

Nowruz

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Nowrūz (Persian: نوروز, IPA: [nouˈɾuːz], originally "New Light") is the name of the Iranian New Year ^[5] in Iranian calendars and the corresponding traditional celebrations.^[6] Nowruz is also widely referred to as the *Persian New Year*.^{[7][8][9][10]}

Nowruz is celebrated and observed by Iranic peoples and the related cultural continent and has spread in many other parts of the world, including parts of Central Asia, Caucasus, South Asia, Northwestern China, the Crimea and some groups in the Balkans.

Nowruz marks the first day of spring and the beginning of the year in Iranian calendar. It is celebrated on the day of the astronomical vernal equinox, which usually occurs on March 21 or the previous/following day depending on where it is observed. As well as being a Zoroastrian holiday and having significance amongst the Zoroastrian ancestors of modern Iranians, the same time is celebrated in parts of the South Asian sub-continent as the new year. The moment the Sun crosses the celestial equator and equalizes night and day is calculated exactly every year and Iranian families gather together to observe the rituals.

Originally being a Zoroastrian festival, and the holiest of them all, Nowruz is believed to have been invented by Zoroaster himself, although there is no clear date of origin.^[11] Since the Achaemenid era the official year has begun with the New Day when the Sun leaves the zodiac of Pisces and enters the zodiacal sign of Aries, signifying the Spring Equinox.

The Jewish festival of Purim is probably adopted from the Persian New Year.^[12] It is also a holy day for Sufis, Ismailis, Alawites,^[13] Alevis, and adherents of the Bahá'í Faith.^[14]

The term Nowruz in writing, first appeared in Persian records in the 2nd century AD, but it was also an important day during the time of the Achaemenids c. 548-330 BC), where kings from different nations under the Persian empire used to bring gifts to the Emperor, also called King of Kings (Shahanshah), of Persia on

Nowrūza



Also called Also spelled Nouruz, Norouz, Norooz, Narooz, Nawruz, Newroz, Newruz, Nauruz, Nawroz, Noruz, Nohrooz, Novruz, Nauroz, Navroz, Naw-Rúz, Nowroj, Navroj, Nevruz, Наврӯз, Navruz, Navrez, Nooruz, Nauryz, Nevruz, Nowrouz, ნაგვრუზი (Georgian)

Observed by

Principally in:

-  Iran
-  Afghanistan
-  Albania
-  Uzbekistan
-  Kazakhstan
-  Azerbaijan
-  Tajikistan
-  Kurds in Syria ^[1]
-  Kurds^[2] and Alevis in Turkey
-  Kurds in Armenia^[3]
-  Georgia^[4]
-  Iraqi Kurdistan
-  Turkmenistan
-  Kyrgyzstan
-  Kosovo

ethnic & religious groups worldwide:Kurdish diaspora Zoroastrians, Some Sufis, Ismailis, Bahá'ís and the Iranian diaspora. Also observed in Bosnia, Caucasus,

Nowruz. The significance of Nowruz in the Achaemenid empire was such that the great Persian king Cambyses II's appointing as the king of Babylon was legitimized only after his participation in the New Year festival (Nowruz).^[15]

The UN's General Assembly in 2010 recognized the International Day of Nowruz, describing it a spring festival of Persian origin which has been celebrated for over 3,000 years.^{[16][17]} During the meeting of *The Inter-governmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage* of the United Nations, held between 28 September – 2 October 2009 in Abu Dhabi, Nowrūz was officially registered on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.^{[18][19][20][21]}

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Crimea, Georgia, India, Macedonia, Pakistan, Serbia, and among Uyghurs and Salars of China.

Significance	New year holiday
Date	March 20, 21 or 22
2010 date	Sunday, March 21, 2010 at 17:32 UTC *
2011 date	Monday, March 20, 2011 at 23:21 UTC *
2012 date	Wednesday, March 20, 2012 at 29:18 UTC *
Celebrations	The Haftsin setting, Chahārshanbe Sūrī, Sizdah Bedar, etc.

- 4.7 Nowruz in the Twelver Shi'a faith
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Etymology

The term *Nowruz* is a Persian compound-word and consists of:

- **now** (Old Persian *nava*) means "*new*" and has the following cognates, in English *new*, in Latin *novus*, German *neu*, Sanskrit *nava*, etc. The Persian pronunciation differs in the many dialects of the language: while the eastern dialects have preserved the original diphthong (IPA: [næuˈɾoːz]), the western dialects usually pronounce it with a different diphthong (IPA: [nouˈɾuːz]), and some colloquial variants (such as the Tehrani accent) pronounce it with a monophthong (IPA: [noˈɾuːz]).
- **rōz** (also with various pronuciations, such as *rūz*, *roz*, or *roj*) means "*day*" in Middle- and Modern Persian. The original meaning of the word, however, was "*light*". The term is derived from Avestan **rowch-*, itself derived from Proto-Indo-European **leuk-* (l <-> r and k <-> ch sound changes are common in Indo-European languages), and is related to Sanskrit *ruci*, Latin *lux* and, in fact, English *light*.

