

Rotary Cultural Awareness Presents

Nowruz (the Persian = Iranian New Year)

The UN's General Assembly in 2010 recognized the International Day of Nowruz, describing it as a spring festival of Persian origin which has been celebrated for over 3,000 years. The State of Wisconsin like CA, MI and many other states, has named March 21 (Nowruz) as the Iran's day. Nowruz is celebrated in Greater Iran, Caucasus, and Central Asia and by Iranians worldwide. It is a public holiday in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Also the Canadian parliament by unanimous consent has passed a bill to add Nowruz to the national calendar of Canada (2009). It is also celebrated in many other countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Some parts of Turkey, India, China, Russia, and countries on Persian Gulf.

This Festival, which **it is not based on Islamic Tradition, begins the solar year at the spring equinox, (March 20 or 21).** The ceremonial includes customs from pre-Islamic festivals. Nowruz is symbolic representations of two ancient concepts, **“End and Rebirth”, “Good and Evil”**

Two weeks before Nowruz each household traditionally grows a plate of sprout of wheat, barely or lentils an omen of good harvest and good future. One week before the New Year the spring cleaning is taking place, and everything must be made as clean as new. A new life is dawning and the house must be symbolically purified and thoroughly cleansed by being carefully washed and cleaned from carpet to bedding. On the last Wednesdays of the year which is called chashambeh-souri, a bonfire of bushes and other dry plants are lit. People leap over the flames shutting “fire, fire, may your strength and redness come to me and my yellowness, sickness, goes to you.” Once the fire has gone out, clay pots and vases filled with water are hurled from the top of the house to shouts off “dard-o-bala” (pain and misfortune). Another costume is covering themselves with a fabric called “chador” and go out after the sunset carrying an empathy metal pot and bang on that and doors with spoon (no talking, only banging and knocking until someone opens the door and gives them candy or cookies (somewhat like Halloween).

For the New Year ceremonial, the Plate of sprouting and the tray of the “Haft Seen” (seven seen) will be placed on the Nowruz tablecloth in front of a mirror lit by all lights at the room and as many candelas as there are members of the household, a copy of the Quran for Moslems, (Bible for Christians, Tura for the Jews, Avesta for Zoroastrians, Aghdas for Bahies), a bowl (crystal or glass) of water with a few gold fish and coins. Other items are such as cookies, candies, honey and colored or painted eggs. The tray of “seven seen” contains seven items whose names in Persian begin with letter seen, (for “sabz” meaning green). The number 7 is a sacred number as it was for Babylonians, and ancient Hebrews, linked to the idea of creation which runs through all the symbolism of Nowruz. These dishes stand for seven angelic heralds of Life-Rebirth, Health, Happiness, Prosperity, Joy, Patience and Beauty. Traditionally, the seven items of Haft Seen are Sekeh (coin); samanu (a sweet wheat pudding); Sabzi (sprouting grains); Sonbol (hyacinth flower; seer (garlic; senjed (a tiny dried fruit from an Asian deciduous tree) and Serkeh (vinegar). Some families substitute one or two items with seeb (apple) and sumagh (sumac). Celebrants wait for the exact moment of Nowruz in much the same way that American or Europeans await the clock to strike midnight and turn December 31 into a New Year. While waiting for the New Year to begin, people wear new cloth, the parents and other older people pray that the New Year will be propitious and recite the holy book to bring blessings and happiness to the world and their family and friends. When the new starts, fireworks are set off and people kiss each other and exchange gifts. Than the New Year's visitation (“deed and baazdeed”) of friends and family starts by going to the house of the oldest family members starts. The New Year celebration is concluded on the thirteen days of the New Year which is called “Seezdah bedar” (thirteen days outside). On this day, people go to picnic at the streams or rivers swollen by the melted snow. The grains that have sprouted in the plate are thrown into the river for good luck.