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## Outdoor Moments of Sizdah Bedar



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Sizdah is the Persian term for thirteen. Leaving the house on the Thirteenth Day of Farvardin (the first month of Iranian calendar), and joyfully spending the day outdoors have been a national tradition since ancient times in Iran. Sizdah Bedar (in English: Getting rid of the Thirteenth) has been possibly considered as a tradition because some people believe the thirteen is an unlucky number, and everybody should get rid of the thirteen. That interpretation may be disputed since it is documented that in Persian, Bedar may also mean Raftan-e beh Dar-o Dasht (in English: Going Outdoors and Country Sides). It should be also noted that most of the times Sizdah Bedar coincides with the first day of April, which is known as April Fools' Day in the Western Culture.

**In Persian Mythology:** Like the Iranian New Year (in Persian: Know Rooz [1], aka Nowruz), the tradition of Sizdah Bedar also traces back to the era of legendary king Jamshid who celebrated this outdoor festival together with his people, the Iranians.

Researcher Mohammad Ahmad Panahi Semnaani in an interview with Iran Daily noted that, "The essence of the Sizdah Bedar ceremonies is the enthusiasm to set up a family, lead a happy life and form friendship. By growing sprouts, ancient Iranians expressed their spirit for green environment and seek further divine blessings in the form of rain for their farmlands. Iranians believed that the Demon of Drought was defeated at midday of Sizdah Bedar. They used to sacrifice sheep and cook kebab in the open areas to celebrate victory of the Angel of Rain against the Demon of Drought".

**In Zoroastrianism:** Sizdah Bedar has also its roots in the Zoroastrian belief that laughter and joy symbolize the throwing away of all bad thoughts. According to Zoroastrianism, the bad thoughts are coming from the Devil Angra Mainyu (in Middle Persian: Ahriman) and the celebrations of New Year and Sizdah Bedar will cleanse all bad thoughts. Avesta, the holy scripture of the Zoroastrian faith, recalls that all those who love purity were responsible for celebrating Sizdah Bedar to help the Angel of Goodness prevail over the earth in the struggle against the Evil and the Devil. It should be noted that in Islam the Devil is referred to as Shaitan or Eblees, a word referring to evil devil-like beings.



**On the Records:** Sizdah Berdar is reported to have been celebrated by the Iranians lived on the Iranian Plateau as far back as 536 BC. It is puzzling to see no record about Sizsah Bedar after Iran became a part of Muslim World in the seventh century.

Amazingly none of thousand famous Europeans who traveled and visited Iran during Safavid era (1501–1736) and up to the last years of Qajars (1794–1925) referred to the celebration of Sizdah Bedar on their Itinerary Reports (in Persian: Safar Naameh-haa). The Iranian politician and writer Abdollah Mostofi (1876-1950) and traveler Edward Pollack who visited Iran in 1865 were possibly among the first authors who wrote about Sizdah Bedar and reported it on their books.

It should be also noted that there are tons of poems on the praising Spring Season (in Persian: Bahaarieh) and the Iranian New year (in Persian: Know Rooz, aka Nowruz) composed by various classical Iranian poets, but the verses on Sizdah Bedar written by the same groups of composers are rarely found. As if there were some problems to author poetry on Sizdah Bedar. According to many researchers, those problems may be attributed to the imposition of the specific codes of behavior on various aspects of daily life after Iran became a part of Muslim World in the seventh century.

More research works are needed to fill those voids.

**Sites of Observances:** In addition to Iran, Sizdah Bedar is also among the festivals celebrated in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, India, and many other parts of the world (View the online article on [Happy Moments of Iranian New Year \[2\]](#)).

**The Various Traditions of Sizdah Bedar:** In modern times Iranians head for parks, gardens or country sides, and enjoy their day together in a picnic. On Sizdah Bedar, many big cities in Iran look empty and unpopulated and as researcher Ali A. Jafari noted, “Cities and villages turn into ghost towns with almost all the inhabitants gone to enjoy the day in woods and mountains along stream and riversides”. At the end of their picnics people throw away the Sabzeh (from the Haft Seen that they prepared for the first day of New Year). The Sabzeh is supposed to have collected the sickness, pain and ill fate hiding on the path of the family throughout the coming year. Touching someone else’s Sabzeh on Sizdah Bedar or bringing it home is considered to be unhealthy, and may invite other peoples’ pain and hardship to the person who brought it over.

Sizdeh Bedar gives Iranians a chance to participate a ceremony out in nature singing, dancing, performing many traditional activities, and enjoying the fresh smell of spring. One of the popular traditions of Sizdah Bedar is the knotting of blades of grass by the young unmarried girls in the hope to marry soon and expressing their wish and hope for good fortune in life and love. It has been documented that in the Iranian culture, the knotting of the grass represents love and the bond between a man and a woman.

The young girls weave together fresh herbs, singing as they do so in a low voice: "Next Sizdah-Bedar, I hope to be in my husband’s home, and as a lady holding a baby" (In Persian: Sizdah Bedar Saal-e Degar Khaaneh-ye Showhar Bacheh Beh Baghal).

While the young girls are singing and knotting the blades of grass, the young boys usually play traditional games and sports. Sizdah Bedar is also a day for competitive games. Games using horse are often chosen since this animal is also representing the Deity of Rain. Adults and older people may play the traditional game of backgammon.



During the picnic day of Sizdah Bedar, some people also follow the oldest prank-tradition in the world and play jokes on each other. This has possibly led many men and women to consider that the origin of the April Fools' Day goes back to the Iranian tradition of Sizdah Bedar. (In Western Culture, the April Fools' Day is mostly marked by the commission of hoaxes and other practical jokes of varying sophistication on friends, family members and neighbors, and the aim of which is to embarrass the gullible).

**Sizdah Bedar in Modern Persian Poetry:** The Persian text of a few poems on Sizdah Bedar composed by contemporary Iranian poets may be viewed on the [Chain of Poems on Sizdah Bedar](#) [3].

Here is the English version of a part of the poem of the Footsteps of Water composed by Sohrab Sepehri in which he refers to the myth of Sizdah Bedar as related to the Angel of Rain:

*"I washed my eyes, I see otherwise  
And I must wash the words:  
Words should be the mere sense of the wind,  
The true essence of the rain  
And we must close umbrellas,  
We must stay under the stroke of drops of rain  
And we must take, all together,  
The mind, the memory and the heart  
To the rite of descending water  
And we must make friends under this chaste shower,  
And may we look for love under the downpour of water,  
Yes, we must play the game of life in the rain": (Translated by Maryam Dilmaghani).*

**Epilogue:** Sizdah Bedar is a day to celebrate people's friendship with nature and it shows that the Iranians have attached to and have been fond of the natural beauties of the environment all throughout their glorious history.

Today, the feast of Sizdah Bedar is not only celebrated in Iran but its outdoor moments are joyfully spent in most parts of the world by many Iranians who left their beautiful lovely homeland behind and they now live abroad.

Enjoy every moments of Sizdah Bedar, have lots of fun, and share the joy of the day with close friends, trusted colleagues, and the most likable members of your family!

Happy Sizdah Bedar!

*Manouchehr Saadat Noury, PhD*

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