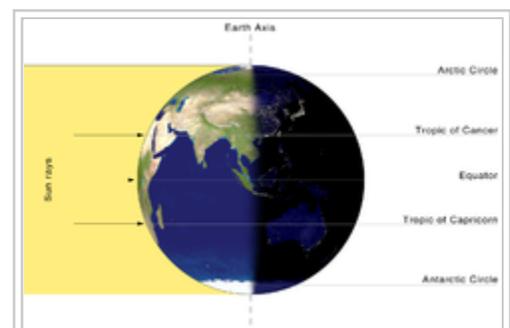
Nowruz and the spring equinox

Main article: Equinox

The first day on the Iranian calendar falls on the March equinox, the first day of spring. At the time of the equinox, the sun is observed to be directly over the equator, and the north and south poles of the Earth lie along the solar terminator; sunlight is evenly divided between the north and south hemispheres.

In ca. 11 century CE major reforms of Iranian calendars took place and whose principal purpose was to fix the beginning of the calendar year, i.e. Nowrūz, at the vernal equinox.

Accordingly, the definition of Nowruz given by the Iranian scientist Ṭūsī was the following: "the first day of the official new



Illumination of the Earth by the Sun on the day of equinox, (ignoring twilight).

year [Nowruz] was always the day on which the sun entered Aries before noon".^[22]

History and tradition

Tradition and mythology



Bas-relief in Persepolis. A Zoroastrian symbol of Nowruz - on the vernal equinox the powers of the eternally fighting bull (personifying the Earth) and lion (personifying the Sun) are equal.

The celebration has its roots in Ancient Iran. Due to its antiquity, there exist various foundation myths for Nowruz in Iranian mythology. In the Zoroastrian tradition, the seven most important Zoroastrian festivals are the six Gahanbars and Nowruz, which occurs at the spring equinox. According to Mary Boyce,^[23]

“ It seems a reasonable surmise that Nowruz, the holiest of them all, with deep doctrinal significance, was founded by Zoroaster himself. ”

Between sunset of the day of the 6th Gahanbar and sunrise of Nowruz was celebrated Hamaspathmaedaya (later known, in its extended form, as Frawardinegan). This and the Gahanbar are the only festivals named in the surviving text of the Avesta.

The Shahnameh, dates Nowruz as far back to the reign of Jamshid, who in Zoroastrian texts saved mankind from a killer winter that was destined to kill every living creature.^[24] The mythical Persian King Jamshid (Yima or Yama of the Indo-Iranian lore) perhaps symbolizes the transition of the Indo-Iranians from animal hunting to animal husbandry and a more settled life in human history. In the Shahnameh and Iranian mythology, he is credited with the foundation of Nowruz. In the Shahnama, Jamshid constructed a throne studded with gems. He had demons raise him above the earth into the heavens; there he sat on his throne like the sun shining in the sky. The world's creatures gathered in wonder about him and scattered jewels around him, and called this day the New Day or No/Now-Ruz. This was the first day of the month of Farvardin (the first month of the Persian calendar).^[25]

The Persian scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni of the 10th century AD, in his Persian work "Kitab al-Tafhim li Awa'il Sina'at al-Tanjim" provides a description of the calendar of various nations. Besides the Persian calendar, various festivals of Arabs, Jews, Sabians, Greeks and other nations are mentioned in this book. In the section on the Persian calendar(تقویم پارسیان), he mentions Nowruz, Sadeh, Tiregan, Mehregan, the six Gahanbar, Parvardegaan, Bahmanja, Isfandarmazh and several other festivals. According to him: *It is the belief of the Persians that Nowruz marks the first day when the universe started its motion.*^[26] The Persian historian Abu Sa'īd Gardēzi^[27] in his work titled *Zayn al-Akhhbār* under the section of the Zoroastrians festivals mentions Nowruz (among other festivals) and specifically points out that Zoroaster highly emphasized the celebration of Nowruz and Mehregan.^[28]

History

Although it is not clear whether proto-Indo-Iranians celebrated a feast as the first day of the calendar, there

are indications that both Iranians and Indians assumed the first day of autumn as the beginning of new year season. There are reasons that Iranians may have observed the beginning both autumn and spring.^[30]

Boyce and Grenet explain the traditions for seasonal festivals and comment: "It is possible that the splendor of the Babylonian festivities at this season led the Persians to develop their own spring festival into an established new year feast, with the name Navasarda 'New Year' (a name which, though first attested through Middle Persian derivatives, is attributed to the Achaemenian period). Since the communal observations of the ancient Iranians appear in general to have been a seasonal ones, it is probable, however, that they traditionally held festivals in both autumn and spring, to mark the major turning points of the natural year".^[30]



Persepolis (Persian: تخت جمشید meaning the throne of Jamshid) all nations stair case. Notice the people from across the Achaemenid Persian Empire bringing gifts. Some scholars have associated the occasion to be either Mehregan or Nowruz.^[29]

We have reasons to believe that the celebration is much older than that date and was surely celebrated by the people and royalty during the Achaemenid times (555-330 BC). It was, therefore, a highly auspicious occasion for the ancient Iranian peoples. It has been suggested that the famous Persepolis complex, or at least the palace of Apadana and the Hundred Columns Hall, were built for the specific purpose of celebrating Nowruz. Although, there may be no mention of Nowruz in recorded Achaemenid inscriptions (see picture)^[31] There is a detailed account by Xenophon of Nowruz celebration taking place in Persepolis and the continuity of this festival in the Achaemenid tradition.^[32] According to Britannica, the Jewish festival of Purim, is probably adopted from the Persian New Year.^[12]

