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On the Occasion of Iranian New Year 1389

By *Firouzeh Mirrazavi*



Haftseen in White House - March 2008

Although the present Iranian Year (1388) has witnessed numerous developments either in domestic and foreign arenas; developments that have changed Iran's and Iranians' image among the world's citizens.

Although Iranian people have faced with lots of bitter and awe-inspiring realities and problems that affected their lives grossly.

Although the debates over stronger measures against Iran - from sanctions, enforcing blockade to military strikes - have been increased in different circles around the world from elites and punditry to politicians and military commanders.

There is coming New Iranian Year (1389) in just a few days, there is coming Norooz.

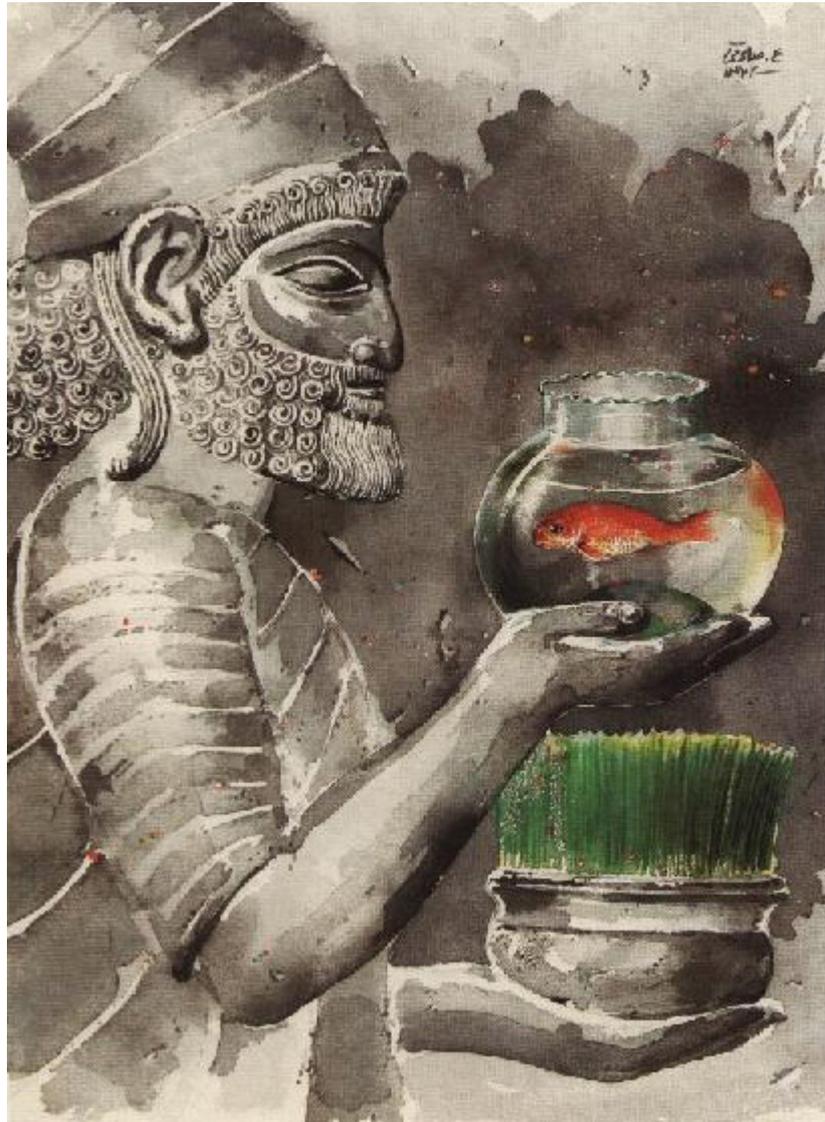
Norooz is a relic of ancient times. A memory of old tales and epics, a celebration of rebirth and rejuvenation. Spring has arrived and the previous year with all its events, good or bad, has passed. Renewed hope anticipates new achievements.

