

Norouz, a National Celebration Endorsed by the Faith

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The Resurrection of the nature is celebrated by the birds which sing, by plants which blossom and by the nice spring breeze. After the cold days and nights of the winter, the pleasant spring days and nights are presented to us by our Gracious God. And Norouz (literally meaning new day) is the celebration of these blessings plus many others. To be thankful, let's start with creating better communication with our Merciful Creator - the One and Only God Who out of His Mercy, showers His innumerable blessings upon us. Let's decide to be better servants of Him through being better to His creatures, and to our own souls.

Norouz celebrations are regarded by us as the celebration of, among other things, the revival for of the earth, the resurrection of the nature and the blossoming of the flowers of life, love and affection. Norouz contains the stories of growth, renewal, refreshment and joy. Norouz or in fact the early spring is a proof of the Resurrection, there coming back to life of the dead for judgment and their eternal life. The Islamic supplication recited by Muslims on the eve of Norouz indicates their faith in the power of God, in His Mercy, in His Wisdom and in the fact that human beings need to change for the best:

“O the One Who changes the condition and the conditions,

Change our condition into the best condition.”

Norouz is indeed also an opportunity for removing hostilities and misunderstandings, replacing the same with peace and love. Like rain, it can offer purity and freshness to the souls.

Norouz, being an ancient and national feast, starts on the first day of each solar year. This celebration has its roots in the ancient custom and traditions of Persians and since Norouz is also endorsed by Islam, Iranians and other Persian-speaking nations who believe in religious teachings and have been loyal to national traditions have kept it alive. In fact, Norouz has been the only national festival of Iranians which not only continue to be held, but also gained increased significance after Islam, because of being in harmony with Islamic beliefs. And boosting national solidarity is another fruit of Norouz celebrations. In fact, Norouz presents a clear picture of Iranians' religious-national culture and is a great factor in the unity of their hearts. Of course, Iranians, being very hospitable, share their Norouz joys with any well-meaning visitors, irrespective of their nationality, colour and creed.

The rich, comprehensive Islamic culture gave a Divine colour to the Norouz celebrations. Norouz being harmonious with human nature received the stamp of approval from Islam and was enriched by the praiseworthy Islamic traditions and manners. In fact, Norouz has been recognized by Islam and has also received spiritual, humane manners from Islam.

It is quite worthwhile to mention here an Islamic narration about Norouz : “One of the friends of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq(AS) the sixth Infallible Imam of the Shi’a quoted that ‘On Norouz I met Jafar as-Sadiq(AS) and His Holiness asked me if I knew about that day. I answered that as far as I knew, on Norouz the non—Arabs celebrate and exchange gifts. Then then the Imam (AS) said, “Norouz is the day on which Allah took the covenant from His servants to worship Him only, not to associate anyone or anything in deity with Him and to believe in His Messengers (AS). And Norouz has been the first day of the rising of the sun and has been the day on which the flowers on the earth were created. And Norouz has been the day of the landing of Noah(AS)’s Ark on the Judi mountain., the day of the descent of Arch-Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH), the day of the breaking of the idols in Ka’ba by Prophet Ibrahim (AS), the day of the allegiance of the companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) of Islam with Imam Ali(AS) for his having become the Amir al-Mu’minin (Commander of the believers) and the day of Imam Ali(AS)’s victory over Nahravan rebels.”

And it has also been quoted from Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (AS) that His Holiness said: “On Norouz do *Ghusl* (Islamic ritual ablution), wear your best, scent yourselves with the best of perfumes and you had also better fast on that day.” This Islamic narration clearly points to the fact that Norouz is regarded a blessed feast in the Divine culture.

Likewise, it has been narrated that on Norouz some Persians brought sweets as a gift to the commander of the believers - Imam Ali (AS). The Imam (AS) asked what the sweets were for. The Persians replied that the sweets had been prepared for the Norouz celebration. The Imam (AS) accepted the gift with a smile and then said: "Make every day Norouz for us." Imam Ali's accepting the Norouz gift and his talking in a friendly joking way about that can be regarded as another proof of the approval of Norouz by the Infallible (AS).

Among the constructive, useful aspects of customs related to Norouz are the house-cleaning custom observed to welcome Norouz as well as buying new clothing for all family members, and also for the less privileged people, especially the needy orphans, exchanging gifts and more importantly visiting relatives, and friends and wishing them the best for the new year. Obviously, these customs are quite approved of and encouraged by Islam, because they breed affection and unity among the people. And of course starting the new year with sincere prayers to God is a great blessing, since remembering God and supplication to Him with monotheistic prayers revives one's soul, just as the spring breeze revives the plants. And as per Islamic teachings, Muslim Iranians also recite verses from the Holy Qur'an on the eve of Norouz, including verse 190 of chapter 3 (Al-i-'Imran) which points to Allah's signs: "*In the creation of Heaven and Earth, and the alternation between night and daylight, there are signs for wise persons.*"

In fact, following the introduction of Islam into Iran and the Iranians' embracing Islam, Norouz customs, influenced by the Qur'anic culture gained tremendous richness. Islam emphasizes the significance of visiting and sincere contact among people in particular among relatives and hence Iranians have made the custom of going to each other's houses and likewise receiving guests during Norouz, a very significant part of the Norouz celebrations. They know that the Prophet of Mercy – Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has taught that: “Visiting and seeing each other grows affection in the hearts.” and “Seeing brothers-in-faith gladdens the heart of the believers.”

In the same way, the Holy Qur'an and the infallible (AS) have urged the believers to do good to each other, in particular to the needy and so Norouz has also embraced these Divine teachings.

Following in the footsteps of the Infallible (AS), Imam Khomeini (ra) the great leader of the Islamic Revolution has considered the arrival of each new year as an opportunity for the elevation of the soul: “We hope in this year our nation will act as per the teachings of Divine Messengers (AS). The important point to be remembered is that egoistic, materialistic inclinations should be removed from one's heart and this goal takes constant care to be fulfilled..... I hope in this year the Iranian people and all the world Muslims will change for the better, working for God and never for selfish interests. May Allah help all strive for His cause, make Norouz blessed for all and unite all Muslims in the face of the world *Kufr*.”

Also, Ayatollah Khamenei, the esteemed leader of Islamic Revolution, has stated: “The arrival of each new solar year which coincides with certain changes in nature is an opportunity for the reformation and correction of one's spiritual, mental and also material conditions. The blessed prayer we are taught to recite at the beginning of each new year is a lesson for this very desirable transformation.

In this prayer we are asking Allah to make a blessed change in our spiritual condition. Of course it is Allah who transforms, but we are duty-bound to do our best for making changes for the best both in our souls, lives and in the world." And he also has expressed these beautiful meanings about Norouz: “Norouz, means a day which you make new through your actions. That means a day which you make new through your actions. The day of the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran -22nd Bahman, 1357 - was in fact a new day, because on that day the Iranian nation, aided by Allah fulfilled a great task. The day when the Imam of the Ummah severely rebuffed America – the world bully was a new day. So, we should make Norouz a Norouz in its perfect sense. Norouz is a new day in nature, while it is up to us to fulfill its human aspect.