

placed in a dish to sprout into a mass of green blades. On the day of Naw-Ruz the family gathers in new or freshly cleaned clothes. The table is decorated with fruit, cakes, coloured eggs and other treats, as well as symbolic objects such as a holy book and a mirror. Among the best known customs of Naw-Ruz is the haft-sin -- the 'seven S's'. These are seven objects beginning -- in Persian -- with the letter 'S', such as hyacinths, apples, lilies, silver coins, garlic, vinegar and rue, decoratively arranged on a table. A great deal of time is spent exchanging visits with friends and relations. The celebrations end on the thirteenth day of Naw-Ruz with a picnic in the country. The sprouted lentils are thrown into running water, carrying away the bad luck of the previous year.

Naw-Ruz is observed wherever Iranian culture has penetrated, notably among the Zoroastrians of India and in the emigré Iranian communities around the world. 'Naw-Ruz' is occasionally used as a personal name in Iran.

The Babi and Bahá'í Naw-Ruz

In the Badi` calendar of the Bab, Naw-Ruz is the day of Baha of the month of Baha, a day called by the Bab 'the Day of God' (yawmu'llah). It was also the 'Day of the Point' (yawm-i-nuqtih) -- i.e. the day of the Bab. Finally, it was a day associated with Him Whom God shall make manifest, the Promised One of the Bab. The remaining eighteen days of the month were associated with the eighteen Letters of the Living, an indication that the Bab envisioned the Naw-Ruz festivities encompassing the nineteen days of the month of Baha, just as the traditional Iranian Naw-Ruz festivities last thirteen days. During Naw-Ruz the Bab permitted the use of musical instruments and other luxuries prohibited at other times. During the night of Naw-Ruz each believer was to recite 361 times the verse 'God beareth witness that there is no God but Him, the Ineffable, the Self-Subsistent'; and during the day, 'God beareth witness that there is no God but Him, the Precious, the Beloved'. Fasting was prohibited during the whole month of Baha. During the six years of His mission, the Bab and His followers observed Naw-Ruz, although it is difficult to say how much this represents a distinctively Babi holy day. Bahá'u'lláh adopted the Babi holy day of Naw-Ruz as the feast day following the fast and stressed that it is associated with the Most Great Name, bearing as it does Bahá'u'lláh's own name. `Abdu'l-Bahá explained the significance of Naw-Ruz in

terms of the symbolism of the new life of spring. Bahá'u'lláh defines Naw-Ruz as the Bahá'í day on which the vernal equinox occurs. Thus, even if the equinox should occur just before sunset, that day -- which in the Bahá'í calendar began at the moment of sunset on the previous day -- is Naw-Ruz. At present, however, Naw-Ruz is fixed as 21 March for Bahá'ís in all countries outside the Middle East, regardless of exactly when the equinox occurs.

Naw-Ruz is one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended. It is generally observed with a meeting for prayer and celebration -- often combined with a dinner since the sunset on which Naw-Ruz begins ends the last day of the Bahá'í fast. As with all Bahá'í holy days, there are few fixed

rules for observing Naw-Ruz, although Iranian Bahá'ís often follow Iranian traditions. Many Bahá'ís use Naw-Ruz as a day of gift-giving. Bahá'ís do not usually observe Naw-Ruz for longer than one day. Since Naw-Ruz is the first day of a Bahá'í month, it is also the day of a nineteen day feast. It is not permitted to combine this feast with the observance of the holy day.

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