gems were mined during his time. He also invented ships built of wood and used them to fetch pearls for jewelry. Perfume from fragrant flowers and wine from grape juice were created during his rule. He was also credited for the manufacture of armor and weapons, and the weaving and dyeing of clothes of linen, silk and wool. It is said that he discovered how to sweeten foods and drinks with sugar.

Legend says that he could talk to animals and birds, and he had a special wine glass, known as Jam-e-Jamshid, in which he could see the future. During his 700 year reign, sicknesses were banished and people lived for hundreds of years. People lived in great harmony and happiness.

Unfortunately, Jamshid's pride grew with his power, and he began to forget that all the blessings of his reign were because of the Creator's benediction. He boasted to his people that all of the good things came from him alone, and demanded that they should bow before him as if he were the Creator. The good people hung their heads in shame and did not know what to say. Slowly, Ahura Mazda's blessing on King Jamshid and his land disappeared. There was darkness and sadness in the kingdom. At that time Zohak was the king of a neighbouring country. He came to Iran to kill Jamshid, who ran away, and Zohak became the next King.

King Jamshid wandered for 100 years, hiding from Zohak, but was finally caught in China and killed with a sharpened fishbone. Thus ended the most splendid era in history. **

Sources:

- Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarey. *No-Rooz, The Zarathushtrian New Year*. Iran Chamber Society.
- Arnavaz Murzban Dinshaw. *The Glorious Kings of the Pishodadian Dynasty: A Story and Drawing Book for Children*. Friday School for Little Zarathushtis.



King Jamshid's Gifts

Make a list of some of the things we use today thanks to the reign of King Jamshid.

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May your New Year smell sweet!



One of the rituals of Nowruz is to sprinkle visitors with rosewater to symbolize a sweet-smelling future. Jamshid, the Peshdadian king who started the festival of Nowruz, is also credited with being the first perfumer.

The famous Iranian historian and theologian, Tabari, wrote: "Jamshid picked up many useful things, including aromatic plants when he was traveling in various lands, seas, and mountains".

Famous Iranian poet, mathematician, and astronomer Omar Khayyam documented that Jamshid had access to ambergris, myrrh, camphor, saffron and other aromatic plants.

M. Saadat Noury. *First Iranians who introduced Perfumery*. www.iranian.com



Shake-Up Your Home



Spring cleaning the home before Nowruz is called *Khaneh (home) Tekani (shake-up)*. During the *Khaneh-Tekani*, all members of the home help to thoroughly cleaning every nook and cranny of the home. Carpets and curtains are washed, silverware polished, and windows cleaned.

After the cleaning, fragrant plants such as hyacinths and tube roses are brought into the house to freshen the air. Some Zarathushtis in India burn sandalwood in a special container called the *afarghan* and walk with it throughout the house, filling air in the house with the scent of sandalwood. In the same manner, Zarathushtis in Iran burn sweet-smelling herbs like wild rue and esfand. Some believe that the smell of

these fragrant herbs welcome the spirits of the departed during the Farvardigan Days [ten days before Nowruz].

Clean Your Room

You can help your family get ready for Nowruz by making sure you clean up your room.

- It is always helpful to break down a large task into smaller piece. For instance, divide the room into four parts and clean up one quarter of the room at a time. Or, you can focus on one *category* at a time—first pick up all the clothes, then books, then toys.
- Spring cleaning is also about getting rid of things that are broken or that you do not use any more. Use three boxes labelled (1) trash (2) repair/clean (3) donate.
- This is a good time to do a thorough cleaning so ask an adult to help you brush the ceiling and clean the flooring. You may need help moving some of the furniture, like your bed or desk, to clean behind them.
- Take down the curtains for washing. If you have blinds, ask an adult to look up instructions of how to clean them. Always clean with the direction of the slats or honeycombs, not against it.



- You can also use this time to see if you would like to change something in your room to make it look different, such as arranging the furniture in a new way or perhaps getting a new comforter for your bed.

After spring cleaning, the home is ready for a fresh start to the New Year. **

Sources:

- *Khaneh-Tekani*. www.heritageinstitute.com. Painting of *Khaneh-Tekani* also from the same site.

Inviting the Fravashis

Fravashis are the spirits of our loved ones who have died. They look after us and guide us. In ancient times, the ten days before the Nowruz were special days reserved for remembering those who had passed away. These ten days were collectively referred to as *Hamaspahmaedaya* and later became known as “Farvardigan” days. Persian Zarathushtis sometimes call them “panji”, while among Parsis the term “mukhtad” is commonly used.

Yasht.13:49 says that the fravashis of the righteous people like to come to the homes of their families because they like being remembered by their loved ones, and they enjoy receiving gifts of food and clothing as they would have if they had been living.

