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The Role of Nowruz
Festivity in Cultural
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Nowruz around
the World

Nowruz in
the Indian
Subcontinent



Nowruz: Marking the Iranian New Year

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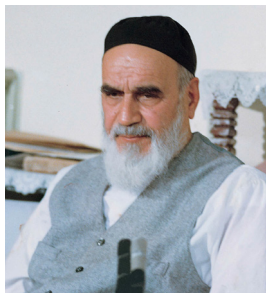
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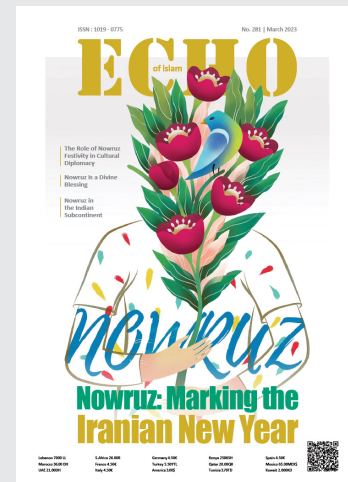
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Editorial

Nowruz Is a Divine Blessing

Mohammad Asadi Movahed

Managing Director of Al-Hoda International Cultural, Artistic and Publishing Institute



‘Nowruz’, literally “New Day,” is a call for a new beginning! In line with the commencement of the Spring and a new year - as per the Iranian calendar - and in harmony with the rebirth of nature, Nowruz calls upon all and every human being for renewal of life and for refreshing our bodies and souls. It is an occasion for cherishing the blessings we live with. A turning point to carry the best of the bygone year whilst setting goals for the better in the new one that has just begun. Nowruz gives inspiration for love, compassion, peace, and happiness while promising a new chapter of hope for prosperity and well-being.

Originally an Iranian cultural feast, Nowruz marks the beginning of the spring season and has been celebrated for thousands of years with great fervor and enthusiasm by Iranians of all ethnic and religious groups. As a cultural umbrella, the celebration of Nowruz has now spread all around the world. In 2010 Nowruz was recognized as an International Day by the United Nations as it is celebrated in many countries. The spirit of Nowruz is all-inclusive and singles no one out. Nowruz (lit. New Day) marks the beginning of Farvardin, the first month of the Solar Hijri calendar, and is usually celebrated on March 20 or 21 globally and is considered an important day to reflect upon one’s deeds and way of life in the previous year and make a promise to live a better life in the year ahead.

HAPPY Nowruz



Our world today needs the spirits and the messages of Nowruz more than ever before. Our world is afflicted by the plagues of war, terrorism, deliberate starvation, arbitrary sanctions, bigotry, discrimination, and inequality, each of which would suffice to undermine the prosperity of our life. On the other hand, environmental degradation and climate change, are threatening the sustainability of our planet. Nowruz is an invitation to the benevolence of humankind and appreciation for nature. It provides an opportunity for rethinking, resuming, and rebuilding.

Nowruz is a constellation of joy, family gatherings, visiting friends, helping the poor, enjoying the weather, traveling, and spending time in nature! Nowruz bears the true spirit of hope, compassion, and a new beginning for a better day, a better season, and a better year. Let us renew our love, faith, and care for one another on this day. May this Nowruz, and many Nowruz to come, lead us to a far better world, in harmony, peace, and towards the light.

Happy Nowruz!

Nowruz from the Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini (RA)

By: Mohammad Rajaei Nejad

Nowruz is one of the most historical festivities in the world, which is held in Greater Iran (the sociocultural region in which Iranian traditions and Iranian languages have had a significant impact). An ancient pre-Islamic tradition that has been approved by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and other infallible Imams (AS).

One of the unique characteristics of Imam Khomeini was his comprehensive outlook. His perception of Islam was far from being dogmatic. For this reason, he did not consider the national culture of the people and the nationality of the country in conflict with Islam. He considered both of them intertwined and this reason the reason that his thoughts penetrated deep into people's hearts.

Very few people can be found in human history have been both of steadfastness in the face of various political dangers and of mystical and poetic nature. A review of the set of these personality aspects is reminiscent of the theory of Thomas Carlyle, who believed that great people change the course of history. It can be said that Imam Khomeini was an

outstanding example of such personalities who were able to create a change in the course of history. Therefore, during his lifetime, he not only had no objection to Nowruz, but it was so important to him that he composed poems about it. In some of his poems, he has emphasized the natural characteristics of spring and this festivity. A rough translation of a couplet composed by the late Imam Khomeini (RA) is given hereunder:

When the Nowruz wind blows,
every year inside the garden

Blossoms and flowers grow everywhere
on the ground

May every season be like autumn
for your enemies,

May every month be like Farvardin
for your friends. (Ibid, P. 262).

While considering Nowruz a blessing for the rich and the poor, the late Imam has praised the custom of wearing new clothes on these days and going spending time in mountains, deserts, and gardens. He considered the arrival of spring and the new year as an opportunity to get closer to God and expressed it in the form of the following poem:

Nowruz wind has blown to the

mountains and the desert,

People wear Eid clothes, whether a king or a beggar (Imam Khomeini's Divan of Poems, P. 39.)

Another issue that shows the importance of Nowruz from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini is mentioning the name of this day in his jurisprudential writings. Therefore, besides his special attention to Nowruz in his Divan of poems and his messages on this occasion after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he had emphasized the importance of recommended fasting on the first day of Nowruz in his book of Tahrir al-Wasila. (See Tahrir al-Wasila, Vol. 1, P. 343)

Imam and the First Nowruz after the Islamic Revolution

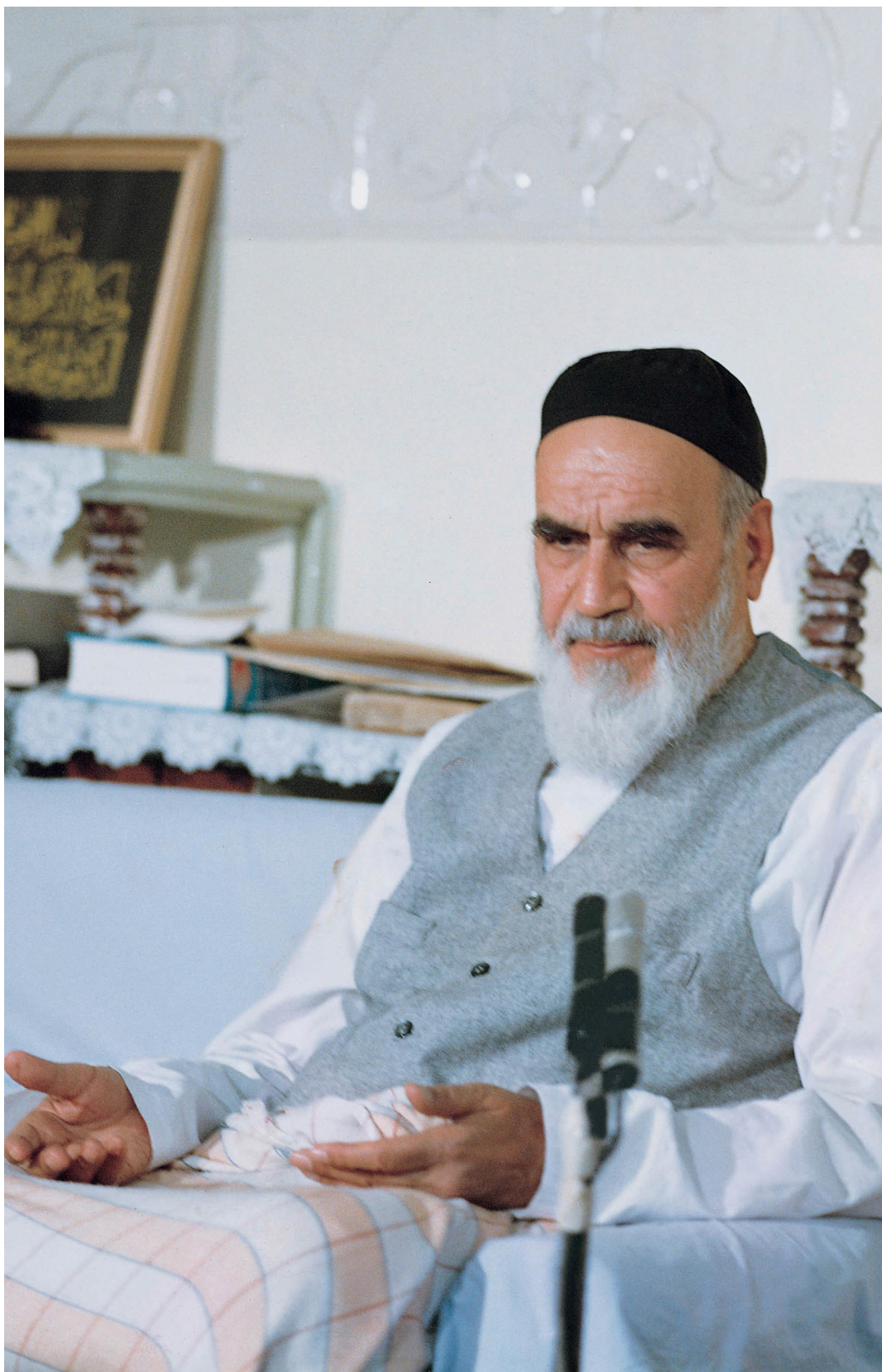
The importance of this festivity in Imam Khomeini's practical attitude towards Nowruz can be gauged from his New Year messages. For instance, in a meeting with the members of the interim government on the threshold of the first Nowruz after the Islamic Revolution (Nowruz of 1358/1979), he expressed some points about the new year that should be taken into

account and outlined the policy of the government and the nation for the first year of the Islamic Revolution.

