

# Spring Brings Happiness

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Norooz means "New Day" in Persian language. Norooz is the traditional festival which marks the beginning of the solar year as well as the New Year on the Iranian and several other national calendars. It is also the most widely celebrated Iranian holiday.

Norooz is a time of renewal and symbolizes rebirth, awakening, cleanliness and newness. A national tradition in almost all regions of Iran is the annual Norooz cleaning. Families wash their rugs and draperies, clean and wax their furniture and often repaint their homes' interior.

One of the ancient symbolic representations of Norooz is based around the idea of the triumph of good over evil. According to the Shah-nameh (The Book of Kings), the national Iranian epic by Ferdowsi, Norooz came into being during the reign of the mythical King Jamshid; when he defeated the evil demons (Divs) seizing their treasures, becoming master of everything and bringing prosperity to his people.

On the night before Norooz, the entire family gathers around a table (or spread) with an arrangement of several items, each of which symbolizes a wish or theme. Of all the items in this arrangement, seven

of them, starting with the Farsi letter "seen" (the English "S"), must always be included. The Farsi translation of number seven is "haft" -- hence the name Haft Seen.

The Haft Seen spread is usually put out a couple of weeks before the Norooz day and symbolizes the holiday season and its special mood very much like the Christmas Tree for the Western holidays.

Zoroastrians celebrated the creation of life by offering their deity, Ahura Mazda, seven trays, full of symbolic objects representing truth, justice, good thoughts, good deeds, prosperity, virtue, immortality and generosity.

The seven items starting with the letter "seen" in the contemporary Haft Seen are:

1-Senjed; the sweet, dry fruit of the lotus tree portraying love and happiness.

2-Sabzeh; or sprouts, usually wheat or lentil representing rebirth.

3-Samanu; a pudding like food in which wheat sprouts are transformed and given new life as a sweet after a lengthy and sophisticated cooking process representing prosperity.

4-Seer; or garlic, representing medicine and health.

5-Sib; or apple is standing for health and beauty.

6-Serkeh; or vinegar, representing age and patience.

7-Sumac; ground Sumac berries is the colour of the sunrise, symbolizing the victory of good over evil.

Iranian people never forget to place their Holy Book (Qur'an) on the Haft Seen table. Other items often included with the Haft Seen are some flowers, sugar cookies or pastries called Shirini, a mirror, candles, eggs, and a bowl with goldfish. Looking at the goldfish at the turn of the year is believed to bring good luck and fortune.

After announcing New Year (which has been calculated exactly) all the family members kiss each other on the cheek and then the elder people i.e. grandfathers give some money or other gifts to their young children as a New Year present.

In the first days of the New Year, the people visit their relatives and friends and renew the friendships. The festival lasts for 13 days during which all the schoolboys and girls are on vacation. Finally on the 13th day, all leave their houses for outskirts carrying their Sabzeh with them, and have their lunch in open space. Also, on this day, the gold fishes are set free in the streams or in the pools so that they may enjoy the nature's resurrection. By the end of the 13th day, the festival ends too, and people particularly children wait impatiently for the next year's arrival.