Nowruz was the holiday of Arsacid/Parthian dynastic Empires who ruled Iran (248 BC-224 AD). There are specific references to the celebration of Nowruz during the reign of Vologases I (51-78 AD), but these include no details.^[31] Before Sassanids established their power in West Asia around 300 AD, Parthians celebrated Nowruz in Autumn and 1st of Farvardin began at the Autumn Equinox. During Parthian dynasty the Spring Festival was Mehregan, a Zoroastrian and Iranian festival celebrated in honor of Mithra.^[33]

Extensive records on the celebration of Nowruz appear following the accession of Ardashir I of Persia, the founder of the Sassanid dynasty (224-651 AD). Under the Sassanid Emperors, Nowruz was celebrated as the most important day of the year. Most royal traditions of Nowruz such as royal audiences with the public, cash gifts, and the pardoning of prisoners, were established during the Sassanian era and persisted unchanged until modern times.

Nowruz, along with Sadeh (celebrated in mid-winter), survived in society following the introduction of Islam in 650 AD. Other celebrations such Gahanbar and Mehregan were eventually side-lined or were only followed by the Zoroastrians, who carried them. There are records of the Four Great Caliphs presiding over Nowruz celebrations, and it was adopted as the main royal holiday during the Abbasid period.

In his work titled the Nowruznama, Omar Khayyam, a well known Persian poet and Mathematician provides a vivid description of the celebration in the courts of the Kings of Persia.^[34]

“ From the era of Kai Khusraw till the days of Yazdegard, last of the pre-Islamic kings of Persia, the royal custom was thus: on the first day of the New Year, Now Ruz, the King's first visitor was the High Mobad of the Zoroastrians, who brought with him as gifts a golden goblet full of wine, a ring, some gold coins, a fistful of green sprigs of wheat, a sword, and a bow. In the language of Persia he would then glorify God and praise the monarch. This was the address of the High Mobad to the king : "O Majesty, on this feast of the Equinox, first day of the first month of the year, seeing that thou hast freely chosen God and the Faith of the Ancient ones; may Surush, the Angel-messenger, grant thee wisdom and insight and sagacity in thy affairs. Live long in praise, be happy and fortunate upon thy golden throne, drink immortality from the Cup of Jamshid; and keep in solemn trust the customs of our ancestors, their noble aspirations, fair gestures and the exercise of justice and righteousness. May thy soul flourish; may thy youth be as the new-grown grain; may thy horse be puissant, victorious; thy sword bright and deadly against foes; thy hawk swift against its prey; thy every act straight as the arrow's shaft. Go forth from thy rich throne, conquer new lands. Honor the craftsman and the sage in equal degree; disdain the acquisition of wealth. May thy house prosper and thy life be long!" ”

Following the demise of the Caliphate and the subsequent re-emergence of Persian dynasties such as the Samanids and Buyids, Nowruz was elevated to an even more important event. The Buyids revived the ancient traditions of Sassanian times and restored many smaller celebrations that had been eliminated by the Caliphate. According to the Syrian historian Yaqut al-Hamawi, the Iranian 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.^[35] The King would sit on the royal throne (masnad), and the court astronomer came forward, kissed the ground, and congratulated him on the arrival of the New Year.^[35] The king would then summon musicians and singers, and invited his boon companions. They would gather in their assigned places and enjoy a great festive occasion.^[35]

Even the Turkic and Mongol invaders did not attempt to abolish Nowruz in favor of any other celebration. Thus, Nowruz remained as the main celebration in the Persian lands by both the officials and the people.

Local variations

Today, the festival of Nowruz is celebrated in many countries that were territories of, or influenced by, the Persian Empire: Iran, Various Iranian Peoples including Kurds, Afghanistan, parts of the Middle East, as well as in the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It is also celebrated by the Zoroastrians as well by certain Iranic inhabitants in Pakistan's Chitral region and Northern Areas. It is also celebrated by the Iranian immigrants from Shiraz in Zanzibar.^[36] it is called *Nevruz* in Turkic, Uyghurs who live in Northwestern China call it "Noruz", and it is called *Sultan Nevruz* in Albanian. In Kurdish communities located in parts of western Iran, the holiday is referred to as *Newroz*, which is a variant of the Persian word Nowruz.^[37]



Kurds celebrating. Fire is the symbol of Nowruz

Nowruz around the world

Nowruz is celebrated in Greater Iran, Caucasus, Central Asia and by Iranians worldwide. It is a public holiday in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan,^[38] Iraqi Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan,^[39] Uzbekistan,^[40] Kashmir,^[41] and Kyrgyzstan.^[42] Also the Canadian parliament by unanimous consent, has passed a bill to add Nowruz to the national calendar of Canada, on March 30, 2009.^{[43][44]}

In Albania *Sultan Nevruz* is celebrated as a mainly mystical day by the Bektashi sect, and there are special ceremonies in the Tekke led by the clergy and large meals are served there. They celebrate this day as the birthday of Ali. Also all Albanians celebrate a secular version of Nowruz, called Spring Day. Nowruz is also celebrated by Kurds in Iraq^[45] and Turkey^[46] as well as by Parsis in the Indian subcontinent.

