



# Nowruz, the Iranian New Year

The Persian New Year is celebrated at the spring equinox around March 21st. Due to the astrological aspects of the Iranian calendar, the exact time of the New year changes from year to year. The celebration of norouz beings from Chahar Shanbeh Sori (a fire festival celebrated on the last Tuesday evening before Norouz) and ends with the Sizdah Norouz ceremony, thirteen days after New Year's day.

Norouz is a time of celebration, marking the yearly cycle of the seasons also represented by the ideas of birth and growth. It is probably the most joyous and significant of all the Iranian festivities found throughout the year, and more universally celebrated than any other festivity.

ChaharShanbehSori (fire festival) In ancient times Chahar Shanbeh Sori was celebrated immediately before the Hamsaptamdad feast which was performed on the 30th day of the year. People believed that the souls of their ancestors would come back to earth under the cover of darkness, to visit them on this special night. To help guide the souls to earth, the people

would start a number of small fires on their rooftops or in their yard. Each fire was started with a taper lit from the main fire in their homes.

At the beginning of Arab invasion, the celebration of Chahar Shanbeh Sori became more like a political revolt against the invaders. However, this festival eventually lost its meaning of revolt and is now performed on the night before the last Wednesday of each year.

For Chahar Shanbeh Sori celebrations, dried tumbleweed bushes were collected. The number of tumbleweed bushes to be lined up and set alight was significant. There should either be seven according to the seven blessed angels (Ordibehesht, Khordad, Amordad, Shahrivar, Bahman, Sepandarmaz and Ahura Mazda); or three according to three important phrases: «Good words, Good deeds and Good thoughts»; or one representing the oneness of God.

Today, throughout Iran, families continue to light tumbleweed bush fire and will jump over them reciting a saying «My yellowness to you, and your redness to me». In this saying, yellow signifies weakness and illness, while red signifies health.

At the time of the Sassanian dynasty, fire was considered very sacred and jumping over any fire was thought to be a profanity. Therefore, the people would

celebrate and be merry around the fire, but would refrain from jumping over it.

## Preparations for norouz

Following the belief that Norouz was a new beginning, preparations for the Norouz ceremonies include houses undergoing a spring-clean, and new clothes bought for each member of the family. These new clothes are worn on New Years Day.

## Miz-e- Norouzi (New Year Table)

In all the Iranian traditions for any feast or religious ritual, a cloth is laid over a table. Traditionally, the best woven cloth available in the house is used as a table cover. In most cases, a cloth called Termeh (brocaded silk), is used. This cloth has to be laid over a table or any surface that is higher than the ground, called «Mizad». Today this word has changed to «Miz», meaning table.

Every attempt is made to make the Norouz table as colorful as possible as it is the most important celebration of the year. At one time, Norouz was also the holiest day of the year. Traditionally, each family would use their best ornaments and dishes to adorn the table.

Items such as a holy book, fire burner, seasonal and dried fruits, and sugared candies are arranged on the table. Each item used has a special significance. The holy numbers of three, seven and twelve are kept in mind when laying the table.

Eating is considered an important part of any celebration. A person designated to distribute the food, is called «Mizad Pan». Today, the word «Mizad Pan» has become «Mizban» meaning host.

### SHAft Seen

(seven things beginning with «seen, the fourteenth letter of Persian alphabet)

During the Sassanian dynasty, very decorative and painted porcelain dishes were brought from china. These expensive dishes were called «Chinee».

In Iran to distinguish between different dishes coming from china, those that were made of metal were called «seeni» and those that were made of kaolin were called «chinee» were.

These dishes were used on the Norouz table. They were filled with different items such as sweet, candy, sugar. The dishes were set out in pattern of seven, according to Amshaspandan (Angels of great order that were Ordibehesht, Khordad, Amordad, Shahrivar, Bahman, Sepandarmaz and Ahura Mazda). Therefore, the Norouz table was called «Haft Seeni» or «Haft Ghab». Later the name changed to «Haft Seen». In some villages, it is still pronounced «Haft Seeni».

Usually a larger, attractively decorated dish was put on the table in the name of one of the seven angels, while

smaller dishes containing other items were arranged around it.

The popular Norouz table today

All the items found on the Norouz table are for bringing good fortune, health, fertility and abundance to the family in the coming year. Although not all items described are commonly used by each family, there are a number that will be used. They are as follows:

۱. Sabzeh (germinated grains) decorated with ribbons
۲. Sekeh (coins)
۳. Samanu (wheat dessert)
۴. Seeb (apple)
۵. Senjed (fruit of lotus tree)
۶. Sonbol (hyacinth)
۷. Seer (garlic)
۸. Serkeh (vinegar)

Other items also placed on the table:

۹. Ketab-e-Dini (holy book)
۱۰. Ayeneh (mirror)
۱۱. Sham>dan va Sham> (candleholder and candle)
۱۲. Mahi (fish)
۱۳. Shirini (sweets and candies)

### Sizdah be Dar

(Thirteenth of Farvardin)

The Iranians have a tradition of spending the day outdoors on the thirteenth of Farvardin. From very ancient times, people have enjoyed this day, although it is also the day that marks the end of the Norouz celebrations.

The first twelve days of the year are very important, because they symbolize order in the world and in the lives of people. The thirteenth day marks the beginning of the return to ordinary daily life.

It is customary on this day, for families to pack a picnic and go to a park or countryside. It is believed that joy and laughter clean the mind from all evil thoughts, and a picnic is usually a festive, happy event.

The thirteenth of Farvardin is also believed to be a special day to ask for rain. As already explained, in ancient Iran every day had its own name, and belonged to a different angel. The thirteenth of Farvardin belonged to Tir or Tishtari, the angel of rain. This angel is depicted as horse continuously fighting with the Drought Demon.

Sizdah be Dar is also a day for competitive games. Games involving horses were often chosen as a victory of a horse represented the victory for the angel of the rain.

Another tradition on the thirteenth, is the knotting of blades of grass by unmarried girls in the hope of finding a husband. The knotting of the grass represents the bondage of a man and a woman

