

Naw-Rúz Program

By Susan Gammage ¹

Introductory Music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIpHWBykBO4>

The Bahá'í New Year (or Naw-Rúz, which means "new day"), is the only Bahá'í Holy Day with no direct relation to the life of a Messenger of God. Like the ancient Persian New Year, it's associated with the spring equinox, that first day of the re-awakening of the planet. It is a time when the icy snows of winter have melted away and the first shoots of the flowers are just beginning to peek through. It is a time when the birds are just beginning to re-appear after their months down south.

The Festival of Naw-Rúz marks the end of the month of fasting and is a joyous time of celebration. It is a Bahá'í Holy Day on which work is to be suspended.

Did you know that Naw-Rúz is the only holiday celebrated by more than one religious group?

Some people claim that Naw-Rúz dates as far back as 15,000 years — before the last ice age, while others claim that it was founded by Zoroaster. Today, the festival is celebrated in many countries that were territories of, or influenced by, the Persian Empire: Iran, Kurdistan, parts of the Middle East, as well as in the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It is also celebrated by Persians living in Pakistan, Zanzibar, Turkey, Iraq, Albania, north-western China and parts of the Indian subcontinent.

In Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban, Naw-Rúz was banned until 2001 where it came back as popular as it was before the Taliban.

It is also a holy day for Ismailis, Alawites, and Alevis (branches of the Shiite Moslem religion). The Jewish festival of Purim is probably adopted from the Persian New Year. Naw-Rúz is celebrated rather like the Christian Easter, with many symbols indicating spring and renewal.

Persians believe that Naw-Rúz marks the first day when the universe started its motion. Moslems believe it's a day in which many events of great religious significance took place. Among them God's first covenant with mankind, the first rising of the sun, the grounding of Noah's ark on Ararat, Gabriel's first appearance to Muhammad, the destruction of the idols in the holy Sanctuary at Mecca, Muhammad's appointment of `Ali as His successor, the appearance of the Qá'im, and the final triumph of the Qá'im over the Antichrist. Such traditions echoed similar accounts of Naw-Rúz found in Zoroastrian literature. In the northern hemisphere Naw-Rúz marks the coming of spring.

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In the Bahá'í Faith, the Báb called the first day of his new calendar "the Day of God". The remaining eighteen days of the first month were associated with the eighteen Letters of the Living, hence the Báb's apostles imagined a celebration that would last nineteen days. Bahá'u'lláh, adopted the new calendar proposed by the Báb, and the use of Naw-Rúz as a festival for those who observed the fast.

As with all Bahá'í holy days, there are few fixed rules for observing Naw-Rúz. Bahá'ís all over the world celebrate it according to local custom.

During the time of the Báb, throughout the night of Naw-Rúz 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".

Persians start preparing for Naw-Rúz with a major spring-cleaning of their houses, the purchase of new clothes and flowers (hyacinths and tulips are popular). They believe that whatever a person does on Naw-Rúz will affect the rest of the year. So, if a person is warm and kind to their relatives, friends and neighbours on that day, then the new year will be a good one. On the other hand, if there are fights and disagreements, the year will be a bad one.

The most joyful time for a Naw-Rúz celebration is at sunset on the last day of the Fast. It seems almost directed by Bahá'u'lláh that it should be this way:

O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Rúz as a feast.
(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 24)

'Abdu'l-Bahá, explained the significance of Naw-Rúz in terms of spring and the new life it brings. As the fast ended, He said, they could turn a new page in their lives, inspired to right action and spiritual excellence.

Soon the whole world, as in springtime, will change its garb. The turning and falling of the autumn leaves is past; the bleakness of the winter time is over. The new year hath appeared and the spiritual springtime is at hand. The black earth is becoming a verdant garden; the deserts and mountains are teeming with red flowers; from the borders of the wilderness the tall grasses are standing like advance guards before the cypress and jessamine trees; while the birds are singing among the rose branches like the angels in the highest heavens, announcing the glad-tidings of the approach of that spiritual spring, and the sweet music of their voices is causing the real essence of all things to move and quiver. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 352)

Shoghi Effendi tells the story about the remains of the Báb, (the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh) finally being laid to rest:

On the 28th of the month of Safar 1327 A.H., the day of the first Naw-Rúz (1909), which He celebrated after His release from His confinement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had the marble sarcophagus transported with great labour to the vault prepared for it, and in the evening, by the light of a single lamp, He laid within it, with His own hands -- in the presence of believers from the East and from the West and in circumstances at once solemn and moving - the wooden casket containing the sacred remains of the Báb and His companion.

