

## **NOWRUZ 21 MARCH 2018**

The first day of Spring marks the first day of the **Iranian** Calendar year. Now Ruz is also celebrated by large numbers of **Kurds** and **Assyrians**. *Now* means new and the word *ruz* means day, so *Nowruz* means starting a new. Iranian families gather around and visit each other. It is also the best time to re-experience the feeling of *mehr* (pure love). During the 12 day celebration of *Nowruz* all families talk about their best experiences of the last year and the things to which they are looking forward in the next year. A spirit of peace prevails.

There are many other things Iranians do for *nowruz* including *khane tekani* (cleaning the house) and preparing the *haft sin* – a tabletop display. The *haft sin* are seven symbols of love and renewal beginning with the letter S. Children look out for *Haji Firooz*, a Santa Claus type character with a blackened face and a red costume as he walks around the streets and entertains people by singing a special song.

*Charshanbe Suri* falls on the last Wednesday before Nowruz and is celebrated with firework displays and the jumping over of fires. A traditional rhyme '*zardi ye man az to, sorkhi ye to az man*' is chanted. Literally translated "my yellow is yours, your red is mine." It is an entreaty for the fire to take sickness, and problems and replace them with warmth and energy. It is a purification rite, which is traditionally regarded necessary before the arrival of Spring. Mixed nuts and berries are also served during the celebration.

*Sizdah Bedar*, falls on the day after the 12 days of Nowruz (April 2) It is a day of picnics as the Iranians celebrate the beauty of Nature.

## **ORTHODOX EASTER 8 APRIL 2018**

Countries that officially observe the Orthodox Easter period include: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, **Lebanon, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine.**

Easter celebrations in Orthodox Christian communities usually include a spit-roast lamb dinner and a display of hard-boiled eggs, dyed red to symbolize the blood of Christ. The egg was an important symbol in the mythologies of many early civilizations and was also connected with the springtime fertility rituals.

In Lebanon, many Orthodox Christians attend a church liturgy at Easter, whether it is on Sunday morning or midnight liturgy between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. On Easter Sunday, many families hold a special lunch consisting of turkey or chicken stuffed with nuts and served with rice. The afternoon is spent visiting friends and family members. Many homes have *maamoul* (cookies) on a plate with other delicacies such as chick peas covered with sugar and sweet almonds.

## **ISRA & MIRAJ 10 JUNE 2018**

Isra and Mi'raj is a two-fold event that commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and his ascent into heaven, according to Islamic belief. One night during the 10th year of Muhammad's prophecy, the angel Gabriel woke him and travelled with him to Jerusalem. Muhammad prayed at the site of the Temple of Solomon with the prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others. The Prophet Muhammad then rose to heaven (carried by Gabriel) from the rock of the temple mount, where many people believe that the Dome of the Rock sanctuary now stands. Allah instructed Muhammad about the five daily prayers that all Muslims must observe. This day is also known as the Night Journey.

## RAMADAN

Muslims worldwide fast (or *sawm*) during the hours of daylight in Ramadan. They do not eat, drink, smoke or engage in sexual intercourse during the fast. They also focus on reading the Koran (Qu'ran), donating to charities (*zakaat*), and certain activities such as refraining from gossip. Some people try to recite the entire Koran by the end of Ramadan.

Communal prayers and meals are held at mosques or in private homes in many Islamic communities in the evenings of Ramadan. The prayers and meals are usually well-attended. Some people spend the entire night praying or reading Islamic texts at a mosque, particularly on Laylat al Qadr which is in the last third of Ramadan. Many people of Islamic faith give money for various charitable causes, such as providing food and new clothes for those in need.

**Cards bearing the words Ramadan Kareem along with a suitable message such as: 'May your prayers and fast in this holy month of Ramadan help bring about peace and tolerance in the world we share.'**

**Activities for children** <https://www.thespruce.com/celebrating-ramadan-with-kids-2104317>

21 JUNE 2017 (10 JUNE 2018)

### LAYLAT AL QADR

Muslims believe that Laylat al Qadr marks the time when the Qur'an's first verses were revealed to the Islamic prophet Muhammed. It is also believed that this night marks their fate in the following year. Therefore, many Muslims pray in the night to God for mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. This practice is also called *Ehyaa*.

This "Night of Power" is considered the most appropriate time of the entire year to pray for salvation and blessings. It is believed that a Muslim's past sins are forgiven if the person prays throughout this night. Many Muslims spend this time of the year studying and praying. Some Muslims spend the whole night praying or reciting the Qur'an.

Some also believe that one who fasts perfectly during the night of Laylat al-Qadr may receive a personal greeting from an angel who will grant them a wish. It is believed that fasting is a way to improving one's self discipline and physical health, as well as gain spiritual benefits.

26 JUNE 2017 (15 JUNE 2018)

### EID AL-FITR

Eid al-Fitr is also known as the Feast of Fast-Breaking or the Lesser Feast. It marks the end of Ramadan and the start of a feast that lasts up to three days in some countries, with Eid al-Adha such as Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. It is one of Islam's two major festivals, being the other major festival. Eid al-Fitr celebrates the end of the fasting that occurs during Ramadan.

This event involves many Muslims waking up early and praying either at an outdoor prayer ground or a mosque. People dress in their finest clothes and adorn their homes with lights and other decorations.

Old wrongs are forgiven and money is given to the poor. Special foods are prepared and friends or relatives are invited to share the feast. Many Muslims may also

prepare festive meals to share, wear new clothes, visit relatives and give presents or candy to children. **Cards can also be sent, often featuring the words “Eid Mubbarak” (blessed Eid).**

Eid al-Fitr is a joyous occasion but its underlying purpose is to praise God and give thanks to him, according to Islamic belief.

**2 SEPTEMBER 2017 (22 AUGUST 2018)**

**EID AL-ADHA** (*EID E GORBAN in IRAN*)

Eid-al-Adha honours Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael when God ordered him to do this. However, just as Ibrahim was about to kill Ishmael, God put a sheep in his place. Some people dispute that the son of sacrifice was Isaac (Ishāq). Regardless, these events are remembered and celebrated at Eid al-Adha.

Muslims celebrate Ibrahim's complete obedience to the will of God during Eid-al-Adha. They remind themselves of their own willingness to sacrifice anything to follow God's commands. It also marks the end of the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Many Muslims make a special effort to wear new clothes or their nicest outfits, attend a prayer service at a mosque and to listen to a sermon. **They also personally greet or send paper or electronic Eid cards to family members, friends and business associates and give gifts to children.**

Some Muslims arrange to sacrifice or slaughter a cow, goat or sheep. The law in the United Kingdom only allows this in an official slaughterhouse. The meat is divided between family, friends and the poor. Other Muslims give money to charity to help poorer families and eat a meat-based meal. Mosques or other groups may arrange communal meals.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2017**

**ISLAMIC NEW YEAR (MUHARRAM)**

Muharram is the first month in the Islamic calendar. The tenth day is known as the **Day of Ashura** and commemorates that Noah left the ark and that God saved Moses from the Egyptians. **For Shi'a Muslims, the Day of Ashura is also a day of mourning** for Husayn ibn Ali. Husayn ibn Ali was a grandson of the Prophet Muhammed and was martyred in 680 CE at Karbala, currently in Iraq.

Some Muslims eat a symbolic meal or dessert on the Day of Ashura, known as Noah's pudding. The ingredients may include water, grains, pulses, fresh and dried fruit, salt and honey. The dish may be garnished with orange or lemon rind, spices, nuts and pomegranate seeds. Muslims are urged to enjoy the dish and to share it with their neighbours.