During the Farvardigan days, we welcome them in our homes by making them feel like treasured guests. Zarathushti traditions include saying prayers of remembrance and offering fruit, flowers, incense, and money to the visiting spirits who have returned to earth. The money is later donated to the *dar-e-meher* or to a charity in memory of the loved one. You can also feed the poor or donate food to a food bank, or do any other act of charity in their honour.

“I Choose”

The Farvardigan days are also seen as a period of time to think about what has made you happy in the past year and what has made you unhappy. We must make up our minds about continuing to do the things that make us happy and to change the things that make us unhappy.

Asho Zarathushtra said that we have *fravarane* or free choice. In the *Jasa Mein Avanghe* prayer we promise: *Astuye humatem mano, Astuye huktem vacho, Astuye hvarshtem shyaothnem*, or “I choose to think good thoughts, I choose to speak good words, I choose to do good deeds”.

The days before Nowruz are the ideal time to “choose” to let go the past hurts and look towards doing the things that make us happy. After all, spring is about new beginnings. **

Source:

- USHAO: Volume IV no. 12. (February 2004). *Fravašis and Fravardégân*. Informal Religious Meetings, Karachi. Originally taken from the book *Man, Soul, Immortality In Zoroastrianism* by Faramroze A. Bode.



During the Farvardigan days, I will remember the fravashis of my _____

In their memory, I will donate _____

to _____

Red Wednesday



The last Wednesday before Nowruz is known as *Chahar Shanbeh Suri*. (The words *Chahar Shanbeh* means *Wednesday* and *Suri* means *red*).

In Iran, bonfires are lit on rooftops and in public places. It is hoped that the light of the fires will bring enlightenment and happiness throughout the coming year.

On that day, adults and children alike leap over the flames, shouting, *Sorkhi-ye to az man; Zardi-ye man az to* Give me your beautiful red colour; and take away my yellow [sickly] pallor!

Ancient Iranians celebrated the last days of the year in their annual obligation feast of all souls, known as *Hamaspathmaedaya* [also Farvardigan]. They believed that guardian angels and also the spirits of our loved one who had died would come back for a reunion. With the help of fires burning in their yards and terraces, ancient Zarathushtis “tried to keep the sun alive” to help the souls see their way down to Earth.

In Iran, children and some adults wrap themselves in white sheets to act out the visits of the spirits. Children will walk up to houses in the neighbourhood with cooking pots in hand, bang them loudly with spoons, and not stop until someone comes out and puts sweets in the pots. This tradition is similar to modern-day Halloween celebrated in the West. **

Source

Massoume Price, *Chahar Shanbeh Soori, The Fire Festival of Persian Peoples*. www.cais-soas.com



Song of Spring



Lord Nowruz has come.
Friends, spread this message.
The New Year has come again!
This spring be your good luck,
The tulip fields be your joy.

Haji Firuz Song

Haji Firuz is like the Santa Claus of Nowruz. He wears bright red clothes and a felt hat, and his face is covered with soot, a black powder that forms when you burn something. His costume is based on the ancient Zarathushti tradition of *Chahar Shanbeh Suri* (red Wednesday). In the olden days, there used to be special people called the fire keepers who dressed in red, and were sent by the Zarathushti priests on the last Wednesday of the year to spread the news about the arrival of the Nowruz. The fire-keepers' second duty was to go from neighbourhood to neighbourhood singing songs loudly and playing music, so when people came out to see what was happening, the fire-keepers would ask them to burn their old and broken items in the bonfires. As things burned, the fire-keeper's faces became blackened with soot. However, in North America if we dress up like Haji Firuz, we have to be careful not to wear a "black face" because it may offend some people who do not know the background.

People of all ages gather around Haji Firuz and his troupe of musicians who dance through the streets with tambourines and trumpets, spreading good cheer and the news of the coming New Year. His songs are similar to hearing Christmas carols, telling all that Nowruz is in the air. Haji Firuz creates a happy atmosphere as it is believed that if the families are not happy, the fravashis (souls of departed loved ones) who have come down to earth for the holidays will leave. The role of Haji Firuz is to bring joy, laughter, and song to the people. **

Sources:

- Mahmoud Omidshar. Haji Firuz. *Encyclopedia Iranica*. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/haji-firuz>
- Photo from public domain on the internet



The Nowruz Table

Among the best known customs of Nowruz is the “**sofreh haft-sheen**” or tablecloth with seven gifts of Nature with names beginning with the Farsi letter “sheen” [phonic sound ‘shuh’].

A week or so before the holiday, grains of wheat and lentils are placed in bowls to sprout into a mass of greenery, symbolizing growth. The table is also laden with fruit, nuts, sweets and snacks,

candles, and the holy book. A bowl with goldfish and a basket of colored eggs, indicating new life, are also placed on the table. Coins and silver are also kept on the table to signify wealth. The table also has a picture of the prophet Asho Zarathushtra, a book of prayers, the *Gathas*, and a *divo* (oil lamp) or candles.