By carefully examining Imam Khomeini's statement on this occasion, several important points can be identified: attention to cultural affairs, attention to the lower classes on the eve of the new year and providing for their needs, preservation of unity, etc. The late Imam Khomeini began his speech with these words: "On the eve of the new year, I have to make certain recommendations to the nation, to the government, and to the government institutions. (See *Sahifah Imam*, Vol. 6, P. 393)

Another practice of Imam Khomeini during Nowruz, which reflected the importance of Nowruz in his view, was giving New Year gifts to others, especially his children and grandchildren; a practice he adhered to before and after the revolution. He did not abandon this practice even during the time of his exile in Najaf. As her daughter, Ms. Zahra Mostafavi, has mentioned in her memoirs:

The Imam used to give us gifts every year since our childhood, the amount of which, of course, changed according to the times. One of his grandsons has also said: In the Nowruz of the years 1986 and 1987 he used to give 300 tomans, but he gave us one thousand tomans on Nowruz of the year 1988. It can be concluded that by resorting to religious teachings and with a moral and spiritual outlook towards national traditions, Imam Khomeini sought to reveal the connection between them and in this way he also tried to ensure the social and political unity of the society.





Grand Ayatollah Khamenei's (the Leader of the Islamic Revolution) Message

On the Occasion of Nowruz 2022 (1401)



In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and peace and greetings upon our Master, Muhammad, and upon his pure Progeny, especially the remnant of God on earth.

O Changer of hearts and eyes,
O Director of nights and days,
O Transformer of situations and circumstances,

Transform our circumstances to

the best of circumstances!

I would like to express my congratulations on Nowruz and the arrival of a new year, new growth in nature, and new days. This year, Nowruz coincides with the festivities for the 15th of Sha'ban, which belongs to the bright sun of the universe, the Imam of the Time (may our souls be sacrificed for his sake). I wish to congratulate the great Iranian nation and all concerned, like-minded nations on these events.

In particular, I wish to congratulate the esteemed families of the martyrs—those patient, cherished families, may God not deprive the Iranian nation and all of us of the existence of these esteemed families. I also congratulate the dear, disabled war veterans and their patient families, and also those who have made great sacrifices and are truly serving the Iranian nation in different fields—including in the fields of health, security, resistance, and science. I congratulate all these dear people on the occasion of this sweet, auspicious holiday.

Another year has passed. The year 1400 SH is over with all its sweet and bitter moments and all its ups and downs, which are a natural part of life. Life is a combination of these sweet and bitter moments and these ups and downs. I wish to point out a few of these great, sweet moments that have occurred for the Iranian nation.

One of them was the elections. The elections were truly important and magnificent. Despite the fact that the pandemic was at its peak in early 2021, the people went to the ballot boxes and cast their votes. This is very important. This took place despite the fact that it was

dangerous for even two individuals standing next to each other at one particular point. In those days, we were witnessing death rates in the hundreds—500, 600, and at times even more individuals in a day. The elections were held in such circumstances. The people went to the polls and participated in the elections. The result was that a new Administration entered the arena.

The evidence shows that this Administration is a popular administration, which is concerned about the goals of the people and which moves on a different path from the previous honorable Administration. This Administration has revived hope in the people, praise God. This was one of the most important events that took place for the Iranian nation.

Another peak event was the serious confrontation with the Coronavirus pandemic. This disease was confronted and combatted in the true sense of the word. Death rates dropped from several hundred a day to 18 or 20 at times. Although the death rates have risen to a certain extent again, there is a drastic difference between these days when the vaccine is available to everyone and those days.

Another peak was our scientific and technological progress. One example was the domestic production of different vaccines, some of which have received certification globally. Various other scientific and technological advances were also made ranging from the production of vaccines to the launching of satellites. The country made important progress in all areas, praise God. These were the great peaks in the year 1400 SH. Various other events also took place inside the country and

there were other sweet moments as well.

There were great peaks in the international arena as well. One of the sweetest events that took place in the year 1400 SH was the Americans explicitly acknowledging—just recently—that they had suffered a “humiliating” defeat in their “maximum pressure policy” against Iran. The term “humiliating” was a term they themselves used. This was an important event. The Iranian nation was victorious. The Iranian nation won. No single person, in particular, can claim credit for this. It was the resistance of the Iranian nation that brought about such a great victory.

Various other events took place as well, both in our vicinity and far from us. Of course, all of these showed the correctness of the path that the Iranian nation is traveling in confronting Arrogance. These events showed that the correct path is the one that the Iranian nation has taken against Arrogance. Well, these were the sweet moments.

We were witness to some bitter moments as well. The most severe, and important of these bitter moments in my opinion are such things as the problems that exist for the livelihood of the people, the issue of high prices, inflation, and the like. Well, these problems must definitely be solved. These problems are solvable. These are economic problems, a part of which I hope will be resolved this year. Not all of them can be resolved at once. They will be resolved little by little. If one is impatient and hasty and says that all of the problems must be solved very quickly, this is not realistic. However, I hope that some of these problems will be resolved in the year 1401 SH, which

is the first year of the new century, the 15th century in the Solar Hijri calendar, God willing.

In previous years, I have chosen a title to be the slogan of the year. In this way, the officials—primarily those in the Executive Branch but alongside them those in the Legislative and Judiciary branches and also the people in general, when matters are related to them—may move in that direction. In some years, good achievements were made in this regard. Of course in certain years, some negligence was shown.

For the year 1400 SH, I chose the slogan “Production: Support and the Elimination of Obstacles.” Good work was done toward that end and continues to be done, and this must be done. In recent years, I have focused on “production” for the slogan of the year, accompanied by certain descriptive terms. The reason is that production is the key to solving the economic problems of the country. National production is indeed the main path that needs to be taken for moving past the economic hardships

and difficulties that exist in the country. In other words, the most important economic issues of the country can be resolved by boosting and improving national production. This is the nature of production.

That is why we have placed great emphasis on production; because it boosts economic growth, it creates employment, it reduces inflation, it increases per capita income and it improves public welfare. Furthermore, it also brings about psychological effects since it boosts national self-confidence and creates a sense of dignity in the nation. Production is such an elixir. National production is this important if it is carried out in the best possible way, God willing.

That is why I have stressed the importance of production in recent years. And this emphasis was effective. Praise God, it has had good results. I wish to highlight production this year too, but with a newly added layer and a new aspect. I wish to emphasize a production that has two characteristics: one is that it should create jobs and the other is that it should be knowledge-based. We must encourage knowledge-based production—one that is reliant on new scientific advances—and production that generates employment. Of course, all kinds of production generate employment. But some kinds of production do not create much employment despite the fact that they require a huge investment while other kinds of production create abundant employment opportunities. By God’s grace, I will expand on this in tomorrow’s speech [the Leader’s annual New Year speech].

If we make knowledge-based production the main criterion, and if we pursue the kind of production

► **O Changer of hearts and eyes,
O Director of nights and days,
O Transformer of situations and circumstances,
Transform our circumstances to the best of circumstances!**

that is knowledge-based with the characteristics that I will mention in my New Year's speech, I believe we will witness tangible progress and a good move forward in achieving all of our economic goals. The same is true of production that creates jobs. Therefore, this year's slogan is "Production: Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating."

