INFORMATIVE SPEECH ABOUT PERSIAN NEW YEAR

FOR

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“Earth, teach me to forget myself as melted snow forgets its life. …Earth, teach me regeneration as the seed which rises in the spring.” Those words were written by William Alexander, but they provide a window on how we look at the miracle of the Vernal Equinox, This is just a small demonstration the impact of the season has had on mankind for thousands of years, and probably no acknowledgement or celebration is as lavish and everlasting as the celebration of Persian New Year, known as Norouz. The first day of spring has been celebrated by the Persian culture for thousands of years and the tradition and meaning that has been shared from generation to generation honors the traditions and cultures of Middle Eastern life as well as the miracle of nature and the change of the seasons. The history, details, and impact on our culture are fascinating. Please enjoy a little step back in time and imagine the sights, sounds and aromas that accompany the celebration of Norouz…

According to a white paper published by Stanford University, No Ruz, or Norouz-the spelling can vary, means “New Day” in Farsi and is the festival of the first day of spring, known as the spring Equinox. We learn that it has been celebrated by “all the major cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, Sumerians, and Babylonians, among others,” and its traditions go back about three thousand years and are “deeply rooted in the traditions of the Zoroastrian belief system.” The article goes on to tell us that Zoroastrian was the religion of Ancient Persia before the advent of Islam fourteen hundred years ago. Although there are many complex aspects to the religion, the faithful believed that all forces of nature like earth, water, sky, animals, plants, justice, peace, health, beauty, and joy among others, which produced, protected and supported life, was good and was to be celebrated. Zoroaster, the architect of the religion, created and promoted many feasts and celebrations of different aspects of life and the last and most elaborate one was No Ruz, celebrating the Lord of Wisdom and the holy fire, and it was to be celebrated at the time of the spring equinox. The Achaemenid Empire, also known as the First Persian Empire, had four major residences-one for each season. No Ruz was celebrated at Persepolis, probably the most famous of all of the early Persian palaces.

In modern times, we can see how the ancient traditions have been translated and carried on. In an article from 2012 featured on the website for Radio Free Europe, we begin to learn of the tradition for having brightly colored eggs… and then breaking them. In other research, we discover the importance of fire in Norouz celebrations as well as the length of the festival and the age-old traditions still practiced today. Harvard University has a document called, “Celebrating Nowruz,” and in it, we learn many interesting aspects of this holiday. This paper reinforces the intent of the holiday to celebrate the end of one year and the beginning of the New Year. Many believe that this is the perfect time as the festival lasts thirteen days and traditionally begins with “spring cleaning,” clearly a concept that has permeated cultures all around the world! It is also customary to purchase new furniture and clothing for the family, all in anticipation of celebrating new life. On the night of the last Wednesday of the festival, there is a ritual called, Chahar Shanbe Suri, which is a fire jumping ceremony. People gather to light small bonfires and jump over the flames chanting, ““*Zardie man az to, sorkhie to az man*” which means, “May my sickly pallor be yours and your red glow be mine.” The time to shake winter’s oppression has arrived! Another tradition for the holiday is to set and maintain a table known as “Haft-Seen.” Translated this means Table of Sevens. Setting the table with at least seven things beginning with the letter “S” that represent the holiday is really at the foundation of the Persian lifestyle and love of nature, family and celebration. Some of the items found at the Haft-Seen table transport us to a place where time stands still and our senses are celebrated: Sumac to celebrate the sunrise and the spice of life, Senjed, which is sweet dried fruit to remind us of love and affection, Serkeh, or vinegar, to symbolize patience and age, Seeb is apples and represents health and beauty, and Sabzeh, sprouted wheat grass which stands for renewal and rebirth. There are many other items that can go on the table and each one causes us to think and marvel at the gift of life and all of its facets and phases. Candles represent radiant life, goldfish symbolize new life, and placing a mirror on the table reminds us to reflect on the year that has just passed.

The Persian poet, Rumi, said, “The truth was a mirror in the hands of God. It fell and broke into pieces. Everyone took a piece of it and they looked at it and thought they had the truth.” It is up to each one of us to look to tradition to learn a little more about ourselves, our communities, and the way in which we live and relate to one another. Celebrating Persian New Year gives us a window on how precious life and nature are as we find our own truth and I invite each one of you to think about this holiday and celebrate the miracles of life, nature, and rebirth. Thank you.