Custom dictates that visitors who come to share the holiday with you should be sprinkled with fragrant rosewater and asked to look into a mirror to make a wish. Some say that this ritual symbolizes that you smell as sweet as roses and shine as bright as a mirror throughout the New Year. **

The Symbolism of the Haft Sheen

The seven articles prominently exhibited in plates on the “Haft Sheen” table all begin with the Farsi letter that sounds like “sh”. In olden days, some haft sheen tables had:

1. **Sharab** (wine) for health
2. **Shir** (milk) for nourishment
3. **Sharbat** (sherbet) for enjoyment
4. **Shamshir** (sword) for security
5. **Shemshad** (box) for wealth
6. **Sham** (candle) for light
7. **Shahd** (honey) for teamwork

Over the years, people have changed what they put on the table to suit their own needs, such as they have removed the sword and replaced it with Shir-Berenj, a pudding made of rice, but the tradition to have seven (haft) things on the table continues.

The symbolism of other things on the table are: the copy of the *Gathas* symbolizes guidance for a good life. The picture of Asho Zarathushtra reminds us of the author of the



Gathas, the founder of the Good Religion and the Conveyer of the Divine Message. The mirror reflects our past and shows us our present so that we thoughtfully plan our future. The candles are light, warmth, and energy to lead a righteous life that would, in turn, radiate light, give warmth, and provide energy for others. The incense burner gives the fragrance we need to meditate, pray to God, and ask for help and guidance. The gold fish symbolizes a happy life, full of activity and movement. The plates of green sprouts represent creativity and productivity, and so do the colorfully painted eggs. **

Source:

- Dr. Ali Akhbar Jafarey. *Nowruz Table*. <https://www.zoroastrian.org/articles/nowruz.htm>
- Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief That Shaped the Christian World*. Inner Traditions
- Photo in public domain from flickr.com

Grow Your Sabzeh



Ten days before Nowruz, you can grow “Sabzeh Nowruz” which is the sprouted wheat, for the Nowruz Table. You will need:

- 1/4-1/2 cup wheat or kidney eye beans (Wheat grows straight-haired, while beans will have leaves.) Wheat seeds where the outer bran layer is intact is the only kind of wheat that should be used for this purpose. Choose unbroken seeds as they sprout best.
- A container like a jar, plate, shallow bowl.
- Several paper towel sheets

1. Soak seeds in water for 24 to 48 hours. Change the water 1-3 times a day.
2. Drain seeds, then spread them on a damp paper towel. Cover the seeds with another damp paper towel so that they do not get any light. Mist the towels several times a day to keep the towel damp. Remember not to over water. On day 5, remove the paper towel and you will see that the seeds are already sprouting.
3. Place damp paper towel (or a thin layer of damp but not wet cotton wool) at the bottom of the container and spread the seeds evenly (not too close and not too far). Cover lightly with a damp paper towel again for two days.
4. On Day 7, discard the paper towel and set the container with the seedlings in a sunny space. Mist daily and watch them grow.
5. By Day 10, you can place it on the Nowruz table. Keep misting the the plants daily. You may have to tie the plants with a ribbon if they start drooping.
6. Traditionally, the sabzeh is put into a river on the 13th day after Nowruz at the celebration of Sizdah Bedar to carry away all the sickness and negativity from the home. **



Eggs Around the World



An egg is a traditional symbol of rebirth. In days gone by the egg, due to its shape, was a symbol of the earth. For Zarathushtis, the egg is associated with Jamshidi Nowruz which is traditionally celebrated on 21 March, the day of the vernal equinox. At the vernal equinox, day and night are of equal length. After the equinox, days become longer. This is a return of life after the “dead of winter” and the official beginning of spring. Many animals, especially birds, begin their

courtship and mating rituals during spring.

Thanks to its obvious association with the beginning of life, on Nowruz we continue to decorate eggs as a symbol of spring and renewal.

Zarathushtis are not the only ones to associate eggs with new birth, fertility, and the cycle of life. The egg has also been the basis of many ancient creation stories and spring festivals around the globe.

The tradition of eggs at Easter dates back to the early days of the church. The ban on eating eggs during the 46 days of Lent before Easter, established in the 9th century, is what made the egg so popular at Easter. The eggs were collected and saved and, once the fasting was over, were distributed to the servants and children, who generally enjoyed them in a huge Easter omelette. During the Middle Ages, egg throwing festivals were often held in churches. During these festivals, the priest would throw a hardboiled egg to one of the assembled choir boys. The egg was then tossed from one choir boy to the next. The boy holding the egg when the clock struck noon was the winner and got to keep the egg.