Other notable celebrations take place by Iranians around the world, such as Los Angeles, Toronto, Cologne and in United Kingdom, mainly in London.^[47] But because Los Angeles is prone to devastating fires, there are very strict fire codes in the city. No fires are allowed even on one's own property. Usually, Iranians living in Southern California go to the beaches to celebrate the event where it is permissible to build fires.^[48] On 15 March 2010, The United States House of Representatives passed *The Nowruz Resolution* (H.Res. 267), by a 384-2 vote,^[49] "Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Nowruz, ...".^[50]

In Iran, the Islamic Regime attempted to suppress Nowruz following the Iranian Revolution and was met with very little success. The Ayatollahs considered Nowruz a pagan holiday and a distraction from more important things such as Islamic holidays.^[51]

In Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban, Nowruz was banned and considered an "ancient pagan holiday centered on fire worship" but until 2001 it came back and now it is as popular as it was before the extremist Taliban.^[52]

It is also a holy day for Alawites,^[13] Alevis, and adherents of the Bahá'í Faith.^[14]

Countries that have Nowruz as a public holiday

-  Afghanistan (20 March to 23 March)^[53]
-  Albania (20 March to 23 March, total of 4 days)^[54]
-  Azerbaijan (20 March to 26 March, total of 7 days)^[55]
-  Azeris in Georgia (country), Georgia^[4]
-  Iran (20 March to 23 March, total of 4 days in general + total of 13 days for schools and universities)^[56]
-  (regional only in  Iraqi Kurdistan) (21 March)^[57]
-  Kazakhstan (21 March to 24 March, total of 4 days)^[58]
-  Kosovo) (21 March)
-  Kyrgyzstan (21 March)^[59]
-  Tajikistan (20 March to 23 March, total of 4 days)^[60]
-  Turkmenistan (20 March to 23 March, total of 4 days)^[61]



New York City Iranian Azeris

-  Uzbekistan (21 March)^[62]

Nowruz celebration in Iran

Nowruz is the most important holiday in Iran. Preparations for Nowruz begin in the month Esfand (or Espan), the last month of winter in the Persian solar calendar.

Spring cleaning and visiting one another

Further information: Spring cleaning

Spring cleaning, or *Khouneh Tekouni* (literally means 'shaking the house') or 'complete cleaning of the house' is commonly performed before Nowruz. Persians (Iranians, Afghans and Tajiks) and other Indo-Iranian groups (Kurds, Azarbaijanis and Balochs) start preparing for the Nowruz with a major spring-cleaning of their houses, the purchase of new clothes to wear for the new year and the purchase of flowers (in particular the hyacinth and the tulip are popular and conspicuous).

In association with the "rebirth of nature", extensive spring-cleaning is a national tradition observed by almost every household in Iran. This is also extended to personal attire, and it is customary to buy at least one set of new clothes. On the New Year's Day, families dress in their new clothes and start the twelve-day celebrations by visiting the elders of their family, then the rest of their family and finally their friends. On the thirteenth day families leave their homes and picnic outdoors.

During the Nowruz holidays, people are expected to visit one another (mostly limited to families, friends and neighbors) in the form of short house visits, which are usually reciprocated. Typically, on the first day of Nowruz, family members gather around the table, with the *Haft Seen* on the table or set next to it, and await the exact moment of the arrival of the spring. At that time gifts are exchanged. Later in the day, the first house visits are paid to the most senior family members. Typically, the youth will visit the elders first, and the elders return their visit later. When in previous year, a family member is deceased, the tradition is to visit that family first (among the elders). The visits naturally have to be relatively short, otherwise one will not be able to visit everybody on their list. A typical visit is around 30 minutes, where you often run into other visiting relatives and friends who happen to be paying a visit to the same house at that time. Because of the house visits, you make sure you have a sufficient supply of pastry, cookies, fresh and dried fruits and special nuts on hand, as you typically serve your visitors with these items with tea or sherbet. Many Iranians will throw large Nowruz parties in a central location as a way of dealing with the long distances between groups of friends and family.

Some Nowruz celebrants believe that whatever a person does on Nowruz will affect the rest of the year. So, if a person is warm and kind to their relatives, friends and neighbors on Nowruz, then the new year will be a good one. On the other hand, if there are fights and disagreements, the year will be a bad one. As an extended tradition to the holiday, men may or may not choose to shave their faces until the night of the "New Day" as a sign of removal of old habits and tendencies and the rebirth of their faith and being.

One tradition that may not be very widespread (that is, it may belong to only a few families)^[citation needed] is to place something sweet, such as honey or candy, in a safe place outside overnight. On the first morning



A Haft sin table in Tehran.

of the new year, the first person up brings the sweet stuff into the house as another means of attaining a good new year.

Chahārshanbe Sūrī

Main article: Chaharshanbe Suri

The night before the last Wednesday of the year is celebrated by the Iranian people as *Chahārshanbe Sūrī* (Persian: چهارشنبه سوری *Sour* means feast, party or festival in *Persian*,^[63] Azerbaijani: *Od çərşənbəsi*, Kurdish: *Çarşema Sor*^{[64][65]} چوارشەمه سوورێ (meaning *Wednesday Festival*) in Persian,^[63] the Iranian festival of fire. This festival is the celebration of the light (the good) winning over the darkness (the bad); the symbolism behind the rituals are all rooted back to Zoroastrianism.

