



Naw Ruz

Naw Ruz, meaning “the new day,” is the Bahá’í New Year festival. Naw Ruz is also the Zoroastrian New Year, which may have given rise to its celebration as Persian New Year as well. In addition, various Central Asian communities observe a version of this New Year holiday.¹

There are many western spellings of the Persian name for this holiday, but “Naw Ruz” is the most common for the Bahá’í holiday. It symbolizes the spring season and falls at the spring equinox, but it has been fixed at March 21st for those celebrating outside Iran. Bahá’í days begin at sunset, so the holiday will begin on the evening of March 20th. Naw Ruz marks the first day of the month Baha, which is the first month in the Bahá’í calendar. The New Year is a joyous day of celebration.

The Bahá’í Faith

In 1844, a young merchant from Shiraz who called himself “the Báb” (the “doorway” or “gate”) founded the Bábí Faith. The Báb believed that he was the gate to the final Imam. In 1863 in Baghdad, a follower of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, claimed to be the messianic figure expected in the Báb’s writings and founded the Bahá’í Faith. The Bahá’í Faith accepts that all world religions have true and valid origins. One of the central Bahá’í beliefs is that of progressive revelation, the concept that religious truth is revealed by God progressively and cyclically over time. Bahá’u’lláh taught that God intervenes throughout history at many different times through his messengers (such as Abraham, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad), called “Divine Messengers” or “Manifestations of God.” Bahá’ís believe that Baha’u’llah is the most recent Manifestation of God but is not God’s final messenger. The most central Bahá’í belief is unity because they believe that people should work together for the common benefit of all humanity. The Universal House of Justice is the governing body that guides the activities of the worldwide Bahá’í community with the intention of making the world a better place.

The Bahá’í Faith is commonly considered one of the world’s major religions, with more than five million Bahá’ís spread across virtually every country. The Bahá’í Faith is one of the most widespread religions in terms of geographical reach. The Bahá’í community in Iran is the largest Iranian non-Muslim religious minority.² The two most sacred places for the Bahá’ís are the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel and the Shrine of Bah’u’llah in Acre, Israel.

Naw Ruz

Naw Ruz is not only the Bahá’í New Year, but also an old Iranian celebration that marks the start of the Zoroastrian New Year. As time progressed, the Zoroastrian holiday became a secular holiday in Persia and continued to be celebrated after the spread of Islam in modern-day Iran. Therefore, it is a new year for both Iranians and Bahá’ís.

¹ The Outreach Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, *Celebrating Nowruz: A Resource for Educators*, <https://cmes.fas.harvard.edu/files/NowruzCurriculumText.pdf>, 3.

² “Statistics,” Bahá’í World News, accessed December 23, 2019, <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/statistics>.

For the Bahá'ís, Naw Ruz is one of the holidays in which work is suspended, and it was established to mark the feast day following the 19-day month (the Bahá'í calendar consists of 19, 19-day months) of fasting. There are no fixed rituals or practices associated with the holiday, which is typical of most Bahá'í Holy Days. Because the Bahá'í community is worldwide, the Bahá'í Faith intentionally does not impose one cultural tradition upon other traditions. Rather, practices that emerge organically based on the traditions of the local community are encouraged. In general, the New Year is celebrated with prayers, feasting, and joyful celebrations. These celebrations may look different depending on location.

As the Persian New Year, Naw Ruz (or Nowruz) marks the return of spring, and is associated with new beginnings.³ Traditions include spring cleaning the home, purchasing new clothing and furniture, and lighting bonfires.⁴ Those celebrating may also have a “haft seen” table, which holds seven items starting with S, that symbolize hopes for the new year.⁵

How Will Naw Ruz Affect the Global Workplace?

The celebration of Naw Ruz will vary based on the location and the traditions of the local Bahá'í community. However, Naw Ruz is generally celebrated with meetings for prayer and celebration, feasting, music, and dancing. Time may also be spent visiting friends and relatives and exchanging gifts. Additionally, since Naw Ruz is one of the nine Bahá'í holidays in which work is suspended, Bahá'í employees may take this day off work.

It is important to remember that Naw Ruz is also observed, albeit in different ways, by Zoroastrians, many Persian people around the globe, and others. As a result, employees belonging to multiple communities may ask for time off for this holiday.

Acknowledging Naw Ruz

More and more, we see companies providing educational resources to acknowledge a range of diverse holidays, holy days and religious festivals, including lesser-known holidays such as Naw Ruz. Holidays present an excellent opportunity for employers to support their religiously diverse employees and customers and reinforce their reputation as leaders in Diversity & Inclusion.

Greetings

If you would like to recognize the holiday with your colleagues and friends, it is appropriate to greet them with a simple “Happy Naw Ruz” or “Happy New Year.”

For more useful information on world religions, subscribe to Tanenbaum’s online resource, Religion at Work: A (Human) Resource. Visit <https://tanenbaum.org/religion-at-work-resource/> to learn more or contact Tanenbaum at workdiversity@tanenbaum.org!

³ Christina Mexouris and Artemis Moshtagian, “More than 300 million people will celebrate Nowruz (and you should, too), CNN travel, accessed December 23, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/20/world/what-is-nowruz-trnd/index.html>.

⁴ *Celebrating Nowruz: A Resource for Educators*, 5.

⁵ Caroline Framke, “Persian New Year, or Nowruz, explained,” Vox, March 20, 2018, accessed December 23, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/3/19/17138516/persian-new-year-nowruz-explained>.