The egg is also part of the Jewish Passover holiday that takes place in the Spring. The egg is placed on the Seder plate and is a symbol of sacrifice and loss, as well as the full cycle of life, and, therefore, hope and rebirth.

In China, red eggs are given out at the one month birthday of a new baby. It is customary to hold a Red Egg and Ginger Party at this time. Once again, the source seems to be the egg’s role as a symbol of fertility and the beginning of life.

Have an egg-citing Nowruz!



Colour Your Eggs

There are many ways to decorate eggs. Some paint patterns with food colouring. Others decorate them with edible gold or silver foil.

An easy way is to dissolve a sachet of Kool Aid in 2/3 cup of water. Soak your hard-boiled egg in it to colour the shell. If the shell is not cracked, it will not affect the taste of the egg, and even if your egg does get a flavour it is still safe to eat. You can use different flavours to get different colours (see photo on the left). If you tie string or ribbons around the eggs before dipping you will get a striped pattern.

If you want more complicated patterns without the effort, you can use “egg sleeves” which are shrink wrap sleeves with colourful patterns (available on etsy.com). You slip this cylindrical film over a boiled egg and then place the wrapped egg on a spoon and dip it into boiling water for 3-5 seconds. The film will stick around the egg. One thing to

remember is that due to the use of boiling water, children require adult supervision. **

Sources:

- Get Cracking. www.eggs.ca
- Kool Aid Eggs. Photo and information from www.lovelyindeed.com/diy-kool-aid-easter-eggs
- Mama Lisa’s World Blog. www.mamalisa.com
- Photo of eggs in a basket free download from www.pxhere.com

Nowruz Candies

On the traditional Nowruz table, many people place seven special sweets because legend has it that King Jamshid discovered sugar on *Nowruz*. The word “candy” comes from the old Persian word for sugar, *qand*. These seven Nowruz sweets are:

1. **Persian baklava**, a sweet, flaky pastry filled with chopped almonds and pistachios soaked in honey-flavored rose water;
2. **Noghs** (sugar-coated almonds);
3. **Nan-e berenji** (rice cookies) made of rice flour flavored with cardamom and garnished with poppy seeds;



4. **Nan-e badami** (almond cookies), made of almond flour flavored with cardamom and rose water;
5. **Nan-e nokhodchi** (chick-pea cookies), made of chick-pea flour flavored with cardamom and garnished with pistachios;
6. **Sohan asali** (honey almonds), cooked with honey and saffron and garnished with pistachios;
7. **Nan-e gerdui** (walnut cookies), made of walnut flour flavored with cardamom and garnished with pistachio slivers.

Source:

- globalcookies.blogspot.com. *Some recipes available on the website.*

Make Your Own Cookies

You can make cookies to add to the Nowruz table. This is a no-bake recipe.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup almond butter
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, or more to taste
- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- 1/2 cup dried fruit or chocolate chips or dried cherries
- 1/2 cup cocoa nibs
- Sea salt to taste



Directions

1. Mix almond butter, honey, and vanilla extract together in a bowl until smooth.
2. Stir oats, coconut, dried fruits (or chocolate chips), cocoa nibs, and sea salt into almond butter mixture until well combined; refrigerate for 30 minutes.
3. Roll mixture into balls using your hands.

Prep Time: 15 minutes **Ready in:** 5 minutes **Makes:** 24

Source

- No Bake Power Bites recipe and photo by Risa Robertson from <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/244800/no-bake-power-bites/>



Favourite Faluda

One of the staples of the Nowruz feasts is *faluda*. In ancient times, *faluda* was more slush-like, made with fresh mountain snow, rose water, and sugar syrup, but over time the beverage has adapted to the cuisine of the place where Iranians settled. Parsi-Zarathushtis from India recognize it as a milk beverage made with *sev* (noodles) and *takhamaria* seeds, and topped with ice-cream. Indians add *kesar* (saffron) or mangos to faluda but it is the rose *faluda* which is synonymous with Nowruz.

In Iran and India, people make the *sev* at home, but in urban areas in North America with large South Asian or Iranian populations, you may find them at an ethnic grocery store. Otherwise, you can substitute Thai rice sticks or Vietnamese rice vermicelli for hand made *sev*. But wherever you may be in the world, when you raise a glass of *faluda* on Nowruz it is a celebration of life. **



Make Your Own

Ingredients:

- 4 tsp *takhamaria* seeds (basil seeds)
- 1 litre milk
- 6-8 tbsp *faluda* noodles
- 1 cup rose syrup (e.g. Rooh Afza)
- 4 scoops vanilla ice-cream

Method:

1. Soak the *takhamaria* seeds in a little milk or water for about 30 minutes.
2. Drain and chill till required.
3. Pour a teaspoon of rose syrup into each glass, which will settle to the bottom of each glass.
4. Divide the seeds and cooked noodles between the glasses.
5. Pour milk into glasses. Tilt glass a bit, pour milk to 3/4 level, carefully.
6. Chill in the fridge.
7. When ready to serve, top with a scoop of ice cream in each glass. Serve with long-handled spoons.

