

Afghan Festival New Year: Trina Ehsan

One of the famous festivals we celebrate in Afghanistan is New Year (Nowruz). Nowruz means New Day and is also known as Farmer's Day. Our new year is based on the solar year and is held on 21 March. This is the most ancient festival in Afghanistan and corresponds to the first day of spring. On this day, many people participate in tree-planting ceremonies held across the towns and cities. During New Year, everyone wears new clothes. Family and friends get together for many different activities such as walking on the grass, playing outdoor games or having picnics. Another equally important aspect of New Year is the food. For this special occasion, the traditional haft mewa (a drink made from a mix of seven dried fruits soaked in water) is especially prepared a few days before. This dish symbolises fertility and the end of the dry and cold season. In addition, meals such as Samanak and Sabzi Chalao (white rice and spinach) are cooked and served as a main dish, along with New Year cookies. These simple, flat, round cookies have almonds or another nut on the top. My mother would make all of these.

On New Year's Eve, we used to eat Sabzi Chalao, to say goodbye to last year. Because this is the farewell night for the old year. And it is our custom to wish someone 'green and fresh when saying goodbye.' On the following morning we had our haft mewa for breakfast along with cookies. Then we spent all day outside with family, friends and neighbours.

It was amazing that everyone was celebrating the New Year and all over the city people were having different entertainments. I loved to walk with my siblings and my cousins on the grass and then go to the park where there were lots of activities. I still remember one of the activities was passing between two tight high stones; if we squeezed through quickly, we would be lucky and win. But sometimes someone got stuck and had to go back.

We did all these activities in one day, but for cooking Samanak we had the whole first month of the spring, because we have to grow the wheat on a tray. It takes two weeks for the grass to grow tall enough to cook. Samanak is like semolina pudding: brown and sweet enough without needing additional sugar. It is cooked by constantly stirring for hours.