We are after this kind of production. Of course, I wish to stress as I did last year that officials should not be satisfied with merely writing this slogan on the letterhead of their organizations or with putting up a sign on the street with this slogan. Such things don't do anything. The main issue is to formulate policies based on this idea in the true sense of the word. Of course, according to what I have seen, this Administration, by God's grace, will make advancements considering the diligence of the honorable President and that of his colleagues. In other words, this slogan will not remain unheeded, by God's grace. However, the more work that is done and the more effort that is made, the better it will be.

I hope that God, the Exalted, will bestow good upon the Iranian nation this year, on this Eid, and in this valuable one-year opportunity. I hope that God willing He will make the people happy, make their lives sweet, gladden the hearts of the people, and gladden the pure souls of our dear martyrs and the immaculate soul of our late magnanimous Imam (may God bestow paradise on him).

I hope that God, the Exalted, will send the greetings of all of us and convey our devotion and sincerity to the great Imam of the Time (may our souls be sacrificed for his sake).



The Message of Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Mahdi Imanipour
President of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization
On the Occasion of Nowruz

نفس باد صبا مشک فشان خواهد شد
عالم پیردگر باره جوان خواهد شد

Morning breeze, its fragrance will exhale
The old world will once again youthfully sail



Nowruz is the manifestation of the revival of nature. Nowruz is a new opportunity for people to reflect on their life and circumstances and seek help from God Almighty to be in the best of conditions spiritually. Nowruz also provides the opportunity for self-retrospection and reflecting upon one's need to evolve on a sacred path replete with signs of the power of God Almighty. This transformation is the divine tradition for which Nowruz is considered a turning point. The existing harmony among the nations who celebrate Nowruz brings their hearts and minds closer to each other at the glorious and beautiful moments of the change of Year. The morning breeze of the first day of Nowruz creates a sense of rebirth among the Persian-speaking nations as well as the non-Persian-speaking nations who consider Nowruz as the ancient heritage of their ancestors.

In addition to its intrinsic value, Nowruz is an opportunity to develop cultural relations between Iran



and its neighbors. The spiritual and civilized outlook towards Nowruz can become a point of profound connection between the nations of the region. Looking at Nowruz as an ancient rite and tradition is not the whole story! Nowruz originated from a kind of unique civilization and has the power to create a cultural-civilizational union among different countries.

In Central Asia, Caucasus, and West Asia, Nowruz can be more than a “common tradition” and become a “center of common culture” to reach a “unified cultural system”. This cultural system may not be limited to a specific time (the end of winter and the beginning of spring) and it can include all the days of the year. This cultural-civilized capacity should be considered and flourished by the countries that celebrate Nowruz.

In the religious teachings of the main leaders of Islam, Nowruz has been referred to as a symbol of transition to a new era in human life. This exalting outlook towards the change of year and Nowruz shows that religious

leaders have considered it to be more than just a ceremony or tradition and looked at it as a turning point in the elevation of human values.

What makes honoring this ancient festivity even more evident is to use of this common opportunity for co-existence, synergy, and convergence among nations and the development, stabilization, and evolution of their cooperation by means of this common heritage.

Nowruz has a special place among the nations of the region and can ensure continuous alliance and greater interaction among these nations and their governments. The hidden creativity and beauty in this ancient festivity can be considered an instrument for promoting a certain lifestyle based on “effective transformation” in the individual, social and international relations of nations. We believe that the regional and extra-regional capacities of Nowruz have not yet been fully actualized, and this heightens the responsibility of the relevant institutions in the countries that celebrate this beauti-

ful tradition.

Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, as the custodian of the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, considers identifying and actualizing the latent capacities and strengthening the current capacities of this ancient tradition as a measure of civilizational and religious solidarity among countries. It is hoped to witness greater convergence among countries inspired by this rich tradition, in the near future. The realization of this ideal will create a bright future for those interested in Nowruz, and our dear compatriots inside and outside the country can, as in the past, have a significant impact on the expansion of the culture of Nowruz.

I, hereby, express my heartfelt congratulations to all dear Iranians, especially those living abroad, as well as the statesmen and citizens of countries within the cultural and religious zone of Nowruz, on this occasion and the New Year (1402) and I wish them a year full of success, blessings, and prosperity.



Islam's Approach to Nowruz

The peaceful interaction of Islam with other religions and beliefs, including the religious and national beliefs of Iranians, was the reason that Nowruz did not disappear from the Islamic society of Iran. In Islam and especially in Shiism, Nowruz is viewed as a blessed day and it is emphasized to honor it. From the Shiite point of view, Nowruz is the day of the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (AS).

It has been narrated that some Iranian Muslims brought a silver vessel full of sweets as a gift for the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), and when he asked about the occasion they said that it is Nowruz. He asked what

is Nowruz? They said: Great Eid of Iranians. The Prophet then responded by saying: "Yes, it was on this day that God resurrected Askareh." They asked what is Askareh? He said: Askareh were thousands of people who left their homeland and went to the desert for fear of death, and God told them to die, and they died. Then he revived them and told the clouds to rain on them. This is why it is customary to sprinkle water on this day. The Prophet of Islam (PBUH) then ate from that sweets and divided the remaining among his companions and said I wish every day was Nowruz for us.

It has also been narrated that

during the era of the Caliphate of Imam Ali (AS), some Zoroastrians presented him with a few silver vessels filled with sugar on the occasion of Nowruz. The Imam accepted their gift and distributed the sugar among his companions. Also according to a narration from Imam Ja'far Sadiq (AS), the miraculous event of the revival of thousands of people from Israelites before Islam - by God's command, which is mentioned in verse 243 of Surah Al-Baqarah - happened in Nowruz.

In volume 59 of the book Bihar al-Anwar of Allameh Majlesi, it is narrated from Imam Sadiq(AS) that Mu'alla bin Khunays said: I

went to visit Imam Ja'far Sadiq on the day of Nowruz and he asked me if I knew (the importance of) this day. I responded by saying that it is the day which is honored by Iranians and exchange gifts. The Imam then said: Swear by Allah celebrating Nowruz is important for ancient reasons that I am going to tell you about. O Mu'alla, Nowruz is the day that the Lord of the world made a covenant with His servants to worship Him, not to associate any partner with Him, and to believe in the prophets and imams. Nowruz is the first day on which the sun rose, winds began to blow, and the earth was created. It is the day when Ali became victorious in the Battle of Nahrwan. It was on this day that Noah's ark landed on Mount Cudi, the day on which Gabriel descended on the Prophet, the day when Abraham broke the idols, and the day when the Prophet carried Ali on his shoulders to throw down the idols of the Quraysh. It is the same day that the Prophet of God asked his companions to pledge allegiance to Ali (AS) as the Commander of the Faithful. It is the same day on which the Qa'im of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Household will come out of occultation, and it is the same day on which he will defeat Dajjal and hang him near Kufa, and there is no Nowruz in which we do not expect a special blessing because Nowruz is one of our days and our Shiites.

Allameh Majlesi narrated in his book "Zadal al-Ma'ad" that it has been recommended to re-

cite this prayer a lot at the time of the change of the year:

يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ وَالْأَبْصَارِ يَا مُدَبِّرَ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ يَا مُحَوِّلَ الْحَوْلِ وَالْأَحْوَالِ حَوِّلْ حَالَنَا إِلَى أَحْسَنِ الْحَالِ

(O Changer of hearts and eyes, O Director of nights and days, O Transformer of situations and circumstances, Transform our circumstances to the best of circumstances!)

Mirza Husain Noori Tabarsi, popularly known as Muhaddith Noori has quoted from the book of Hossein bin Hamedan in "Mustadrak al-Wasail" that al-



▶ **The most important symbol of Nowruz, which is "Haft-sin", has an ancient and Islamic philosophy. In his research book on Nowruz entitled "Nowruz and the Philosophy behind Haft-sin", Mohammad Ali Dadkhah has written, "The number seven is chosen and sacred".**

Mufaddal bin Umar al-Jaafi has narrated from Imam Sadiq (AS) that: God sent a revelation to Prophet Hezqil that: "This day is a blessed day before me. I have made a promise to myself that if any believer asks me for anything on this day, I will fulfill it, and that day is Nowruz."

There is a recommended prayer for Nowruz Eid in the book "Mufatih al-Janan", which comprises the recitation of Surahs Al-Hamad, Al-Qadr, Al-Kafirun, Tawhid, Al-Falaq, and Al-Nas, and is very similar to the prayer that is included in the rituals and practices of Friday and Ghadir Khum Eid. Imam Sadiq (AS) has been quoted in the same book stating: "When Nowruz comes, do ghusl, put on your cleanest clothes and perfume yourself with the best fragrances and after finishing the obligatory noon and afternoon prayers and their nafilahs, pray four rak'as, each rakat followed by a salam. In the first rak'a recite Surah Al-Hamd followed by Surah Al-Qadr (ten times). In the second rak'a recite Surah Al-Kafirun ten times after Surah Al-Hamd. In the third rak'a recite Surah Tawhid ten times after Surah Al-Hamd, and in the fourth rak'a recite Surahs Al-Nas and Al-Falaq ten times after Surah Al-Hamd. And after finishing these prayers do a thanksgiving prostration and recite this supplication (Refer to Mafatih al-Jinan for the full text of the supplication).