Source:

- Farishta Dinshaw (2005). Nowruz Mubarak. DAWN newspaper, Karachi, Pakistan
- Photo as a free download from pexels.com



Sizdah Bedar



Sizdah Bedar is celebrated on the last day, i.e. the 13th day, of the Nowruz celebrations i.e. April 2. The fire festival of Chahar Shanbeh Suri welcomes Nowruz, and Sizdah Bedar is one to send the celebrations away.

The custom is to spend the day outdoors near water, in parks or the countryside. It is believed that joy and laughter clean the mind from all evil thoughts and a picnic with family and friends is a festive, happy event. People bring a picnic with fruits, cheese, bread, and other delicacies,

specially a noodle soup called *ash'e reshteh*.

On this day, people also release the goldfish from the Haft Sheen table into the water. The festivities continue all day until sunset. Traditionally, people play practical jokes on each other and tell white lies on this day, calling it the “thirteenth lie” (similar to April Fool’s Day). It is believed to be the oldest prank-tradition in the world still alive today, which has led many to believe that the origins of the April Fool’s Day goes back to this tradition that has been celebrated by Persians as far back as 536 BC.

Another tradition on the Sizdah Bedar is the knotting of blades of grass by unmarried women in the hope of finding a suitable partner. Family members take the opportunity of this large gathering to do a little matchmaking. The knotting of the grass represents the wish for good fortune in life and love, and the bond between a man and a woman. As the blade grows the knot is eventually opened, symbolizing the unravelling of obstacles and wishes coming true.

A ritual performed at the end of the picnic day is to throw away the greenery, *sabzeh*, from the Haft Sheen table. The *sabzeh* is supposed to have collected all the sickness, pain and ill fate hiding on the path of the family throughout the coming year. Touching someone else's *sabzeh* on this thirteenth day or bringing it home, therefore, is considered to be a bad omen and may invite other peoples' pain and hardship to oneself. By throwing the *sabzeh* in running water,





lethargy and weariness are believed to be washed away, and one can face the new year with energy and enthusiasm. **

Source:

- Sizardah Bedar. Wednesday March 31, 2010. *Historical Iranian Sites and People*. Retrieved from <http://historicaliran.blogspot.com/2010/03/sizardah-bedar.html>.
- Photos from same site.

Nowruz Around the World

Today, Nowruz is celebrated all around the world by people influenced by Iranian culture, notably the Zarathushtis (Zoroastrians), Shi'ite Muslims, Baha'is, and Kurds. It has the unique distinction of being the only holiday celebrated as their own festival by several religious groups.

Nowruz and the coming of spring is celebrated in different ways around the world.

In Afghanistan, where it is also Farmer's Day, farmers decorate their cows and come into the city for an annual agricultural fair. Legends have grown up around the holiday – an ugly old woman named Ajuzak is thought to roam when Nowruz begins. It is believed that if it rains on Nowruz, she is washing her hair and the spring plantings will thrive.

The Kurds celebrate it as *Newroz*. One tradition similar to *Char Shanbeh Suri* is called *Churshama Kulla* or “jump over the fire”. In Kurdistan, jumping over the fire happens on the last Tuesday of the year. Women wear coloured dresses and spangled head scarves and young men wave flags of green, yellow, and red, the colors of the Kurdish people. They hold this festival by lighting fire and dancing around it. They greet each other with “Bijî Newroz!” which means “Long Live Newroz!”

In Uzbekistan, Nowruz celebrations include horse-racing competitions that attract thousands of viewers.

In Albania, *ballakume* (a special dish), dried figs, walnuts, turkey legs, boiled eggs, *simate* (a sandwich) are distributed to members of the family. The oldest woman of the house remains awake at night and goes from room to room to put grass on the pillows of young people and children, as well as young couples to symbolize growth and prosperity. The youngest in the family is given the task of fertilizing orange and olive trees. **

"Celebrating Nowruz". (2019). Compiled by Farishta Murzban Dinshaw for editions of e-Ushao, 2009-2016. Hukhta Publications.



Celebrating Nowruz

Read the story *Celebrating Nowruz* and illustrate a cover for it.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin purple border, intended for the student to draw an illustration for the book cover.



Celebrating Nowruz

By Farishta Murzban Dinshaw

Friday School for Little Zarathushtis, Karachi (1999; revised 2019)

Spenta saw her mother light the *diva*¹ and then both of them stepped back to admire the thanksgiving Nowruz Table. Spenta smiled when she saw how beautiful the Table looked, just as spring is supposed to be - fresh, green, and bountiful. Besides the diva, the picture of the Prophet Asho Zarathushtra Spitama and a copy of the *Gathas*², there were baskets of glossy fruit and vases of fragrant flowers. Bowls of germinating grains - wheat, *lobia* and *daal moong* - which she and her brother Nerius had started growing a week earlier, grew tall and green.