The tradition includes people going into the streets and alleys to make bonfires, and jump over them while singing the traditional song *Zardī-ye man az (ane) to, sorkhī-ye to az (ane) man* ("az-ane to" means belongs to you); This literally translates to "My yellowness is yours, your redness is mine," with the figurative message "My paleness (pain, sickness) for you (the fire), your strength (health) for me." The fire is believed to burn out all the fear (yellowness) in their subconscious or their spirit, in preparation for new year.

Serving different kinds of pastry and nuts known as **Ajil-e Moshkel-Goshā** (lit. *problem-solving nuts*) is the *Chahārshanbe Sūrī* way of giving thanks for the previous year's health and happiness, while exchanging any remaining paleness and evil for the warmth and vibrancy of the fire.

According to tradition, the living are visited by the spirit of their ancestors on the last days of the year, and many children wrap themselves in shrouds, symbolically re-enacting the visits. They also run through the streets banging on pots and pans with spoons and knocking on doors to ask for treats. The ritual is called *qashogh-zany* (spoon beating) and symbolizes the beating out of the last unlucky Wednesday of the year (See also Trick-or-treating).

There are several other traditions on this night, including: the rituals of *Kūze Shekastan*, the breaking of earthen jars which symbolically hold one's bad fortune; the ritual of *Fal-Gūsh* (lit.Divination by ear), or inferring one's future from the conversations of those passing by;^[66] and the ritual of *Gereh-goshā'ī*, making a knot in the corner of a handkerchief or garment and asking the first passerby to unravel it in order to remove ones misfortune.

Haft Sīn

Main article: Haft-Sin

Haft Sīn (Persian: هفت سین) or **the seven 'S's** is a major traditional table setting of Nowruz, the traditional Iranian spring celebration. Today The haft sin table includes seven specific items starting with the letter 'S'



Chehel Sotoun's Wall painting, that dates back to the Safavid era, depicts a Chaharshanbe Suri celebration.

or *Sīn* (س) in the Persian alphabet. The items symbolically correspond to seven creations and holy immortals called Amesha Sepanta protecting them. The seven elements of Life, namely Fire, Earth, Water, Air, Plants, Animals, and Human, are represented. They also have Astrological correlations to five planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Sun and Moon. With the advent of Islam the word Amesha Sepanta shortened to and eventually was remembered by just the letter S and the number 7. The *Haft Sin* has evolved over time, but has kept its symbolism. Traditionally, families attempt to set as beautiful a *Haft Sīn* table as they can, as it is not only of traditional and spiritual value, but also noticed by visitors during Nowruzi visitations and is a reflection of their good taste.

The *Haft Sīn* items are:

- *sabzeh* - wheat, barley or lentil sprouts growing in a dish - symbolizing rebirth
- *samanu* - a sweet pudding made from wheat germ - symbolizing affluence
- *senjed* - the dried fruit of the oleaster tree - symbolizing love
- *sīr* - garlic - symbolizing medicine
- *sīb* - apples - symbolizing beauty and health
- *somaq* - sumac berries - symbolizing (the color of) sunrise
- *serkeh* - vinegar - symbolizing age and patience.



Haft-Sin

Other items on the table may include:

- *Sonbol* - Hyacinth (plant)
- *Sekkeh* - Coins - representative of wealth
- traditional Iranian pastries such as baghlava, toot, naan-nokhodchi
- *Aajeel* - dried nuts, berries and raisins
- lit candles (enlightenment and happiness)
- a mirror (symbolizing cleanness and honesty)
- decorated eggs, sometimes one for each member of the family (fertility)
- a bowl of water with goldfish (life within life, and the sign of Pisces which the sun is leaving). As an essential object of the Nowruz table, this goldfish is also "very ancient and meaningful" and with Zoroastrian connection.^[67]
- rosewater, believed to have magical cleansing powers
- the national colours, for a patriotic touch
- a holy book (e.g., the Avesta, Qur'an, Bible, Torah, or Kitáb-i-Aqdas) and/or a poetry book (almost always either the Shahnameh or the Divan of Hafez)

Haji Firouz

Main article: Haji frouz

The traditional herald of the Nowruz season is a man called Hājī Fīrūz (or Khwāja Pīrūz). He symbolizes the rebirth of the Sumerian god of sacrifice, Domuzi, who was killed at the end of each year and reborn at the beginning of the New Year.

He usually uses face paint to make his skin black (black is an ancient Persian symbol of good luck) and wears a red costume. Then he sings and dances through the streets with tambourines and trumpets spreading good cheer and heralds the coming of the New Year.

New Year dishes

- *Sabzi Polo Mahi*: The New Year's Day traditional meal is called Sabzi Polo Mahi, which is rice with green herbs served with fish. The traditional seasoning for Sabzi Polo are parsley, coriander, chives, dill and fenugreek.
- *Reshteh Polo*: rice cooked with noodles which is said to symbolically help one succeed in life.
- *Dolme Barg* : A traditional dish of Azeri people, cooked just before the new year. It includes some vegetables, meat and rice which have been cooked and embedded in grape leaves and cooked again. It is considered useful in reaching to wishes.
- *Kookoo sabzi* : Herbs and vegetable souffle, traditionally served for dinner at New Year. A light and fluffy omelet style made from parsley, dill, coriander, spinach, spring onion ends, and chives, mixed with eggs and walnut.