When all was finished, and the earthly remains of the Martyr-Prophet of Shiraz were, at long last, safely deposited for their everlasting rest in the bosom of God's holy mountain, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had cast aside His turban, removed His shoes and thrown off His cloak, bent low over the still open sarcophagus, His silver hair waving about His head and His face transfigured and luminous, rested His forehead on the border of the wooden casket, and, sobbing aloud, wept with such a weeping that all those who were present wept with Him. That night He could not sleep, so overwhelmed was He with emotion.

The most joyful tidings is this," He wrote later in a Tablet announcing to His followers the news of this glorious victory, "that the holy, the luminous body of the Báb ... after having for sixty years been transferred from place to place, by reason of the ascendancy of the enemy, and from fear of the malevolent, and having known neither rest nor tranquillity has, through the mercy of the Abhá Beauty, been ceremoniously deposited, on the day of Naw-Rúz, within the sacred casket, in the exalted Shrine on Mt. Carmel... By a strange coincidence, on that same day of Naw-Rúz, a cablegram was received from Chicago, announcing that the believers in each of the American centers had elected a delegate and sent to that city ... and definitely decided on the site and construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 276)

Arabic Chant of Naw-Rúz Prayer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIjFAtLzKv8&feature=related>

The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIV, p. 27)

This is the Day, O my Lord, whose brightness Thou hast exalted above the brightness of the sun and the splendors thereof... This is the Day whereon the hopeless have been clothed with the raiment of confidence, and the sick attired with the robe of healing, and the poor drawn nigh unto the ocean of Thy riches. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 273)

If we are not happy and joyous at this season, for what other season shall we wait and for what other time shall we look?

This is the time for growing; the season for joyous gathering! Take the cup of the Testament in thy hand; leap and dance with ecstasy in the triumphal procession of the Covenant! Lay your confidence in the everlasting bounty, turn to the presence of the generous God; ask assistance from the Kingdom of Abhá; seek confirmation from the Supreme World; turn thy vision to the horizon of eternal wealth; and pray for help from the Source of Mercy! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 351)

Here is the prayer that was chanted earlier, this time in English:

Praised be Thou, O my God, that Thou hast ordained Naw-Rúz as a festival unto those who have observed the Fast for love of Thee and abstained from all that is abhorrent unto thee. Grant, O my Lord, that the fire of Thy love and the heat produced by the Fast enjoined by Thee may inflame them in Thy Cause, and make them to be occupied with Thy praise and with remembrance of Thee.

Since thou hast adorned them, O my Lord, with the ornament of the Fast prescribed by Thee, do Thou adorn them also with the ornament of Thine acceptance, through Thy grace and bountiful favor. For the doings of men are all dependent upon Thy good-pleasure, and are conditioned by Thy behest. Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the Fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the Fast. And shouldst Thou decree that he who hath observed the Fast hath broken it, that person would be numbered with such as have caused the Robe of Thy Revelation to be stained with dust, and been far removed from the crystal waters of this living Fountain.

Thou art He through Whom the ensign "Praiseworthy art Thou in Thy works" hath been lifted up, and the standard "Obeyed art Thou in Thy behest" hath been unfurled. Make known this Thy station, O my God, unto Thy servants, that they may be made aware that the excellence of all things is dependent upon Thy bidding and Thy word, and the virtue of every act is conditioned by Thy leave and the good pleasure of Thy will, and may recognize that the reins of men's doings are within the grasp of Thine acceptance and Thy commandment. Make this known unto them, that nothing whatsoever may shut them out from Thy Beauty, in these days whereon the Christ exclaimeth: "All dominion is Thine, O Thou the Begetter of the Spirit (Jesus)"; and Thy Friend (Muhammad) crieth out: "Glory be to Thee, O Thou the Best-Beloved, for that Thou hast uncovered Thy Beauty, and written down for Thy chosen ones what will cause them to attain unto the seat of the revelation of Thy Most Great Name, through which all the peoples have lamented except such as have detached themselves from all else except Thee, and set themselves towards Him Who is the Revealer of Thyself and the Manifestation of Thine attributes."

He Who is Thy Branch and all Thy company, O my Lord, have broken this day their fast, after having observed it within the precincts of Thy court, and in their

eagerness to please Thee. Do Thou ordain for Him, and for them, and for all such as have entered Thy presence in those days all the good Thou didst destine in Thy Book. Supply them, then, with that which will profit them, in both this life and in the life beyond.

Thou, in truth, art the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 67-69)

Closing Music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-xwnb7kCuE&feature=related>