

# **What we are never told about NOU ROUZ And HAFT SEENE**

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One of the most important Iranian festivals is called Nou Rouz - the New Year. Nou Rouz literally means the 'New Day' and is celebrated on the vernal equinox in spring. It is the rejuvenation of nature, the beginning of a new life and most appropriate time in nature to start a New Year. It is believed to date back to the time when Shah Jamshid celebrated the first spring, after the ice age.

The ancient Zarathushtian calendar was a solar calendar. It is repeatedly documented in the ancient Avesta writings like 'Haptan Yasht' (Ha-3), and the Yasna about: "the coming of the season at the proper time of the solar year." This clearly indicates that a solar calendar was maintained.

The ancient knowledge has been lost but the ancient culture still exists. The Iranians, although they no longer recognize the difference, have to this day knowingly or unknowingly preserved two different words for the New Year, that is Nou Rouz (New Day) and Sal-e-Nou (New Year). The Dari language, which, is the reminiscent of the ancient dialects and is spoken by the present day Zarathushties of Yazd, commonly say 'Sul-e-noo', meaning New Year.

In ancient times every year on the vernal equinox in spring, the Iranians celebrated Sal-e-Nou the New Year, but once in a few centuries they also celebrated Nou Rouz, the NEW DAY. It was based on their knowledge that the time taken by the earth to revolve around the sun involved a fraction when calculated in terms of the earth's rotation round its axis (365.24190 days). They were aware that the 365 days a year and the extra day (leap year) once in four year would still total up in fractions. Further their calculations showed them that the vernal equinox would repeatedly coincide with sunrise at a particular longitude although once in a few centuries. Whenever this event in nature occurred in their kingdom they celebrated it as NOU ROUZ. By taking this event in nature as the start of the Year, in that particular year a natural adjustment would

have also been made, setting the calendar to zero difference. As recorded in history on the spring equinox of 487 BCE Nou Rouz was celebrated at Takth e Jamshid when the first rays of the rising sun lighted the square stone set in the central hall of the palace. For that was the place chosen on earth where the sunrise would coincide with the equinox and set the calendar to zero.

Thus **Nou Rouz occurs** once in a few centuries and is the day **when the vernal equinox, coincides with sunrise at a given longitude**. We all know that the earth goes around the sun and when the sun is exactly over the equator it is called the vernal equinox and on that day the 24 hour period is equally divided between night and day. At a given longitude every year the equinox occurs at a different time. The time difference in Iran is about 5 hours 48 minutes and 20.16 seconds, when compared to the year before. Thus the New Year is ushered in, each year at different hours of the day, coinciding exactly with the equinox. This practice is still carried on in Iran as a nation.

The journey around the sun takes 365.24190 days, which gives us about 5:48:20.16 hours time difference every year, (give and take a few minutes each year) thereby every fourth equinox is about 23:13:20.64 hours ahead and so a day is added to the end of that year hoping to solve the equation. While in fact, the fifth year is started short by about 46 minutes and 39.36 seconds or .0324 days. Every 120 years a leap year is skipped to cover this shortfall. But even that result in a fraction  $120 \times 365 + 116\sqrt{4} = 43829$  days accounted for by our system of recording leap years. While in fact the earth has taken  $365.24190 \times 120 = 43829.028$  days. Thus the 120<sup>th</sup> year starts short by 40 minutes and 32 seconds (1440x.028), which only reduces the difference but does not zero it out. With present day technology and atomic clocks these inconsistency are more visible. Thus in ancient days the only way to zero the difference was to wait for the **sunrise to coincide with the equinox** at the same longitude and that is what the ancient Iranians did and called for a special celebration.

The Zarathushties having lost their kingdom were very soon influenced by the Semitic calendar and they gave up their solar calendar to adopt the alien lunar calendar, which some Zarathushties are following to this day, while the rest have reverted back to the solar calendar.

This year the equinox is on March 20<sup>th</sup> at 5:30:40Hrs Pacific Standard Time and 17:00:40 Hrs Iran Standard Time and will be celebrated by Iranians all over the world.