The most important symbol of Nowruz, which is "Haft-sin", has an ancient and Islamic phi-

losophy. In his research book on Nowruz entitled "Nowruz and the Philosophy behind Haft-sin", Mohammad Ali Dadkhah has written, "The number seven is chosen and sacred". The choice of this number for the Nowruz table is of significance. Ancient Iranians associated this number with the seven holy immortals. In astrology, the number seven is the house of dreams. Allameh Majlesi says: The sky has seven layers and the earth has seven layers, and seven angels or angels are their guardians, and whoever recited seven verses of the Holy Quran that begin with the letter sin at the time of the change of the year, he/she will be protected from earthly and heavenly disasters. The religious sanctity of the time of the change of the year is so important for people that many of

them prefer to be in holy shrines at that time.

Some of the customs and rituals of Nowruz are as follows:

1- Ghusl: according to some hadith ghusl is considered one of the rituals of Nowruz.

2- Exchange of gifts: Giving gifts in Nowruz has been customary since ancient times. This custom has also been confirmed by Islam. It means that the custom of giving gifts is generally accepted. In some cases, even the infallible Imams had recommended giving gifts to each other.

3- Paying visit to family and friends: Visiting, and congratulating one another in Nowruz is considered one of the important

customs of Nowruz, and Islam, too, has approved and recommended this pleasant custom. Although this custom is obligatory on other days of the year as well, it has been especially emphasized to be observed during Nowruz.

4- Wearing clean clothes and being perfumed: It has been in narrations that when Nowruz comes, do ghusl and wear your best and cleanest of your clothes and perfume yourself with the best perfumes.

5- Fasting: It has been recommended to fast on the first day of Nowruz. According to hadith, fasting is one of the rituals of Nowruz. Islamic jurists have also considered fasting on the first day of Nowruz as a recommended ritual.



Nowruz: Marking the Iranian New Year

Nowruz or "New Day" refers to a series of ancient traditions related to celebrating the great Iranian New Year, which is also known as the "Persian New Year". The festival starts from the first day of the month of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian solar calendar) to the 13th day called "Sizdah-be-dar" or "the Day of Nature". The first day of the Iranian calendar coincides with the first day of spring, around March 21.



Nowruz originated from pre-Zoroastrian and Zoroastrian theology, the state Iranian religion before Islam or exactly, the world's oldest continuously practiced religion, dates back to at least the second millennium BC. Despite its origin, it has been celebrated in many areas, such as India, the Caucasus, Central Asia, western Asia, the Black Sea Basin, and the Balkans because of the influence of Iranian culture among other nations. Nowruz contributes to friendship among different communities of people so that March 21 was inscribed by UNESCO under the title "The International Day of Nowruz" on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity in 2016. Every year when the month of Esfand (the last month of the Iranian year) arrives Iranians look forward to celebrating Nowruz. They do cleaning and shopping and buy new things, especially new cloth and presents for Youngers. Fresh fruits of the season, sweets, candy, and nuts are favorites by Iranians to host their guests properly

Nowruz history

To understand how much this part of the year is important for Iranians, you need to know some information about the history of Nowruz. The beginning of the new year was an important event for the Iranian agro-pastoralist society and it had a strong effect on their lifestyle and was related to the agricultural economy.

The end of winter and the beginning of spring were the time of work for agro-pastoral societies, within the spring, they get ready to harvest their produce and in summer and then planting new products. The amount and quality of their products especially food depended largely on the fact that to what extent a suitable condition for farming was provided for the next year. There is a famous Iranian proverb said "Nowruz is the key of the year" so it has been the best time to celebrate and thank God

Since the 3rd millennium BC, Nowruz has been celebrated in the Iranian plateau. At the time of the Achaemenids, Nowruz was celebrated in form of an annual tradition everywhere but the royal center of the festivals was Persepolis or Takht-e Jamshid palace in Fars. The complex was the ancient cultural capital of Achaemenids, the great Iranian emperors who ruled over a great part of the ancient world for more than two hundred years. There are very famous reliefs related to Nowruz and its symbols in Persepolis, one of these symbols is the battle of a lion (the new year) and the ox (the old year) demonstrated the victory of the lion. In various locations of the palace, the nobles or servants were also found holding apples or round things like eggs in their hands. On the palace of Apadana, there are reliefs demonstrating the different nations who brought gifts to the Achaemenian great king.

Nowruz Ethics

Traditionally, before the arrival of Nowruz, the members of the family gather together around the Haft-sin, which is arranged on a table or on special table linen called "Softreh" in Persian that is spread on the ground. The Haft-sin refers to seven items that begin with the letter sin (Persian: س). The main items include Sabzeh (the sprouts of wheat, barley, or lentil grown in a dish), Samanu (a sweet pudding made from wheat germ), Senjed (Persian olive), Serke (Vinegar), Sib (Apple), Sir (Garlic) and Sumaq (Sumac). Each item of Haft-Sin is a symbol of an ancient Zoroastrian holy spirit named Izadan (The Gods and Goddesses), the name of twelve Persian months derived from the name of these twelve spirits. For example, Sabzeh is the symbol of life and Ordibehesht (the second month of the Persian calendar); Smanu is the symbol of grocery and Shahri-var (the sixth month); Senjed is the symbol of love and lovers Khordad (the third month); So-maq is the symbol of rain and Bahman (the eleventh month), Serkeh is the symbol of immortality and Mordad (the fifth month), Sib is the symbol of fertility and Esfand (the twelfth month), Sir is the symbol of worship and Mehr the seventh month

Other items, such as a mirror, candles, painted eggs, coins, goldfish, orange, the divān of Hafez, the Šāhnāme of Ferdowsi, and the holy books



Qur'an, Bible, or Avesta found on the table too. At the moment of the transition to the New Year people pray and speak to God in order to ask for help and health and give thanks. A large diversity of folks and different communities of religions hold Nowruz in high regard. During the Nowruz, people are expected to make short visits to family, friends, and neighbors. Usually, young people visit their elders first, and then the elders return their visit. Because of the holidays, some people find New Year as the best time to travel and see new places, the tourist provinces and areas like Fars, Isfahan, Yazd, the northern area alongside the Caspian Sea, and the Southern beaches of the Persian Gulf are the most popular destination for tourists and travelers during Nowruz. As said before, the Nowruz

holiday lasts thirteen days and the last day is called Sizdah Be Dar. On this day, the Iranian families leave their houses towards natural attractions and spots like parks, gardens, green pastures, rivers, forests, or simply their backyard gardens to

have a lovely picnic, take food and eat it outdoors, play games in groups and spend a nice day with family and friends

Although Nowruz is known as the Iranian New Year, you don't have to be from Iran or specifically Persian to celebrate it because this universal festival belongs to every nation of the world. It is the beginning of spring, the season of rebirth and rejuvenation, so from every corner of the world you are, you can join the people who celebrate Nowruz as the universal festival of spring, light, and happiness. Nowruz has been listed as one of the intangible cultural heritage due to its impact on global solidarity as well as one of the oldest human cultural celebrations that convey the message of friendship, peace, respect for nature, and happiness

► **Nowruz contributes to friendship among different communities of people so that March 21 was inscribed by UNESCO under the title "The International Day of Nowruz" on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity in 2016.**



The Story of Nowruz

By: Dr. Hossein Chaqomi; An Expert in Cultural Affairs

Spring is the time when the earth gets revived and becomes fertile, trees start getting green once again, and seeds grow out of the soil into different kinds of herbs and plants. In ancient times it was regarded as a turning point for both nature and man to get back to their

creational origins and recharge their powers. This change in the manner of nature directly affects man's mood in his daily life. Thus, the spring season is not only a clear-cut manifestation of the transformation of natural phenomena but it also causes an essential and spiritual

transfer inside man from an old person of the last year to someone else in the new year.

All spring festivals have pastoral origins because people historically used to try to live safely in the form of small communities where the majority of members were involved in



farming and animal husbandry. The fertile soil (farms and pastures), clean water, and sky were wisely considered to be the key elements in their lives and so nature was of great importance to the rural minds. Old legendary civilizations were proud of focusing their attention and endeavors on how to show their way of honoring the revitalization of nature in the most creative and faithful ways. Lupercalia was a pre-Roman pastoral festival in Europe, that took

place around mid-February. It had originated from a spring washing festival and spiritual cleansing ritual known as Februa and hence the month's name.

