

# Charshanbe Suri, bridging tradition and modernity

## Iranica Desk

In the ancient land of Persia, a tapestry of rituals and traditions weaves a rich cultural heritage that has withstood the test of time. Among these cherished customs, the Charshanbe Suri celebration stands as a beacon of tradition, deeply rooted in history and revered to this day.

As the people of Iran eagerly approach the joyous occasion of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, this year celebrated between March 20th and April 1st, Charshanbe Suri emerges to infuse a vibrant hue into the lives of the people on the evening of the Tuesday before the final Wednesday of the year.

In anticipation of the Charshanbe Suri festivities, as the last Wednesday of the year draws near, individuals of all ages hasten to make preparations for their forthcoming Nowruz celebrations. On the eve of Charshanbe Suri, it is customary for the younger generation to gather at the homes of their elders, reveling in each other's company. Marketplaces bustle with activity as people flock to procure supplies and provisions to host their guests.

Various combustible materials are readily available for purchase, while wish balloons adorn the market stalls, symbolizing hopes and dreams taking flight. Both the young and the old meticulously prepare themselves, striving to ensure that the night is one to be remembered — a night where bonds are strengthened, memories are forged, and traditions are upheld with reverence and joy.

## Lighting bonfires

With arms laden with light, this celebration casts a spell of illumination amidst the encroaching darkness. The sky may darken at night, but bonfires ablaze everywhere kindle a legion of lights, piercing through the veil of night. People joyfully leap over the flames and sing: "My yellowness for you, your redness for me."

This verse once served as a prayer recited by Persians in ancient times, beseeching the fire to carry away the ailments and worries of the past year, paving the way for a new year brimming with joy and happiness. Charshanbe Suri also serves as the inaugural step in heralding the arrival of spring, a season of renewal and rebirth.

The ancient and enchanting tradition of the Charshanbe Suri celebration centers around the ritual of lighting the fire. Following the burning of shrubs and the extinguishing of flames, the remaining ashes are meticulously poured behind the houses. A gentle knock on the door signals the next phase of the ceremony.

From within, a voice asks, "Who is there?" The visitor outside responds, "It is me." Further inquiry follows, "Whence do you come?" The reply echoes, "From the wedding feast." The voice asks, "What tidings do you bring?" The answer rings out, "Good health." In that moment, the door swings open, ushering in the embodiment of good health with a warm embrace.



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## Problem-solving nuts

Following the conclusion of the fire-jumping festivities on the eve of Charshanbe Suri, family members assemble to partake in a time-honored tradition: roasting *ajil-e moshkel gosh*, or problem-solving nuts, over the flames. These nuts and seeds, seasoned with salt, would be savored by all in attendance.

The assortment of nuts and seeds include pumpkin seeds, pistachios, watermelon seeds, wheat, hazelnuts, almonds, chickpeas, and sesame seeds. It was believed that consuming these delectable snacks would instill kindness and compassion within the individual, dispelling any lingering feelings of animosity or envy. This act of communal snacking served not only to nourish the body but also to nurture the spirit, fostering a sense of harmony and goodwill among loved ones gathered together on this auspicious occasion.

## Shahnameh reciting

Reading poetry from the Shahnameh (a medieval epic written by the poet Abolqasem Ferdowsi) on the eve of Charshanbe Suri around the fire is another tradition carried out by the elders of the family on this night. Individuals with skills in music also showcase their art with their instruments and recite poems describing the arrival of spring. This practice, which is also performed in other celebrations such as the Yalda Night ceremony, is usually considered an integral part of ancient Iranian rituals.

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## Pot breaking

In the annals of Charshanbe Suri traditions, a member of the household would carefully fill a clay pot with water, carrying it to the rooftop or the highest point in the village. With a steady hand and a firm heart, the person would release the pot, letting it plummet to the ground below. As the pot shattered upon impact, the water within would cascade onto the earth.

Ancient wisdom dictated that this ritual act served as a protective measure against misfortunes, with the breaking of the pot symbolizing the dispersal of calamities. The flowing water, a beacon of light and purity, was believed to cleanse away any lingering misfortunes, carrying them far from the realm of the living. This symbolic gesture of renewal and purification held a profound significance in safeguarding the household.



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## Spoon banging

One of the other interesting customs in Charshanbe Suri is the tradition of spoon banging, referred to in Persian as *qashoq zani*, which was widely used in ancient times. According to this custom, girls and boys would cover their faces with a veil and go to their neighbors' houses, collecting nuts and sweets.



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## Shawl throwing

Shawl throwing, *shal-andazi* in Persian, is another tradition of Charshanbe Suri that has been prevalent in some villages and cities.

In this custom, young people make a long rope by tying several silk and satin scarves together and go to the roof through the stairs; they lower the rope into the house through the chimney opening and grab its end on the roof. Then, with a few loud coughs they make the homeowner aware of their presence.

As soon as the homeowners see the colorful rope, they put something into the corner of the shawl and tie a knot. With a gentle shake, they inform the other party that their Charshanbe Suri gift is ready. Then the shawl thrower raises the shawl. If the gift is bread, it symbolizes blessings; and if it is sweets, it symbolizes sweetness and joy.



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## Changes

Charshanbe Suri, like any other cultural ceremony, has undergone changes over time and taken on a completely new face. Perhaps the fire is still lit and people jump over it in a few places, but more prevalent is the use of explosives and firecrackers on the streets.

The old and interesting ceremony has been replaced by terrifying sounds of explosions. Every year, many people fall victim to mischief; they may even lose an eye or burn their skin while walking through an explosion.

This ancient tradition, which was supposed to be a gathering for bringing health and prosperity, has now become a reason for fear, endangering people's lives.

If this celebration had a purpose other than bringing joy to hearts and purifying the soul from evil and providing a sense of peace, it would have disappeared by now.