Norooz (Nowruz) in Persian means "New day". It is the beginning of the year for the peoples of Iran (Greater Iran, including: Afghanistan, Arran (Republic of Azerbaijan) and Central Asian Republics).

It begins precisely with the beginning of spring on vernal equinox, on or about March 21. Tradition takes Norooz as far back as 15,000 years--before the last ice age.

King Jamshid is said to be the person who introduced Norooz celebrations. Some 12 centuries later, in 487 B.C.E., Darius the Great of the Achaemenian dynasty celebrated the Norooz at his newly built Persepolis in Iran. On that day, the first rays of the rising sun fell on the observatory in the great hall of

audience at 06-30 a.m., an event which repeats itself once every 1400-1 years. The Persepolis was the place the Achaemenian king received on Norooz, his peoples from all over the vast empire. The walls of the great royal palace depict the scenes of the celebrations.



We know the Iranians under the Parthian dynasty celebrated the occasion but we do not know the details. It should have, more or less, followed the Achaemenian pattern. During the Sasanian time, preparations began at least 25 days before Norooz. Twelve pillars of mud-bricks, each dedicated to one month of the year, were erected in the royal court. Various vegetable seeds--wheat, barley, lentils, beans, and others--were sown on top of the pillars. They grew into luxurious greens by the New Year Day. The great king held his public audience and the High Priest of the empire was the first to greet him. Government officials followed next. Each person offered a gift and received a present. The audience lasted for five days, each day for the people of a certain profession. Then on the sixth day, called the Greater Norooz, the king held his special audience. He received members of the Royal family and courtiers. Also a general amnesty was declared for convicts of minor crimes. The pillars were removed on the 16th day and the festival came to a close. The occasion was celebrated, on a lower level, by all peoples throughout the empire.

A major part of the New Year rituals is setting a special table with seven specific items present, Haft Sin (Haft chin, seven crops before Islam). In the ancient times each of the items corresponded to one of the seven creations and the seven holly immortals protecting them.

Today they are changed and modified but some have kept their symbolism. All the seven items start with the letter S; this was not the order in ancient times. Wheat or barley representing new growth is still present. Fish the most easily obtainable animal and water are present. Lit candles are a symbol of fire. Mirrors are used today, origin unknown. These were expensive items in ancient times and were made from polished metal. It is unlikely that all households would have one. Zoroastrians today place the lit candle in front of the mirror. Wine was always present. Today it is replaced by vinegar since alcohol is banned in Islam.

Egg a universal symbol of fertility corresponding to the mother earth is still present. Garlic is used to warn off bad omen. Samano a thick brownish paste is present today. It is a nutritious meal and could have been part of the feasts. Coins symbolizing wealth and prosperity, fruits and special meals are present as well.

Ferdowsi the great Iranian epic poet described this auspicious event in Shahnameh:

*On Jamshid as the people jewels streamed,
They cried upon him that New Year beamed*

*On Farvardin Hormuz in this bright New Year
Bodies were freed from pain all hearts from fear*

*New Year new king the world thus rendered bright
He sat resplendent on the throne in light*

United Nations General Assembly recognized the International Day of Nowruz, a spring festival of Persian origin.

According to the preamble of the resolution on the International Day (document A/64/L.30/Rev.2), Nowruz, which means new day, is celebrated on 21 March, the day of the vernal equinox, by more than 300 million people worldwide as the beginning of the new year. It has been celebrated for over 3,000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions.

The Assembly called on Member States that celebrate the festival to study its history and traditions with a view to disseminating that knowledge among the international community and organizing annual commemoration events.

Welcoming the inclusion of Nowruz into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 30 September 2009, the text notes the festival's "affirmation of life in harmony with nature, the awareness of the inseparable link between constructive labour and natural cycles of renewal and the solicitous and respectful attitude towards natural sources of life".

Best wishes for the New Year and the advent of spring to all Iranians and all the peace-loving people around the world.

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