The ancient people always believed in deities or gods and goddesses who they thought to be the governors of all terrestrial and extraterrestrial happenings and who caused prosperity in people's life. They used to relate these earthly incarnated beings to the celestial powers and be-

lieved firmly that it was necessary to worship them, in order to grasp their favor and generosity, by holding such feasts.

A more in-depth examination would reveal that people all over the world, celebrated the revival of the earth in various ways, to different extents, and according to different beliefs. In some countries, they hastened to celebrate it most early, from the first day of spring, and in some others, they ethnically postponed the celebration to the end of the



season. But in Japanese culture, people traditionally emphasized memorializing the magnificence of spring for several months from the beginning of the season till summer by holding Cherry Blossom Festivals.

Likewise, in ancient Mesopotamia where many festivals were held, there was a spring festival named Akitu or Akitum, which was named after a particular herb in the Sumerian language. In fact, the biggest ceremony all around Mesopotamia was for the New Year and Akitu was the climax of the Babylonian New Year feast. This was originated in Babylon and held by Babylonians and Assyrians. The significance of Akitum was mainly. Although the goal of holding Akitum is still under discussion, the seasonal period when it was regularly held, notifies the fact that spring was celebrated even before the time of primitive gov-

ernments and kingdoms during which people gave importance to different cultural, religious, and political ceremonies, etc.

It can, thus, be concluded clearly that the aim of many New Year festivals was to establish a relationship between natural powers and human destiny, to a great extent, and would usually end up in sanctifying deities and their so-called representatives, kings, on the earth.

In Eastern beliefs, the spring season, with its positive meteorological effects on human life, was the best time to cherish deities and kings. So the New Year festivals were not merely to have fun and go out of daily issues for a while, they were to hold commemoration ceremonies, in the most splendid way, in remembrance of what the kind mothers of nature give the earth and its habitants.

Many of such holy prehistoric

or medieval events have been changed very little in rituals or the form of doing them but have strongly transferred in terms of their main structures and the basic goals or the philosophy of their genesis. In ancient Egyptian culture, spring was honored splendidly as it marked the time of harvest when people engaged in gathering their crops. In fact, the ancient Egyptians stretched the act of feasting till a later month when they believe the earth was geographically preparing itself to give them the gift of food and fruits. Sham Al-Nassim is an Egyptian national holiday marking the beginning of spring and the necessity of being joyful within the family and friendly gatherings and eating healthy vegetables and fruits and foods as a sign of gratitude towards nature for its benevolence.

Meanwhile, Iranians and the



other members of the big family of antique Persia and its neighbors including Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, parts of India, Turkey, and Iraq perform similar rituals and in some cases, hold national ceremonies at the beginning of the spring season.

Nowruz (lit. the New Day) was originally invented by Zoroastrians who were the ancient people of Persia (ancient Iran), which reflects upon their special consideration of the passionate and decent Iranians for the beauties of their natural environment and their personal inner needs. It is also to be added that Nowruz was one of the four basic Persian celebrations to cherish the change of nature and the dynamics of the earth. The other three celebrations included Mehregan (to celebrate

the cold half of the year), Yalda (to celebrate the beginning of winter), and Tirgan (to celebrate the beginning of summer).

By cleaning their homes, preparing new clothes, planting in their gardens, making cookies and preparing seafood, setting a special table filled with fruits, nuts, and newly cultivated lentil or wheat seeds, and at last paying respectful visits to the elderly members of the family, Iranians and the people of neighboring regions try to welcome the elegance of spring both indoor and outdoor and especially inside their hearts. Nowruz and its effects on the life of people have been studied scientifically from different social, psychological, humane, and ethnic perspectives. As the messenger of love, happiness, rebirth, blessing, and inner growth, it plays a highly important role in different fields of life in the Near East.

The few days of holiday reflect upon the need on the part of

members of society to take constructive rest and engage in useful and pleasant activities that would make a person once again close to his family, relatives, and friends. From this perspective, the task of Nowruz is to strengthen affectional allegiance between an individual and his social surroundings as a means of healing his tiredness and routine boredom. During a few days of being away from daily obligations and having time to refresh themselves, people get the opportunity to respond to their spiritual and intrinsic needs.

In brief, Nowruz is a symbol of the time-space revitalization of both outer and inner aspects of human life for Iranians; a new phase for self-examination, spirituality, and self-respect with the aim of preparing a suitable ground for the elimination of weak moral points, empowering strong attitudinal and behavioral points and rebuilding one's personality.

From what has been discussed in this article, it can be noticed that all through human history, since the emergence of old Eastern and Western civilizations, there has always been a tendency to honor the role of seasonal changes in the earth and their relevance in the human life, both physical and spiritually.

The message of devoting attention to festivals marking the beginning of seasons, spring in this case, can be summarized by stating that by celebrating Nowruz the people of Iran extend their appreciation and thankfulness to God Almighty for the revival of the earth.

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Nowruz in the Indian Subcontinent

The Indian subcontinent is one of the oldest lands with an ancient civilization, which is culturally very close to the people of Iran. Nowruz in India is mixed with different cultures. The advent of Nowruz in the Indian subcontinent, which is a land with thousands of unique festivities, traditions, and customs, dates back to the time when the Iranian Zoroastrians first arrived in this subcontinent some time between 636–651 CE.

During the rule of Muslim dynasties in the Indian subcontinent, not only the Persian language expanded greatly, but Iranian culture also made great progress there. Among other festivities and celebrations, Nowruz was celebrated with special programs.

From the time of Ghaznavids onwards, Nowruz became common among the people of the Indian

(commonly known as Parsis) who had migrated to India around the 9th century CE. Nowruz celebration has always been highly valued since the beginning of Islamic rule in India and is seen in historiographies, biographies, and poems, and it reached the peak of glory at the time of the Mughal emperor, Akbar shah, who honored the Iranian solar calendar, and being under the influence of the ancient customs and traditions of the Zoroastrian migrants people, ordered to hold Iranian festivals according to the solar calendar from 922 AH onwards.

During this period, the Nowruz celebration in the Indian subcontinent lasted for 19 days, during which decorations, lights, and fireworks could be seen everywhere with ultimate glory. It has been customary since then to exchange gifts, pay



subcontinent and this trend reached its peak during the Timurid and other Turkic dynasties. One of the factors that contributed very constructively to this spread was the presence of Zoroastrians

alms and make donations (Nowruzane) on the eve and last day of this festivity. In the subcontinent, the Iranian New Year is known by two names, "Nowruz" or "Patti" and is celebrated in several

regions like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab, Kashmir, etc. In Kashmir, a group of Hindus have been holding a festival called (Noorah) for a long time simultaneously with Nowruz, which is very similar to Iranian Nowruz. Procuring new clothes, cooking various dishes, decorating houses and the neighborhood, holding celebrations, and visiting relatives and friends are among the customs of the Nowruz celebration, which are another part of Nowruz. In the Princely State of Hyderabad, Nowruz was one of the four holidays where the Nizam would hold a public Darbar, along with the two official Islamic holidays and the sovereign's birthday. Prior to Asaf Jahi's rule in Hyderabad, the Qutb Shahi dynasty celebrated Nowruz with a ritual called Panjeri, and the festival was celebrated by all with great grandeur.

Nowruz among the Parsis

Parsis celebrate Nowruz by decorating and scenting their houses and arranging the "Haft-sin" table, which they call "noh-sofreh". It is customary among the Parsis to decorate the entrance of their houses with rice flour in the shape of a



butterfly because they believe that they lead the guardian angels into the house and the fireplace. It is also customary to make special homemade sweets on the first day of Nowruz, containing raisins and almonds. Parsis receive their Nowruz

guest by spraying rose water. On this day, they usually visit fire temples and offer special prayers.

The Parsi community of India observes the new year using the ancient Iranian calendar which does not account for leap years, meaning this holiday has now moved by 200 days from its original day of the vernal equinox. In India, the Parsi New Year is celebrated around August 16–17.