There were bowls with many kinds of lentils and rice, and different kinds of dried fruits to show Nature's bounty. The gold fish in the glass bowl, and the hard-boiled eggs with painted shells in a big basket signified the new life that spring brought with it. And for prosperity there were shiny silver and gold coins, which her mother took out only for the Nowruz Table, and afterwards put away wrapped in red silk till the next year.

The part of the Table, Spenta liked best was the Haft Sheen. It was a tradition borrowed from the time Zarathushtis lived in Iran, but adapted to the living in the West³. Seven items whose names in Persian begin with the sound "shuh" were displayed:

1. ***Sherab*** – (wine) representing good health
2. ***Sheer*** – (milk) representing purity
3. ***Sherbert*** – (fruit juice) representing balance
4. ***Shagufeh*** – (flower buds) representing new life
5. ***Shama*** – (candle) representing light and warmth
6. ***Shakar*** – (sugar) representing sweetness
7. ***Shahed*** – (honey) representing a busy life and prosperity

1 A *diva* is an oil lamp. It is lit in Zarathushti homes on special days to represent the light (*khvareh*) of God.

2 The *Gathas* are the holy book of Zarathushtis and contain the sermons of Prophet Zarathushtra.

3 Farishta Dinshaw (February 2003). *Navrooz Khojeste Bad*. Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York Newsletter, Issue 9.



Spenta's mother picked up a gold-rimmed mirror and showed Spenta her reflection in it, saying, "Like the mirror, may you shine in the New Year too."

And after sprinkling Spenta with rose water, she said, "And may all you think, speak, and be as soft and sweet-smelling as roses".

Spenta hugged her mother and asked, "May I show the mirror to the visitors when they come to see our Table in the evening?"

"Yes, but remember to give Nerius a turn too. Where is he? We don't want to be late for the Dar-e-Meher⁴. "

Spenta went to call her brother who was still getting dressed in his new clothes. "Nerius, hurry up for once. Today is Nowruz."

Nerius said, "I don't know why you make such a lot of fuss about Nowruz. It's just like any other day."

"Of course it's not like every other day. It's a very special "new day"⁵. It's the first day of spring⁶. Winter is finally over."

"What is the big deal about that?"

"Ten thousand years ago the winters in Iran were so severe, people rejoiced when they saw the first signs of spring. King Jamshid⁷ made the first day of spring⁸ a royal holiday."

Before Nerius could reply, they heard their mother calling them for breakfast. Besides the usual egg, toast, and milk, there was *sev*⁹ and sweet *dahi* decorated with rose petals.

After breakfast the whole family went to the Dar-e-Meher where they prayed for peace and prosperity of the family, and the country.

4 Dar-e-Meher or the House of Light is a place of worship for Zarathushtis, similar to a masjid or a church.

5 "No" means "new" and "rooz" means "day"

6 NoRooz marks the beginning of spring and falls on the day of the VERNAL EQUINOX, i.e. on March 21, when night and day are of equal length.

7 Jamshid (or Yim Shaita) was the fourth king of the Peshodadian dynasty of Iran. His reign was during the ice-age ten thousand years ago, and when the snow finally thawed his whole kingdom rejoiced at the coming of spring. Zarathushtis call the festival Jamshidi Navroze in his honour.

8 According to the Gregorian calendar which we follow today, March 21 is Jamshidi NoRooz day. According to the Zarathushtrian Fasli calendar day Hormazd of month Farvardin is the first day of spring. This calendar is still the official calendar of Iran.

9 Vermicelli fried with almonds, pistas and raisins.



On the way home, Spenta and Nerius stopped to visit their school friends, Ali and Rozina Lallani,¹⁰ and Firuzeh and Asfandiar Kohzadeh to wish them as it was their Nowruz as well.

In the evening, it was Spenta's and Nerius's turn to receive visitors, as cousins and friends dropped in to greet them on Nowruz.

Spenta showed all the visitors the mirror, sprinkled them with rose-water, and gave them good wishes for the New Year.

Faluda, the traditional Nowruz drink of rose syrup, ice-cream, and rice noodles, was served to all the guests. Spenta spilled some of it on her new dress, but she did not mind: it was Nowruz day and she remembered her Grandmummy saying that if you did not let little things bother you on Nowruz and remained sunny-tempered throughout the day, the whole year would flash by with happiness.

That night as Spenta got ready for bed she thought to herself, I wish today wasn't over but at least there are twelve more days to go before we pack the Nowruz Table¹¹.

