Nowruz, the Oldest New Year Celebration

Friedrich Hegel says: “In Persia first arises that light which shines itself and illumines what is around. The principle of development begins with the history of Persia; this constitutes therefore the beginning of history.”

Iran (Persia) with more than 7000 years civilization has influenced our life more than any other country or culture. A new era in its significant history, is the Declaration of World’s first Human Rights Charter issued at Nowruz about 3000 years ago by Cyrus the Great (کوروش بزرگ) who for the first time founded an Empire based on Human Rights including today’s Democracy, Equality, Right to Express, Freedom to Move and Work and Live where ever people would like.

The document has been hailed as the First Charter of Human Rights, and in 1971 the United Nations (UN) published a translation of it in all the official U.N languages. The document is considered superior to the Human Rights Manifesto issued by the French revolutionaries in their first national assembly.

Nowruz means a New Day, a new beginning. While Nowruz as an Iranian festival of spring has a record of several thousand years, but significantly it has been since 2568 years ago celebrated as a new day for an Empire based on Human Rights values. Also UNESCO has registered Nowruz under the name of Iran. Nowruz is also celebrated in a large number of today’s countries.

Nowruz marks the first day of spring and the beginning of the Iranian year.

Nowruz is celebrated on the day of the astronomical vernal equinox (in Finnish kevätpäivätasaus), the start of spring in the northern hemisphere, which usually occurs on March 20-21.
At the time of the equinox, the sun is observed to be directly over the equator, and the north and south poles of the Earth lie along the solar terminator; sunlight is evenly divided between the north and south hemispheres.

The Iranian calendar is an Astronomical Solar Calendar, one of the longest chronological records in history and it is all the time used in Iran as the main official calendar. Due to the long history and civilization of Iran, Iranian calendar has three starting points:

1. **Beginning of Civilization**: This is when Iranian Civilization began over 7000 years ago i.e. when the first cities and civilized life in the world was formed in Iran among which **Sialk of Kashan, Shahrse Sukhteh** in south of Iran can be mentioned.

2. **Establishment of Persian Empire**: This is the beginning of the official Persian calendar, since 3000 years ago, and it is the independence date of the Iranian Empire (Persian Empire) which also includes the Iran today. Based on this solar calendar most of today’s calendars including the western calendar, (having 365 days in a year) are formed. This calendar is a national calendar for most Iranians in the country (such as Zoroastrians among many others) and also for Iranians living abroad as well.

3. **Enhancement of Calendar**: The present governmental calendar, called Jalali Calendar (1388), is now used as an administration calendar in official affairs of the country. This calendar has nothing to do with the independence date of Iran, but the previous Persian calendar was devised in 1077 CE by Persian astronomer Khayyam and a group of Persian royal astronomers making it the most exact calendar of our today world.

All names of Iranian months come from the Persian Zoroastrian cosmology, where many feasts, festivals and rituals are introduced to honor of the nature and creature. Nowruz, the most elaborate one, was to celebrate **Ahura Mazda** (God) and the Holy Fire at the spring equinox.

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The name of official Iranian months, all originated from Persian Zoroastrianism.
Many of Nowruz and other Persian celebrations such as Yalda (in Finnish Joulu, in English Yule or Christmas) have their origin in Persian Mithraism and Zoroastrianism. Iranians are through their National celebrations, traditions and official calendar purely influenced by Zoroastrian traditions and values from which the most important are: Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds (بی‌گناهی - گفتارگی - کردارگی). This is because the Zoroastrian traditions and thoughts have been the crenel of Persian culture and Iranians life.

As is well known, Zoroastrianism has also widely influenced other cultures especially Christianity and other main religions (see www.persia.edublogs.org). Iran is one of the few countries where all main religions (Islam, Christianity, Jewish and Zoroastrianism) live side by side in peace. Even though Nowruz is not a festival of Christians in Iran or elsewhere but what is called Easter in Christianity (in Finnish pääsiäinen) is strongly influenced by Persian Nowruz traditions. However, Iranians celebrate Nowruz at home and not in the Mosque or Church!