Nowruz in Kashmir

Nowruz is a special day for the people of Kashmir, especially the Shia Muslims, which is mostly associated with prayers and special religious ceremonies, and in some cases, seeing and visiting relatives. Shias of the Indian subcontinent see Nowruz from a religious perspective. Not only in Kashmir but also in other cities, which are considered the center of Shias, a special ceremony is held for Nowruz. The sanctity of Nowruz for them is because, according to Islamic records, many events have taken place in the history of the prophets and also the infallible imams on this day. Based on these beliefs, the creation of the world and the creation of Adam took place in Nowruz, Noah's ark came to rest on Mount Cudi, the Prophet of Islam cleansed the Kaaba from idols, and most importantly, Ghadir Khum or the introduction of Imam Ali (AS) as the successor of the Prophet of Islam on 18th of Dhu al-Hijjah coincided with the first day of Nowruz. For this reason, some Muslims fast on Nowruz day and observe special prayers, which include two rak'as of salat. Also, Shiite Muslims illuminate their place of residence, recite poems attributed to Imam Ali (AS) and make offerings in his name. Muslims of the subcontinent believe that Nowruz prayers receive the blessing for the whole year.

Some of the recreational programs and games played in Nowruz and in the spring season include racing, hockey, football, tennis, horse riding, horse racing, javelin, and kabaddi.

In some parts of this continent, people hold long colorful flags, gather in a special place – usually a wide square with greenery – and start merry-making and spend the whole day like this until the evening and then congratulate each other and return to their homes.



Nowruz in China

By: Dr. Alireza Khoshrou:
An Expert on Chinese Culture

As per the Iranian calendar, March 21 coincides with the first day of the year popularly known as Nowruz. Besides Iran, which is the birthplace of Nowruz, this festivity has also been celebrated in the countries of Central Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Xinjiang region of China for more than two thousand years. Iran and China share a number of cultural customs, which have created a close relationship between the Iranian and Chinese nations.

In China, Nowruz is celebrat-

ed not only by the Uyghur people but also by Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks living in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region in western China, and almost similar customs and ceremonies (to those observed by Iranians) are held in this region every year right at the beginning of spring and on the first days of the month Farvardin (the first month of the year in the Iranian calendar) with great enthusiasm.

It is quite likely that the advent of Nowruz in China dates back to the distant past when

Nowruz was celebrated by the Iranian merchants and immigrants who lived in certain regions of China, such as Xi'an, Guangzhou, and Yunnan and because of the similarities with the spring festival in China, the two have come to be somewhat intertwined.

It is worth mentioning that due to the antiquity of the Chinese culture, there are many local, regional, and national festivities and that is the reason that China is also referred to as the land of festivities. The main Chinese festivals, which are



celebrated throughout China, include the Spring Festival (the beginning of the New Year); the Festival of Lanterns; The boating race festival (an ancient festival), and the mid-month festival (an autumn festival) of which the Spring Festival has a lot of similarity with the Iranian Nowruz.

As mentioned earlier, Nowruz is the traditional festival of the migrant ethnic minorities who live mainly in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, and Gansu and Qinghai provinces (all in Northwest China) and have their own language and system of writing.

The Nowruz Festival is celebrated on the vernal equinox (around March 21) and is regarded by the Kazaks as the New Year. On that day, people pay New Year's visits to each other

and hold various activities to welcome the New Year. Before the festival, people will clean up their houses and prepare festive food, such as the porridge-like Nowruz Meal and various savory meat and so on.

On this day, people are all brightly dressed in their folk costumes to pay New Year's visits to each other. They eat the Nowruz Meal and sing Nowruz songs, wishing each other good health and a bumper harvest in the coming year. On this day, the heads of sheep are always presented to the elders.

Various activities are held during the festival, such as singing and dancing, wrestling, playing tongue twisters, guessing games, flying kites, and playing hide-and-seek, and so on. A particularly interesting activity of

this festival is a game called Girl Chase.

March 21, which is also an important day in China is referred to as the spring equinox. The Chinese agricultural calendar is divided into 24 solar periods, which extend from the beginning of spring to the beginning of summer.

The first day of Nowruz is an official holiday in Xinjiang province and the radio and television of the region broadcast special programs on this occasion. People pay a visit to each other and congratulate one another on the occasion of the new year and merry. Organizing various artistic events, reciting poetry, group singing and dancing is another feature of Nowruz in this region, which is celebrated with great enthusiasm.

The Role of Nowruz Festivity in Cultural Diplomacy

By: Mahdi Reza

Cultural Expert on Cultural Diplomacy

The role that Nowruz festivity can play as a cultural element in creating regional convergence is unique and unmatched. This is due to the fact that Nowruz has historically been an influential factor in cultural convergence

and enhance relations between peoples is one of the old and long-standing issues of human history and Nowruz is one of those intangible historical contexts that can make relations between nations and governments

growth and elevation of stable peace and peaceful coexistence. Nowruz is a common cultural asset shared by Iran and its neighbors. The role of Nowruz in cultural convergence takes place in two ways; hard and soft. In its



between nations and states and nations have always been looking for factors that enhance their relations. Of course, it should not be overlooked that the idea of using cultural and social commonalities in order to strengthen

in the field of culture and civilization more humane and logical.

By the same token, cultural diplomacy can play an important role in cultural exchange among nations and especially neighbor states resulting in cultural

hard form, a union gets formed with the aim of forming a common culture and identity. A clear example of this form of cultural convergence is the European Union the purpose of the creation of which has been to help

create a common European identity, which has, of course, failed in some cases.

But another type of it is soft convergence, where countries are led towards convergence due to their understanding of a similar identity and thus increase their interactions. In this type of convergence, there is more strength and it has a longer and more stable life. Nowruz is an element that can cause convergence. Nowruz is not just a time and a celebration, rather it is a discourse. Nowruz is a discourse that originates from the heart of peaceful coexistence. Something that the countries of the region are in need of it more than any other time and the attainment of which can affect the entire hu-

▶ **But another type of it is soft convergence, where countries are led towards convergence due to their understanding of a similar identity and thus increase their interactions. In this type of convergence, there is more strength and it has a longer and more stable life.**

there is divine and humane; a world full of light, brightness, blessing, and truth. Nowruz has always been recognized as

protection of the environment gets manifested. As a common cultural element shared by peoples with multiple beliefs, diverse clothing, and different languages, Nowruz can help promote greater and stronger friendships within the framework of cultural diplomacy of neighboring states. Nowruz can and has the capacity to be used as an essential element of cultural diplomacy in promoting cultural and political ties and bonds among nations.

In order to strengthen cultural diplomacy, Nowruz is a festivity that can advance stronger interactions among different nations of the region without causing doubts and misunderstandings.

To conclude it must be noted that besides enhancing cultural



man world. Nowruz has the power to connect and unite nations and create convergence among them. This is because, within the context of Nowruz, there is no sign of negativity. Everything

a common intangible heritage within the cultural and civilizational boundaries of greater Iran. Nowruz is one of the few festivities in which the relationship between man and nature and the

convergence, Nowruz, as an element of cultural diplomacy, has the potential to help increase political and economic cooperation among the countries of the region.



Nowruz around the World

Nowruz is a rite dating back to at least the 6th century BCE, marking the new year and ushering in spring. Various known as Novruz, Nowruz, Noruz, Navruz, Nauroz, or Nevruz, even though it originated in ancient Iran (Persia), this ancient and historic rite and festivity has been celebrated by peoples of different religions and cultures in many countries along the Silk Roads, including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with full fervor every year and it is now a part and parcel of the cultural heritage of countries.

With the migration of many expatriates from these countries to other parts of the world including China, European countries, and America, this great festivity is celebrated simultaneously with the people of Iran on March 21. The return of the spring was seen to have great spiritual significance, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil and joy over sorrow. In particular, the Spirit of Noon, known as Rapithwina, who was considered to be driven underground by the Spirit of Winter during the cold months, was welcomed back with celebrations at noon on the day of Nowruz according to Zoroas-

trian tradition.

Welcoming the inclusion of Nowruz in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on 30 September 2009, the United Nations General Assembly, in an unprecedented move, adopted a resolution on February 23, 2010, recognizing 21 March as the "International Day of Nowruz" and welcoming the efforts of the Member States where Nowruz is celebrated to preserve and develop the culture and traditions related to Nowruz. It also encourages the Member States to make efforts to raise awareness about Nowruz and to organize annual events in commemoration of this festivity, as appropriate. The UN Resolution No. 64/253 also stressed that Nowruz, the day of the vernal equinox, is (in the contemporary era) celebrated as the beginning of the new year by more than 300 million people all around the world, particularly in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Republic of Azerbaijan and a number of other countries in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and other regions and has been celebrated for over 3,000 years.