Haji Firuz in Tehran

Sizdah Bedar

Main article: Sizdah Bedar

The thirteenth day of the new year festival is Sizdah Bedar (literally meaning "passing the thirteenth day", figuratively meaning "Passing the bad luck of the thirteenth day"). This is a day of festivity in the open, often accompanied by music and dancing, usually at family picnics.

Sizdah bedar celebrations stem from the ancient Persians' belief that the twelve constellations in the Zodiac controlled the months of the year, and each ruled the earth for a thousand years at the end of which the sky and earth collapsed in chaos. Hence Nowruz lasts twelve days and the thirteenth day represents the time of chaos when families put order aside and avoid the bad luck associated with the number thirteen by going outdoors and having picnics and parties.

At the end of the celebrations on this day, the *sabzeh* grown for the *Haft Seen* (which has symbolically collected all sickness and bad luck) is thrown into running water to exorcise the demons (*divs*) from the household. It is also customary for young single women to tie the leaves of the *sabzeh* before discarding it, so expressing a wish to be married before the next year's *Sizdah Bedar*. Another tradition associated with this day is *Dorugh-e Sizdah*, literally meaning "the lie of the thirteenth", which is the process of lying to someone and making them believe it (similar to April Fools Day).

Nowruz in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Nowroz is officially recognized as a "National festival"^[68] and high-ranking officials (including Vice President, Ministers, and Provincial Governors) participate in its celebration. The first two days of the Persian New Year are official holidays in Afghanistan. It is traditionally celebrated for 2 weeks

among the people. Preparations for Nowruz 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 as following:

- **Guli Surkh festival** (Persian: میله‌ی گل سرخ): The Guli Surkh festival which literally means *Red Flower Festival* (referring to the red Tulip flowers) is the principal festival for Nowruz. It is celebrated in Mazari Sharif during the first 40 days of the year when the Tulip flowers grow in the green plains and over the hills surrounding the city. Mazari Sharif is basically the center of Nawroz celebrations in Afghanistan. People from all over the country travel to Mazari Sharif to attend the Nawroz festivals. Various activities and customs are performed during the Guli Surkh festival, including the Jahenda Bala event and Buzkashi games.
- **Jahenda Bālā** (Persian: جهنده بالا): Jaheda Bala is celebrated on the first day of the New Year (i.e. Nawroz), and is attended by high-ranking government officials such as the Vice-President, Ministers, and Provincial Governors. It is a specific religious ceremony performed in the 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. This is the biggest recorded Nowruz gathering where up to 200,000 people from all over Afghanistan get together in Mazar central park around blue mosque to celebrate the banner raising (*Jahenda Bālā*) ceremony.
- **Buzkashi**: Along with other customs and celebrations, normally a Buzkashi tournament is held during the Guli Surkh festival in Mazaris Sharif, Kabul and other northern cities of Afghanistan.
- **Haft Mēwa** (Persian: هفت میوه): In Afghanistan, people prepare *Haft Mēwa* (literally translates as *Seven Fruits*) instead of *Haft Sin* which is common in Iran. Haft Mewa is like a Fruit salad made from 7 different Dried fruits, served in their own syrup. The 7 dried fruits are: Raisin, *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, and is normally cooked or prepared on the eve of Nawroz or a few days before the Nawroz. 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 mā Kafcha zanem - Degarān dar Khwāb o mā Dafcha zanem*
- **Special cuisines**: People cook special types of dishes for Nowruz, especially on the eve of Nowroz. 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 Nowrozī*, which is only baked for Nowroz. Another dish which is prepared mostly for the Nowroz days is *Māhī wa Jelabī* (*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 fiancé's family give presents to or prepare special dishes for the fiancée's family on special occasions such as in the two Eids, Barā'at and in Nowroz. Hence, the special dish for Nowroz is *Māhī wa Jelabī*.
- **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.
- **Jashn-e Dehqān**: Jashn-e Dehqan means *The Festival of Farmers*. It is celebrated in the first day



Cooking samanu (or *samanak*) is a Nowruz tradition in Afghanistan and Tajikistan

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.

- **Kampirak:** Like "Haji Nowruz" in Iran, he is an old bearded man wearing colorful clothes with a long hat and rosary who symbolizes beneficence and the power of nature yielding the forces of winter. He and his retinue pass village by village distributing gathered charities among people and do his shows like reciting poems. The tradition is observed in central provinces specially Bamyan and Daykundi.^[69]

Newroz celebration by Kurds

Main article: Newroz as celebrated by Kurds

Although the Kurds celebrate Nowruz, it was not however until 2005 that Kurdish population of Turkey could celebrate their new year openly.^[70] "Thousands of people have been detained in Turkey, as the authorities take action against suspected supporters of the Kurdish rebel movement, the PKK.^[71] The holiday is now official in Turkey after international pressure on the Turkish government to lift culture bans. Turkish government renamed the holiday *Nevroz* in 1995, and reclaimed it as a *Turkish* holiday.^[72]

The word 'Newroz' is Kurdish for 'Nowruz'. The Kurds celebrate this feast between 18th till 21 March. It is one of the few 'people's celebrations' that has survived and predates all the major religious festivals. The holiday is considered by Kurds to be the single most important holiday of every year.