In the past and also in many of today fests, Iranians use to have the Holly Fire in all their celebrations, especially at:

**Yalda** (or Shabe Chelleh): which in English corresponds to Yule or Christmas and in Finnish Joulu, is the Celebration of Birth of Light (see www.persia.edublogs.org).

**Sadeh** is an ancient Iranian tradition which means “hundredth” and refers to one hundred days and nights (50 days and 50 nights) left to the beginning of the new year Nowruz. **Sadeh** is a mid winter fire festival. It is a festivity to honor the Holly Fire and to defeat the forces of darkness, frost, and cold.

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**Mehrgan** is the festival of beginning of the winter and the harvest time. Mehr in Zoroastrian Holly book, Avesta, is "Miora" and in ancient Persian it is called Mitra/Mithra or Mehr. Mithra (Mehr) is the Persian Messiah born from her virgin mother Anahita (Note: the same story as Mary and Jesus).

Nowruz preparation begins early in March with **khane tekani** (house cleaning). This tradition stems from the Zoroastrian concern with cleanliness as a means to keep Evil away. As Nowruz is a feast of hope and renewal, Iranians greet the New Year freshly showered and garbed in new clothes. An important part of the New Year rituals is setting the **Haft Seen**, a table containing seven items starting with the letter “S”, which each represent one of the seven creations and their holy protectors:

1. **Sabzeh** (freshly grown greens, in Finnish pääsiäisruoho): The color green is the national color of Persians; therefore, wheat, barley or lentil sprouts were grown in a dish to symbolize rebirth and prosperity. This element is also transferred from Nowruz to Easter (in Finnish Pääsiäinen).
2 - Samanu (Mâmmî):
Samanu (in Finnish "mâmmi") is a pudding made of germinating wheat or malt mixed with flour and brought to a consistency. It is a representation of the excellence of Persian cuisine. This element is also transferred from Nowruz to Easter (in Finnish Pââsiäinen).

3 - Sonbol (Hyacinth, Hyasintti): A pot of flowering hyacinth or narcissus heralds the rebirth of nature and the coming of spring with its strong fragrance. Also this element is transferred from Nowruz to Easter (in Finnish Pääsiäinen).

4 - Serkeh (vinegar, etikka):
Vinegar is a symbol of fermentation, having originated as grapes and undergone many transformations. It symbolizes a tasty preservation and represents age and patience.

5 - Sumac (sumakkipuun marja):
Sumac berry is said to be the spice of life. Sumac brings to mind the color of sunrise and with the appearance of the sun, Good conquers Evil.

6 - Senjed (Jujube, jujuban hedelmä):
Jujube, the Lotus tree berry, represents love. It was said that when the lotus tree is in full bloom, its fruit and fragrance make people fall madly in love. The tree symbolizes shelter and security and Senjed is placed on the New Year table to motivate nature's rebirth.

7 - Seer (Garlic, valkosipuli):
Fresh garlic is used to ward off evil omens and represents medicine (as it lowers blood pressure) and peace.

Apart from the seven main Haft Seen items, other elements and symbols are also placed on the table:

Eggs (خم مرغ): Painted eggs are a symbol of fertility corresponding to Sepanta Armaiti, or mother earth, in Zoroastrianism. The eggshell symbolizes the sky and the boundaries of the universe. Also this element is transferred from Nowruz to Easter (in Finnish Pââsiäinen).

Apple (سیب): In Iranian folktales, medicine men often split an apple in halves, giving one to each spouse to prevent infertility. Apple also represents beauty and health.

Mirror (آینه): Mystical Iranian literature extensively refers to mirrors as a representation of self-reflection and honesty. The word Ayneh (mirror) comes from Advenak, one of the aiding forces in the creation of man; therefore, Iranians believe mirror represents the images and reflections of creation.