Nowruz in the Republic of Azerbaijan

The Republic of Azerbaijan is the only non-Persian-speaking country the government of which has declared Nowruz as a national festivity and celebrates it in a very beautiful way. Nowruz is an official holiday in the Azerbaijani calendar. Traditions and customs related to Nowruz ceremonies in this country are more similar to those in Iran as compared to other neighboring countries. Like Iran and some countries in the region, Nowruz is celebrated as a national and religious holiday in Azerbaijan at the beginning of spring, and as a long-standing tradition. During the communist era, Nowruz, as a national and religious holiday, faced many ups and downs and it was even declared banned on December 5, 1936. However, after the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991, Nowruz came to be recognized as a national festivity, which begins every year on March 20 and continues for five days, which are official national holidays.



Nowruz in Turkey

Nowruz, which is known by different names in Anatolia, such as “Sultan-i Nevruz”, “Nevruz Sultan”, “Mart

Dokuzu” (ninth of March), and “Mart Bozumu” (harvest time in March) is still a living and vibrant tradition in Turkish society.

Among the Tahtaci (woodworker) Turkomans, who take their name from their work with wood, the Nowruz festival is held on the 9th of March, old-style, and is called Sultan Nevruz. It is celebrated on 22-23rd March when the Tahtaci Turkomans climb up to the high plateaus. Nowruz is regarded by the Tahtaci Turkomans as a day when feasting takes place in memory of the dead. March 22, the day before Nevruz, is the time for welcoming Nowruz in and is devoted to Nowruz preparations, such as cleaning houses or preparing food. Pastry with spinach, eggs painted with onion skins, pastry, pieces of bread, sweets, candies, roasted chickpeas, and Turkish delight are among the dishes and food served on Nowruz day. Meanwhile, relatives and neighbors start visiting each other. On March 23, people wake up early. They go to the cemeteries wearing new clothes and with the food they have prepared beforehand. At the graveyard, people chat while drinking coffee. Everybody has to visit the graves close by and drink coffee or tea there. Later, people come together to eat. During the meal, people play musical instruments and sing folk songs, swings are suspended from the trees and children fly kites which are called “bayrak” (flag).



Nowruz in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has been celebrating Nowruz since its independence in order to revive the ancient tradition of the country. It is celebrated every year on March 21. In this country, according to old and new traditions, New Year is celebrated as a sign of reviving the ancient cus-

toms of the Turkmen people. In Turkmenistan, Nowruz is a holiday and according to the Turkmen people, Jamshid, the fourth king Pishdadian, called the day on which he ascended the throne as Nowruz. From the days before March 21, Turkmen decorate their towns and villages, as well as prepare receptions and parties. Nowruz ceremonies in Turkmenistan are usually held in the main squares of cities and villages, and young Turkmen men and women celebrate special days with games and entertainment such as horseback riding, wrestling, handkerchief jumping, cockfighting, ramming, and playing chess.

Like some other countries in which Nowruz is celebrated, the Turkmen women, too, cook Samanou or Samani, which is a special Nowruz delicacy.



Nowruz in Uzbekistan

Nowruz is celebrated widely in Uzbekistan. When Uzbekistan was part of the Soviet Union, celebrations of Nowruz were generally unofficial, and at times even prohibited. Currently, Nowruz is an official public holiday in Uzbekistan and is always celebrated on March 21.

In preparation for the holiday, people tidy their homes and buy new clothes. Before, during, and after Nowruz, it is customary to prepare sumalak (samanou in Persian), the main ceremonial dish of the holiday. Sumalak is a sweet paste made entirely from germinated wheat and is cooked in a large pot. To prepare sumalak friends, relatives, and neighbors – usually women – gather around the pot, all taking a turn to stir the mixture. When ready, sumalak is distributed among neighbors, relatives, and friends. At Nowruz, people also visit relatives and friends and give presents to children.



Nowruz in Iraq

Nowruz is considered the most important festival in the Kurdish culture of Iraq and is a time for entertainment such as games, family gatherings, preparation of special foods, and the reading of poetry. The celebration of Nowruz has its local peculiarities in different regions of Kurdistan. On the eve of Nowruz, in southern and eastern Kurdistan, bonfires are lit. These fires symbolize the passing of the dark season, winter, and the arrival of spring, the season of light. The 17th-century Kurdish poet Ahmad Khani mentions in one of his poems how the people, youth and elderly, leave their houses and gather in the countryside to celebrate Nowruz.



Nowruz in India

In India, the Parsi community celebrates the Iranian New Year in a similar fashion as is around the world. People decorate their houses and wear new clothes on the occasion of Nowruz. A visit to the Fire Temple, the place of worship of the Parsi community, is a ritual followed on Nowruz every morning. Special prayers are

offered and once the religious rituals are done, Parsis celebrate the day with various delicacies. In India, prominent numbers of the Parsi community still remain in Mumbai and Gujarat, who celebrate Nowruz with ardor.



Nowruz in Kazakhstan

This day has been celebrated for centuries by the people of Kazakhstan. In modern Kazakhstan, Nowruz is celebrated for three days - from March 21 to March 23. It is a public holiday. The main principles and traditions of the holiday have not changed. As before, people wish each other well-being. In cities and villages, they clean park areas, plant seedlings, organize large-scale festivals, performances of favorite Kazakhstani artists, national sports tournaments, culinary competitions of pilaf (Central Asian rice dish), and nauryz-koje cooking. Each year, the capital of Kazakhstan - the city of Nur-Sultan (Astana) - stands out with its cultural and entertainment program. The main events, according to tradition, are held in open areas of the city and in the territory of the EXPO exhibition.



Nowruz in Kyrgyzstan

Nowruz celebrations are held in Kyrgyzstan to greet the coming of a new spring. Although the festival has been celebrated since ancient times, the celebration of Nowruz in Kyrgyzstan on March 21 was officially established by the law of the Kyrgyz Republic only on Feb. 5, 1991. On the night from 20 to 21 March, according to tradition, Muslims cook sumolok (porridge) from sprouted wheat (barley, millet) by adding flour, as well as dried apricots and raisins for flavor. While porridge was boiling, people sing songs all the night and tell legends. People pray that the year would be rich, productive, peaceful, and prosperous.



Nowruz in Pakistan

As spring approaches, a ceremony called Basant Day is held in Pakistan. People go to the rooftops from night to morning to prepare all kinds of food and celebrate. They listen to music and fly kites. The main center for Basant celebrations in Pakistan is Lahore, the country's cultural capital. In Pakistan, Nowruz is also called "Alam Afroz" meaning the newly arrived day, which illuminates the world with its arrival. On Nowruz, people send each other colorful greeting cards decorated with flowers and nightingales. Nowruz calendar is of special importance to them. Different religious and social groups describe Nowruz on the first page of their calendar and call that calendar "Jantri".



Nowruz in the land of Taleshan (People of Talesh)

(Iran and Caucasus)

■ Changiz Shakuri
Master of Political Geography

Talesh is the name of a tribe with an ancient history that lives in a region with the same name located to the west of the Caspian Sea. This region starts from the Sefid-Rud river in the Gilan province of Iran and extends to the Kura (or Cyrus) river, parallel to the Talesh mountains, in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Before the annexation of a part of Talash geography to Russia, which was formed as a result of the disgraceful Treaty of Turkmenchay, all of Talash was part of Iran as a result of which the culture and civilization of Talesh were of a unified identity under the banner of a single religion and language.

The Talesh region of Iran includes the cities of Astara, Talesh, Rezvanshahr (Talesh-e Doulab), Masal, Shanderman, and parts of Fouman, Shaft,

Sowme'eh Sara, and Anbaran, covering an area of 5413 square meters and a population of about 600,000. The Taleshan population in the Republic of Azerbaijan is also about 800 thousand people, excluding the Talesh diaspora in Russia. Available information proves that the language spoken by the people of Talesh is rooted in Old Persian (Asgari Khanqah, Asghar: 1388-89, 13).

Nowruz, not only has a great role in the identity and solidarity of today's Iranian society, but it can be a connecting thread between all those who love and celebrate Nowruz outside the geographical borders of Iran. This is because the common culture and mythological symbols play the greatest role in the solidarity of nations, and the perpetuity of national and religious such rites as Nowruz are

important from this point of view.

The culture of the people of Talesh is a mixture of customs, beliefs, and national Iranian traditions combined with mystical-religious elements. This fusion has been able to establish a musical culture the scope of which ranges from “Nowruz chants” (as a symbol of national beliefs in this community) to “religious poems, in which religious leaders are praised on the occasion of their birthdates.” (Kazemi, 2010) The people of Talesh living on the other side of the Iranian border celebrated ancient Iranian festivals and rites with greater enthusiasm than the people of this ethnicity living in (Ibid.)

What follows are some details of the important customs and traditions of the people of Talesh during Nowruz.