With this festival Kurds gather into the fairgrounds mostly outside the cities to welcome spring. Women wear colored 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.^[73]

The main Kurdish greeting that accompanies the festival is *Newroz pîroz be!* literally translating to "Congratulations on the New Year" or equivalent to *Happy Newroz!*. Another greeting used is, *Bijî Newroz!*, simply meaning *Long live Newroz!*

Newroz is still largely considered as a potent symbol of Kurdish identity in Turkey. Newroz celebrations are usually organised by Kurdish cultural associations and pro-Kurdish political parties. Thus, the Democratic Society Party was a leading force in the organisation of the 2006 Newroz events throughout Turkey. In recent years the Newroz celebration gathers around 1 million participants in Diyarbakır, the biggest city of the Kurdish dominated Southeastern Turkey. As the Kurdish Newroz celebrations in Turkey often are theater for political messages, the events are frequently criticized for being political rallies rather than cultural celebrations.

In other largely populated Kurdish regions in the Middle East including Iraq and Syria, similar celebrations



"Churshama Kulla" is the tradition where people jump over the fire. It is celebrated as a national emblem in Kurdistan. In this Picture Kurds in Istanbul celebrate Newroz through coming together and showing their cultural unity.

are carried out with fire, dancing and music. In Iran, it is the most important festival of the whole year.

In Kurdistan, jumping over the fire (known as Chuwarshama Kulla) happens on New Year's Eve (rather the last Tuesday of the year).

Novruz in Azerbaijan

Main article: Novruz in Azerbaijan

Usually preparation for Novruz begins a month prior to the festival. Each of forthcoming 4 weeks is devoted to one of the four elements and called accordingly in Azerbaijan. Each Tuesday people celebrate the day of one of the four elements - water, fire, earth and wind.^[74] People do house cleaning, plant trees, make new dresses, paint eggs, make national pastries such as shakarbura, pakhlava and a great variety of "national cuisine".^[75] Wheat is fried with kishmish (raisins) and nuts (govurga). As a tribute to fire-worshipping every Tuesday during four weeks before the holiday kids jump over small bonfires and candles are lit. On the holiday eve the graves of relatives are visited and tended.^[76]

Novruz is a family holiday. In the evening before the holiday the whole family gathers around the holiday table laid with various dishes to make the New Year rich. The holiday goes on for several days and ends with festive public dancing and other entertainment of folk bands, contests of national sports. In rural areas crop holidays are marked.^[77]

The decoration of the festive table is khoncha, a big silver or copper tray with Samani placed in the centre and candles and dyed eggs by the number of family members around it. The table should be set, at least, with seven dishes.^[74]

On the last Tuesday prior to Novruz, according to old traditions children slip around to their neighbours' homes and apartments, knock at their doors, and leave their caps or little basket on the thresholds all the while hiding nearby waiting for candies, pastries and nuts.^[74]

Nowruz in the Zoroastrian faith

Zoroastrians worldwide celebrate Nowruz as the first day of the New Year. Parsi Zoroastrians of South Asian origin celebrate it as "Nowroj", "Navroz", or "Navroj" on the fixed day of March 21, while Zoroastrians of Iranian background generally celebrate, like other Iranians, on the actual Spring Equinox date. Because different Zoroastrian communities in India/Pakistan and Iran have evolved slightly different calendar systems, there is some variance. Adherents of the *Fasli* variant of the Zoroastrian calendar celebrate Nowruz in March, but today, most other Zoroastrians also celebrate on this day.

Other variants of the Zoroastrian calendar celebrate the Nowruz twice: once as *Jamshedi Nowruz* on March 21 as the start of spring, and a second Nowruz, in July/August (see Variations of the Zoroastrian calendar), as either New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. That the second Nowruz is celebrated after the last day of the year, known as Pateti, which comes after a Muktaad period of days remembering the dead. Many Parsis are confused by this, and mistakenly celebrate Pateti as if it were Nowruz, when in fact Nowruz is the day



Azerbaijani youth celebrating Novruz.

after. Some attribute this confusion by some as celebrating the last day of the year (contrary to what might be expected from a term that means "new day"), may be due to the fact that in ancient Persia the day began at sunset, while in later Persian belief the day began at sunrise.

Zoroastrians of Iranian origin generally put up a Haft Sin table as do other Iranians. Zoroastrians of Parsi (South Asian) origin do not traditionally use a Haft Sin. They set up a standard "sesh" tray- generally a silver tray, with a container of rose water, a container with betel nut, raw rice, raw sugar, flowers, a picture of Zarathustra the prophet, and either a floating wick in a glass filled with water topped with oil for fuel, or an "afargania", a silver urn with a small fire nourished by sandalwood and other fragrant resins.