## HAFT SEENE

Nou Rouz as a festival is symbolically celebrated by arranging seven items on a green tablecloth. In Yazd and Kerman, where the Zarathushties were concentrated in Iran, upto the 1940's they laid seven trays, in which they put various items that were available to the family. Most of them stood either as a sign of thanks giving for its abundance in the past year or for a wish for its abundance in future. Of significance were the seven trays (Seene). Today in Iran seven items that start with the letter Sheen (Sh) or Seen (Se) are arranged. The Muslims use items starting with Seen because they cannot place wine (SHarab) on the table. In either case the items have philosophic meanings, which are not necessarily known to all the people. They do it as a tradition. Those who know the meaning may only know a version of the new philosophic meanings but not the real ancient ones. The new meanings are the ones that have been repeated over and over again to disguise the real ones and thereby making it possible to preserve the ancient Zarathushti culture and custom in Islamic Iran on a national level.

Like many other things not only was the real symbolic meaning behind the seven trays disguised but even SHEen was changed to SEen so that wine (SHarab) could be replaced by vinegar (SErkeh) and the tradition preserved. A few generations having gone by the Zarathushties of today have also lost the real ancient meaning and significance of this culture and have started believing in some version of the new philosophic meanings given to the seven items. So while scholars are busy discussing if Sheen is correct or Seen the grocery shops make a few extra bucks selling both those items.

With a view to the fact that in the near past seven trays were placed with any number of items in them, and these days we have seven items starting with Sheen or Seen, and the bas-relief's at Takht e Jamshid (Persipolis) depict seven people from each country carrying Nou Rouz gifts,<sup>1</sup> shows the importance of SEVEN.

***The real significance of seven was to represent THE SEVEN ETERNAL LAWS<sup>ii</sup>, which embodies the Teachings of Zarathushtra. It was a way of preserving and a reminder of the teachings of Zarathushtra.***

The celebration itself begins on the stroke of the clock indicating the time of the equinox and lasts for the next 21 days. To begin with, a fire or a lamp, or a candle is lit; prayers are said and the members of the family sitting round the table greet each other by sprinkling rose water and showing each other a mirror. Usually they say, 'May you be as fragrant as the rose and as bright as the mirror.' Then the elders give the others members of the family their blessings and gifts. With view to the fact that the equinox is at different hours of the day each year, the sequence of programs may differ. In any case, at the next appropriate moment, a visit is paid to the Temple where prayers are recited and then a visit is made to the house of the elders in the family, where usually the kids get their gifts. Zarathushties believed in enjoyment and making the best of life and any and every occasion was taken advantage of, thus visiting friends and family, parties and function continue for the first 21 days of the New Year.

### **NOU ROUZ -E- BASTANI KHOJESTEH BAAD HAPPY NEW YEAR**

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<sup>i</sup> See picture on cover. (Iran Zamin Vol -1 No.2)

<sup>ii</sup> The ancient meaning of the "**SEVEN ETERNAL LAWS**" in summary form is as under.

1- **VOHU MANA -Good Mind-** The mind, wisdom, should be used in a Good way and each one to their maximum capacity.

2- **ASHA VAHISTA -The Ultimate Truth -** Using the mind in a **Good** way and to its maximum, results in the understanding of the natural laws and we end up with good knowledge, good discoveries, and good inventions.

3- **KHASH ATRA VAIRYA- Good Guidance-** The information, the truth, the discoveries, what do we do with them? We have to use them to make life better, by giving Good Guidance, making Good Rules and Good Laws. That would also lead to Good Products and Good Services.

4- **SPENTA ARMAITI - Lawful Desire-**The result of Khash atra vairya is Righteousness, a Righteous Society, a Righteous Nation, a Paradise where people live in harmony with each other and with nature. Where

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there is No war, No pollution, No sickness, No lies, No thefts, and No fear. Where all DESIRES are LAWFUL.

5- **HAURVATATA - Perfection-** In such a Righteous Society people have a chance to advance Mentally, Physically and Spiritually. The result is PERFECTION. Perfect doctors, perfect engineers, perfect musicians, perfect farmers, perfect poets, perfect athletes, perfect priests, perfection in all fields physically and spiritually.

6- **AMERETAT - Immortality-** Perfection creates a mental stage in human life where one is Free from the Fear of Death, free from the fear of the unknown. Thereby one does not belong to the material world but to a timeless, spaceless state of mind where death has no meaning.

7- Having attained Perfection and lost the sense of fear, the final and seventh stage is attained. One understands and becomes one with, The **Wisdom in Creation, MAZDA AHURA**, the Power, the living Wisdom, the active, creative, expanding Force that keeps the universe in action and chain reaction, and the **Creator of this Wisdom AHURA MAZDA**.

For the ancient meaning of the "Seven Eternal Laws" in detail check the web site [www.ancientiran.com](http://www.ancientiran.com)