• Frying and roasting edible seeds and rice:

Women of Talesh roast and fry rice and other edible seeds like lentils and wheat after soaking and draining them, usually on fire and by using clay pots.

• Planting greenery and flower arranging:

About two weeks before Nowruz, the women and girls of the family put seeds like wheat, lentils, corn, peas, and orange in clay, porcelain, zinc, or plastic dishes filled with water and wait for them to sprout. Also, they pick fragrant forest violets and primroses and arrange them in the form of a small bouquet for Haft-sin as a symbol of the advent of spring and the revival of the earth. In some regions like Astara the branch of the evergreen and an oily plant with deep green color, which is called “Zargand” in the Taleshi dialect, are collected from the forest and used for decorating the Haft-sin table.

• Reciting Nowruznameh:

Reciting Nowruznameh is a custom, which usually begins at the beginning of the last month of the Iranian calendar (approx. around 21st February) and continues until “chaharshanbeh-suri” and some youth (2 to 4) go door to the door, knock the

door or ring the doorbell, enter the premises and start reciting poems, the content of which are in praise religious leaders, ethnic heroes, and nature. After that, the owner of the house comes out and gives them a gift, which is usually cash or some rice and the poem reciters also give a small branch of the buxus, which is a symbol of blessing, to the owner of the house and he/she puts it in the place where rice is stored.

An example of Nowruz letter poems in North Talesh (Caucasus):

Translation:	
It is spring, It is New Year	آوه سُوره، آوه سُور
When spring comes	وختی آوه سُور دَمَه
Everywhere is green	کاووبه، مَحول هَمَه
The swallow flies and comes	پَر سَتِلَه پری اومه
It is New Year, It is spring	آوه سُوره، آوه سُور

• Chaharshanbeh-Suri (Kulukuli Wednesday)

The people of Talash go to their local cemetery on the eve of the last Wednesday of the year to visit the graves and recite Fatiha for their deceased one. After it gets dark, they light fires in three or seven places using rice straw. Usually, the elders hug their little children and jump over the fire three times and recite certain poems.

Examples of songs in North Talesh language:

Translation:	
O Fire, Wednesday fire	کولوکولی چارشنبه
I give my yellowness	زر دیم دئو بَ تَ
O fire, give me your redness	کاشت سی بده بمن
O Fire, Wednesday fire	کولوکولی چارشنبه

• Nowruz special cuisines:

The nature in Talesh, the variety of food, and the art of cooking are three important components in cooking and preparing food for the last Wednesday of the year and the first day of Nowruz. Fish, which is usually the Caspian white fish, is stuffed with aromatic vegetables, pickles, and walnuts and fried and served with rice. "Lavangi" or stuffed chicken is also one of the most delicious local dishes. "Ba Satrama Ordak" or stuffed duck, is placed under the rice pot and cooked with its steam. "Sabzi Kuku" which is prepared from green vegetables, eggs, and garlic leaves, and also walnut patty, or "Vuzeh Kuku" which is prepared from walnut powder, vegetables, and spices are other special cuisines of Nowruz. But the most important food of the Talesh people is "Pateh" or "Tarah", which can be called the national dish of the people of Talash. This food is prepared from natural edible greens collected from the forest and is mixed with a little rice added to it and has healing properties and a special taste.

• Splashing water (Aw pashandi)

Early in the morning on the last Wednesday of the year and before the morning prayer, the head of the family jumps three times over the clear water of the nearby river or spring and brings some water home, and sprinkles it on the family members so that they wake up and jump over the clear water too. While jumping, they make a wish that their morals and our hearts would be as clear as water during the new year.

• Sizdah Be-dar day of nature:

The people of Talesh consider the 13th day of the month of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian calendar) as the day of harmony with nature and go to the heart of nature to spend the day. On this day, even the sick members of the family should stay at least thirteen steps away from their house and spend the day in nature. At noon time and upon hearing the midday call to prayer, young girls and boys tie the green sprouts they have brought from the Haft-sin table and wish that they would



be married before the end of the year and then throw it into the river. On this day, people play their local games and in addition to shopping at the local bazaar, the musicians perform music with such instruments as reed, sorna, and tambourine.

Among the social functions of Sizdah Be-dar, we can mention the familiarization of boys and girls of marriageable age with each other, listening to each other, and the glad tidings of possible upcoming wedding celebrations.

• Nowruz meeting and peacemakers "Eid Avini":

On the morning of the first day of Nowruz, the people gather in the house of the head of the community. At first, a literate and trustworthy person recites some verses of the Holy Quran, and then a Nowruzname reciter recites poems in praise of spring in a pleasant voice. And then those who have not been in good books for some time reconcile, shake hands and embrace each other.

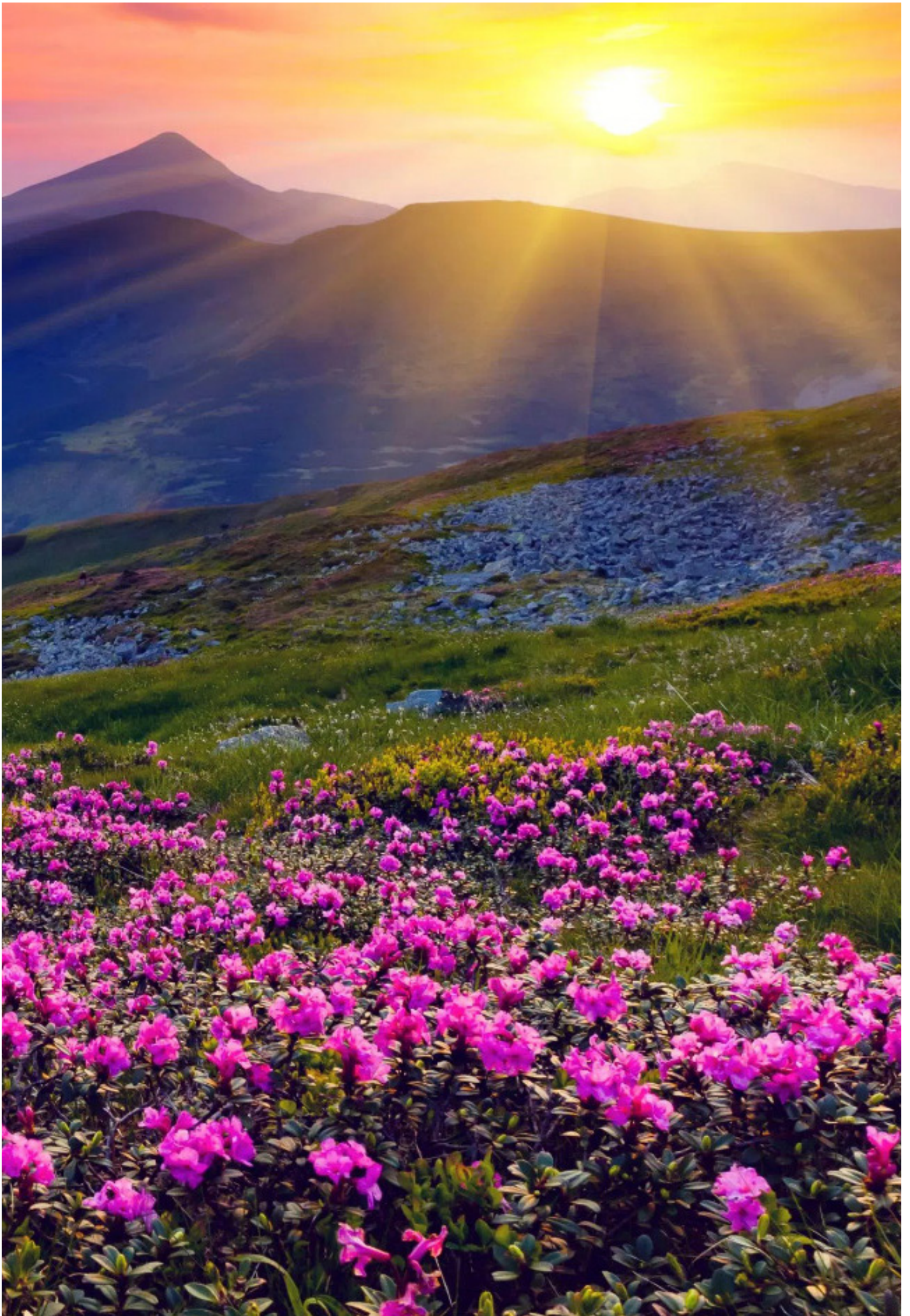
In Talesh villages, too, young people gather and start paying visits to all the houses, especially the houses of those who have lost a loved one or have



a sick person at home and wish them a year with good health.

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