Nowruz in the Twelver Shi'a faith

Along with Ismailis,^[78] Alawites and Alevites, the Twelver Shi'a also hold the day of Nowruz in high regard. The day upon which Nowruz falls has been recommended as a day of fasting for Twelver Shi'a Muslims by Shi'a scholars, including Abul-Qassim al-Khoei, Imam Khomeini^[79] and Ali al-Sistani.^[80] The day also assumes special significance for Shias as it was on 21 March 656 AD when the first Imam Hazrat Ali assumed the office of Caliphate.

Naw-Rúz in the Bahá'í Faith

Main article: Bahá'í Naw-Rúz

Naw-Rúz in the Bahá'í Faith is one of nine holy days for adherents of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide and the first day of the Bahá'í calendar occurring on the vernal equinox, around March 21.^[81] The Bahá'í calendar is composed of 19 months, each of 19 days,^[82] and each of the months is named after an attribute of God; similarly each of the nineteen days in the month also are named after an attribute of God.^[82] The first day and the first month were given the attribute of Bahá, an Arabic word meaning splendour or glory, and thus the first day of the year was the day of Bahá in the month of Bahá.^{[81][83]} Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, explained that Naw-Rúz was associated with the *Most Great Name* of God,^{[81][83]} and was instituted as a festival for those who observed the Nineteen day fast.^{[84][85]}

The day is also used to symbolize the renewal of time in each religious dispensation.^[86] Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son and successor, explained that significance of Naw-Rúz in terms of spring and the new life it brings.^[81] He explained that the equinox is a symbol of the messengers of God and the message that they proclaim is like a spiritual springtime, and that Naw-Rúz is used to commemorate it.^[87]

As with all Bahá'í holy days, there are few fixed rules for observing Naw-Rúz, and Bahá'ís all over the world celebrate it as a festive day, according to local custom.^[81] Persian Bahá'ís still observe many of the Iranian customs associated with Nowruz such as the Haft Sîn, but American Bahá'í communities, for example, may have a potluck dinner, along with prayers and readings from Bahá'í scripture.

Navroz celebration by Parsis

In the *Fasli/Bastani* variant of the Zoroastrian calendar, Navroz is always the day of the vernal equinox (nominally falling on March 21). In the *Shahenshahi* and *Kadmi* calendars, which do not account for leap years, the New Year's Day has drifted ahead by over 200 days. These latter two variants of the calendar,

which are only followed by the Zoroastrians of India, celebrate the spring equinox as *Jamshed-i Nouroz*, with New Year's Day then being celebrated in July–August as Pateti "(day) of penitence" (from *patet* "confession," hence also repentance and penitence).

Navroz celebration by Kashmiri Pandits

The Kashmiri Pandits celebrate Navroz (or Navreh in Kashmiri) on a date around the vernal equinox. The date, which usually falls between mid-March and mid-April, is determined by the Hindu lunar calendar every year. The day of the vernal equinox (coinciding with the Iranian Nowruz) is also celebrated by the Kashmiri Pandits in the same manner as the lunar Navroz and is referred to as *Sonth*.

Thal Bharun (meaning 'filling the platter') is a major Kashmiri Pandit Navroz tradition. It is similar to the Iranian Haft Sin. The items placed on the tray or platter generally include wheat or rice , a sweet pudding made from milk and cereal, fruits, walnuts, rosewater, a coin (*sikkeh*), a pen, an ink-holder, a mirror (for introspection, purity of thought and honesty), and a lit diya or clay lamp (representing *satyaprakasa*, the Light of the Truth). Besides, new clothes are worn and presents are exchanged. Some adults, particularly women, fast on this day.

Novruz celebration in China

Traditionally, "Nawriz" was celebrated mainly in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by the Uyghur, Chinese Tajik, Salar, and Kazakh ethnicities.

UN recognition

The UN's General Assembly in 2010 recognized March 21 as the International Day of Nowruz, describing it a spring festival of Persian origin which has been celebrated for over 3,000 years and calling on world countries to draw on the holiday's rich history to promote peace and goodwill. During the meeting of The Inter-governmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage of the United Nations, held between 28 September – 2 October 2009 in Abu Dhabi, Nowrūz was officially registered on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In response to the UN recognition, Iran unveiled a postage stamp. The stamp was made public in the presence of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the first International Nowruz Celebrations in Tehran on Saturday, 27 March 2010. President Ahmadinejad also called for joint efforts to further acquaint the world about the meaningful holiday, adding that it could significantly promote global peace and justice: “Observing Nowruz will not only promote cultural values, but it will also help nations establish relations based on friendship, peace, justice and respect.”^[89]



Salar people in China celebrating Nowruz^[88]

Spelling variations in English

A variety of spelling variations for the word "nowruz" exist in English-language usage. Random House (unabridged) provides the spelling "nowruz".^[90] Merriam-Webster (2006) recognizes only the spelling

"nauruz" (and a contestant in the final session of the 2006 Scripps National Spelling Bee, Allion Salvador, in the United States was disqualified on that basis^{[91][92]}). In the USA, many respected figures in the field of language such as Dr. Yarshater at Columbia University have suggested to use *Nowruz*^[*citation needed*].

See also

- Iranian calendar
- Iranian festivals
- Sham el-Nessim
- Kha b-Nisan
- Assyrian new year
- Earth Day
- New Year's Day
- Nowruz Eve among Mazandarani people
- Public holidays in Iran

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