Nerius poked his head through the door and said, "Ready for bed, I see. Good night. Oh, and one more thing. I forgot to tell you something this morning."

"What was that?"

"*Nowruz khojasteh baad.*"¹²

Spenta smiled. "*Nowruz khojasteh baad* to you too." **

10 Nowruz is celebrated by the people who have some link with Central Asia - including what is now Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan. Besides countries, communities with links to these areas such as the Ismailis, and the Irani Shias also to celebrate Nowruz.

11 The Nowruz Table is kept for thirteen days, and throughout the period, visitors drop in to wish Navroze Mubarak.

12 "Happiness to you on Nowruz" is the old Persian greeting. "Nowruz Mubarak" is also used.



Notes for Parents

Importance of Nowruz Celebrations

In the West, Zarathushti families are bombarded with the dominant culture's festivals. Christmas, particularly, is a holiday that has lost its religious basis and has become a secular festivity. As such, Zarathushti families have adopted many of the festival's celebrations such as decorating the house with a Christmas tree and exchanging presents. Zarathushtis are renowned for adapting to their surroundings, yet if we are to maintain our cultural and religious identity, we have to make an effort to showcase and illuminate our own traditions. Nowruz is just the occasion to involve the family in celebrating our traditions.

The days before Nowruz is a good time to do a thorough spring cleaning of the house. There are some tips given below on how to involve the whole family in the process.

It is also a great time to get the children to reflect on what they would like to achieve in the upcoming year and what habits they would like to change. It builds their skills for goal setting and self-reflection. Talk to them about key moments in their lives in the past year, such as owning up to breaking a lamp or winning an award as this builds character and self-esteem. Talk as well as not such stellar events like when they teased or bullied someone or threw a tantrum. This gives them an opportunity to reflect how they would have done things differently. It also gives them an opportunity to let go of bitter memories. Remember, that this is an opportunity to share experiences, not be judgmental. If you are open and share what you have regretted and learned from, they will be more likely to do the same when it is their turn to share.

Maintaining farvardegan days helps children to build a connection with their family history, remembering and celebrating the lives of family members they may not have known. Displaying family heirlooms and old photographs, and talking about your own memories of them are a great way of building these connections.

The Nowruz Table traditions are particularly colourful and engaging for children. You can involve the children in many ways to set up the Table such as growing the seedlings or painting the eggs. Inviting their friends over to see the table or even asking for permission to display it in their schools help non-Zarathushtis to become more aware of our traditions and their profound symbolism.

Sizdah Bedar is the thirteenth day of the Nowruz celebrated on April 2. It is the day when you put away the Nowruz table and dispose off the wilting greenery. It is meant to be spent out of doors. Early April in the north of America may be too cold for a picnic, but those in the south may wish to organize one with family and friends. For those who live in the north, perhaps a walk in the park may be the way to go. **

Spring Cleaning

Sarah Aguirre, a writer who specializes in helping families clean and organize their homes, offers these tips to involve the whole family.

- Make sure the assigned day has no prior engagements during the time period allotted for work. Check and recheck schedules and plan ahead. Don't accept excuses. Let everyone know that this is a family event and they are all strongly invited to be there.



- Turn off the ringers to your phones, and let extended family and friends know that you'll be unreachable that day. A distraction can cause the whole job to fall apart.
- Invite everyone to bring his or her favorite CD or cassette tape. Take turns playing each of the CD's or cassettes. To be fair pull names out of a hat to determine order.
- Have some good snacks and drinks on hand for break times. Choose your families' favorites. Having predetermined breaks can keep the family motivated to keep working.
- Make chores age appropriate. Do not expect children who are too young to participate in heavy cleaning and organizing. Have work that they can do available or create alternate activities that still help. Sorting safe items can be good for preschool and school age children. If some of your children are too young to participate consider having a trusted relative or friend take care of them during the cleanup.
- Plan a reward for when the job is finished. Take the family out to a movie and/or dinner. Or if you are all too tired from your hard work, order a pizza and rent a movie. You'll all be able to lounge on the couch basking in the knowledge of a job well done.
- If you are expecting older children to clean up their own room, be sure to consider "bridge help". It's okay to spend 15-30 minutes in the room with your child, depending their age, where you show them the steps required to complete the task. For example, you might teach your child to pick up the clothes on the floor, inspect them, and then either put the clothes in the hamper or put them away. It's very important that kids know *exactly* what your expectations are.

Sources:

- Sarah Aguirre. *Tips for Family Clean Up Day*. www.about.com
- Sara Bean, *4 Tips to Help Get Kids to Clean Their Rooms*. www.Empowering Parents.Com

A New Nowruz Table

The items on the Nowruz table have evolved in the thousands of years that this custom has been practiced.