Candlestick (شمع): Iranians believed Ahriman (the devil) could not enter wherever there was light; therefore, candles came to represent enlightenment and happiness and a flickering candle is placed for each child in the family around the bowl of fire or mirror.

Coins (سکه): Coins represent prosperity and wealth. They are also a symbol of Shahrivar, the Amshaspand which represents metals.

Narenj (نارنج): A sort of Persian Orange, which is placed in a bowl of water, symbolizes the revolving Earth or the twelve months of the year.
Fish: The last solar month, Esfand or Espand, is in the Pisces period (in Finnish Kala, in Persian بهار and on the eve of the New Year. It gives its place to Aries (in Finnish Oinas, in Persian بهار) and hence, goldfish represent an image of the changing of the year. Fishes are also one of the symbols of Persian goddess of water and fertility.

Poems of Hafez, Khayyam or Holy Book: Family may place also a Holy Book on the table; many also put the book of poems by the celebrated Iranian poet Hafez.

As it can be seen, most of above symbols can be seen also in the Easter tradition (عيد نوبي in Finnish Pääsiäinen) of Christianity especially in Nordic countries, Russia, and many of European countries. All of these have their roots in Persian tradition Nowruz. For example at Easter in Nordic countries e.g. in Finland, people have most of the above elements on their table including: Freshly grown greens (pääsiäisruoho يرخوپا), Samanu (mämmi سيمن), Eggs (kananmuna كسامن), Candlestick (kyntilät كائمت), Hyacinth (Hyasinti سبتي), Narcissus (Narsissi شمک) etc.

In Nowruz also a nice fellow called Baba Nowruz (بابا نوروز like Santa Claus) used to bring gifts for children and hope for people. Nowadays parents give the gifts to their children but Baba Nowruz brings the hope and happy Nowruz announcement for all people.

Today, in addition to Iran, the festival of Nowruz is celebrated in many other countries that were territories of, or influenced by, the Persian Empire. In West most of Nowruz traditions and symbols are appeared in Easter and Christmas.

For both ancient and modern Iranians Nowruz is a celebration of life, a feast of renewal and change; a time to visit relatives, friends and pay respect to older family members.

Once the New Year is announced, people exchange presents called Eydi, sweets are passed around and family members and relatives kiss each others, and every one is happy. The celebration of Nowruz lasts 13 days!

The first few days following the New Year are spent visiting relatives and friends. The sixth day of Nowruz is of great importance to Zoroastrians whom celebrate this day as the birthday of Zoroaster.

Here in Perspolис (نخست چمنس پارسه) representatives of all nations from the whole Persian Empire come to wish a happy Nowruz and bring gifts for the King. Perspolis was Ceremonial Capital of Persian Empire where Nowruz was celebrated.

Baba Nowruz in a Nowruz Festival. Santa Claus (Joulupukki) is another form of Baba Nowruz!
The thirteenth day of the New Year festival is called *Sizdah Bedar* when families attend picnics to avoid the bad luck associated with the number thirteen. *Sizdah* means thirteen, and *bedar* means to get rid of, i.e. "getting rid of thirteen". The bad luck number 13 in other cultures is derived from this ancient custom. On this day, *Sabzeh* of Haft Seen table, which has now symbolically collected all the sickness and bad luck, is thrown into running water.

**What We Have in Common?**

As we can see, most of our traditions have the same root and we all celebrate them in a way or other. Nowruz and its reflections are actively present in our today life worldwide. This shows us that we have a lot in common. Therefore, we all, being from different religions or countries can celebrate the start of spring, Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

**Nowruz**)  

*Happy Persian New Year, Nowruz to all Iranians and happy Nowruz, the beginning of spring, to all the world.*

The Iranian New Year Celebration, Nowruz, begins each year at Spring Equinox occurring 20-21 of March.

For more info see www.persia.edublogs.org