SOFREH HAFT SEENI

Seeni is a round tray [like an Indian thaali]. There is a school of thought that believes that the original Nowruz table in ancient Persia had seven trays containing seven different items that represented blessings, abundance, bounties of Nature and the coming of spring such as greenery, fruits, coins, rosewater, mirror, milk, eggs and goldfish. Barsam (branches from the sacred trees of pomegranate, willow, olive and fig in bunches of three, seven or twelve) were also displayed. This is a likely explanation of the Nowruz sofreh since Farsi was not spoken in those days.

In modern times, families can make this a thanksgiving project and collectively come up with what should be placed on the seven trays.

THE CONTEMPORARY SOFREH HAFT SHEEN

Traditionally, the haft seeni evolved into having a table with seven items named after the letter sheen (phonetically "shuh"). [Refer to page 9 for the list.] However, in Islamic Iran, the Haft Seen table came into being to avoid putting "sherab" (wine) on the table as was customary in the Haft Sheen table because alcohol is forbidden in Islam.

For diasporic Zarathushti communities who are unable to procure traditional items, Farishta Murzban Dinshaw's suggestion is to expand the symbolism of the Nowruz table so that the spirit behind it is the same as that of the traditional sofreh – to celebrate the gifts of Nature – but with items that are more easily available in the West. The modified table would continue to have items beginning with the Farsi letter "sheen" [phonic sound "sh"] to maintain unity with tradition, but incorporate some new items. All items have origins in natural resources as tradition dictates.



1. Sherab (wine) representing health.

Jamshid Peshdadian, the king who initiated the Nowruz celebrations, was also credited for discovering the medicinal properties of wine. There is a growing body of scientific research that indicates the polyphenols found in red wines may offer significant antioxidant protection and prevent various forms of cancer and heart disease.

2. Sheer (milk) representing goodness, purity.

In the jashan ceremonies, milk represents animal life and Vohu Mano or Good Mind. According to Zarathushti lore in to the post-Sassanid *Dadestan i denig* (I.31.10), at the time of the Final Judgment a river of molten metal will flow over the earth. The wicked will be burned but righteous people will wade through this river as if it was a bath of warm milk.

3. Sherbet (sweetened fruit juice) representing the balance of tartness and sweetness of life.

Sherbet e Sekanjabeen [“sirka anjabin”, literally meaning “honeyed vinegar”] is a beverage made from lemon juice and honey and garnished with mint. In olden times, a mixture of honey and white vinegar was drunk for its medicinal properties as a decongestant and a digestive. Today, sherbet is used as a generic term for any fruit juice but originally it referred to fruit ices. The Persians drank fruit syrups cooled with snow, which were the forerunner of modern day sorbets. Syrup made from rose petals was highly prized and was a popular flavor for faluda and other sweets. For practical purposes, you can use any fruit juice, but one that has a traditional association with Persia such as pomegranate juice (sherbet e anar) or sherbet e sekanjabeen would be better.

4. Shagufeh (buds) representing perfection, happiness, new life.

Flowers are used in Zarathushti rituals and ceremonies to represent immortality and bliss. Each of the seven Amesha Spentas (immortal beings) have a flower that represents it according to the Bundahishn. In Iranian tradition, Cypress branches are placed on the Nowruz table as it is symbolic of truthfulness, youth and freedom. It has also been associated with perfection because of its evergreen leaves. Placing budding flowers on the Nowruz table instead of open blooms would represent the coming of spring as well as the practical purpose of increasing the chances that the flowers will remain fresh for the thirteen days that the table is set.

5. Shama (candle) representing warmth, light, wisdom, radiance of Ahura Mazda.

Fire literally dispels darkness and is often used metaphorically as the light of wisdom banishing the darkness of ignorance. On a practical note, it would be preferable to have candles made of beeswax to illustrate an obvious link to nature.

6. Shakar (sugar) representing sweetness.

Sugar has an obvious association with sweetness and good fortune. In Parsi-Zarathushti ceremonies, the traditional ceremonial tray (ses) contains a silver cone filled with sugar crystals symbolizing a mountain of sweetness. In Iran, a Kalleh Ghand is used, which is a cone of solid rock sugar wrapped in green and gold foil. On auspicious occasions like weddings, navjotes, agharnis, sugar is placed in the mouth of the celebrants.

7. Shahed (honey) representing healing, prosperity, love.

Honey has hygroscopic, antibacterial properties and was used in ancient times to treat open wounds and burns. In many traditions it is associated with richness and sweetness of life here and in heaven, and is considered as a symbol for immortality. In ancient Persia, newlywed couples drank mead [drink made from honey] for a month after they married (known as the "honey month" hence the term "honeymoon") in order to get in the right frame of mind for a successful marriage. In more literal terms, honey can also represent sweet rewards through hard work. **

Sources:

- Farishta Dinshaw (February 2003). Navrooz Khojeste Bad. Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York Newsletter, Issue 9.