

Iranian and Zoroastrian Celebrations

People have conducted various celebrations since long ago. These celebrations are part of human social existence. People have known that communal living provides strength. Traditions and celebrations are part of social life in various cultures. Group celebrations satisfy people's spiritual needs and gives them comfort. In addition, the celebrations and gatherings are a way for people to connect and enjoy one another's presence. Each celebration or gathering has a special purpose such as, increasing joy, paying respect to a certain individual, or an ancient tradition.

For example, each Gahanbar (six seasonal celebrations) is to celebrate one of Ahura Mazda's creations, a special time to donate and help fellow human beings. At Gahanbars, Zoroastrians gather and get acquainted. In these gatherings they get to find out about one another's problems, find solutions, and provide help. By listening to the Avesta people gain peace and joy in being with one another.

Zoroastrian culture, stemming from an ancient religion has many celebrations and traditions. Some of these celebrations have cultural value, others religious significance, and there are those with personal importance.

Categorizing Iranian and Zoroastrian celebrations:

1. **Monthly celebrations**- Zoroastrian calendar has 30 days. Each day has a name, and each month has a name. When the name of the day and the month are the same, a monthly celebration is conducted. As monthly celebrations have been passed down to us through several historical turmoil, more is known about some than others.
 - a. **Farvardingan** (Day of Farvardin and month of Farvardin)- On this day Zoroastrians go to the cemetery and remember their loved ones who have passed.
 - b. **Ordibeheshtgan** (Day of Ordibehesht and month of Ordibehesht)]- Ordibehesht is represented with fire since it signifies Asha Vehishta (the best Truth, Righteousness). The celebration is conducted in Atash-kadeh.
 - c. **Khordadgan** (Day of Khordad and month of Khordad)-Khordad is represented by water and this celebration is about protecting water. The celebration is conducted near a stream, spring, or another body of water.
 - d. **Tirgan** (Day of Tir and month of Tir)-This celebration is dedicated to Arash Kamangir. He is remembered on this day for his bravery and for protecting Iran. This celebration is also for protecting water. People gather and splash water on one another. It is important not to waste water on this day while celebrating.
 - e. **Amordadgan** (Day of Amordad and month of Amordad)- Amertat meaning non-death. Amordad is represented by plants and this day is celebrated in protection of plants, trees, and environment.
 - f. **Shahrivargan** (Day of Shahrivar and month of Shahrivar)- This day is chosen to honor and celebrate Father's Day.
 - g. **Mehregan** (Day of Mehr and month of Mehr)-The legendary story of this day is about Kaveh and Fereydoun's victory over Zahak, an unjust and cruel king who was ruling Iran. Fereydoun binds Zahak at Damavand mountains and becomes king of Iran. Mehregan is also a harvest celebration. On the Mehregan table, many grains relating to harvest can

be found. This celebration is also in honor of Izad* Mehr, keeper of promise. Three important Iranian ethics is celebrated during this time. First, standing up against unjust and cruelty, second kindness, and third keeping promises.

- h. **Abangan** (Day of Aban and month of Aban)-Abangan is in celebration of running waters.
- i. **Azargan** (Day of Azar and month of Azar)-Azargan is in celebration of protecting fire.
- j. **Daygan** (Day of Ormazd and month of Day/Day of Day-be-azar and month of Day/Day of Day-bemehr and month of Day/Day of Day-bedin and month of Day) Since the word Day means God, on the days of **Ormazd, Day-be-azar, Day-bemehr, and Day-bedin** four Daygan celebrations and conducted.
- k. **Bahmangan** (Day of Vahman and month of Bahman)- Vohu Mana meaning Good Mind. This day is dedicated to animals and is celebrated in protection of animals.
- l. **Esfandgan** (Day of Spandarmaz and month of Esfand)- Spenta Armaity meaning devotion or serenity. This day is in celebration of Earth, and fertility. It is dedicated to celebrating Mother's Day.

Monthly celebration	Approximate date according to Gregorian Calendar
Farvardingan	April 8 th
Ordibeheshtgan	April 22 nd
Khordadgan	May 25 th
Tirgan	July 1 st
Amordadgan	July 25 th
Shahrivargan	August 21 st
Mehregan	October 2 nd
Abangan	October 26 th
Azargan	November 24 th
Daygan	December 16 th
Day-be-azar	December 23 rd
Day-be-mehr	December 31 st
Day-be-din	January 7 th
Bahmangan	January 16 th
Esfandgan	February 18 th

2. **Annual Celebrations**- These celebrations are conducted once a year.

- a. **Nowruz** and related Nowruz celebrations-Nowruz is to celebrate the beginning of Iranian New Year at the time of Spring equinox in the Northern hemisphere and the re-birth of nature.
- b. **Zarathushtra's birthday** (Day of Khordad and month of Farvardin)-Traditionally this day is celebrated as Ashu Zarathushtra's birthday.
- c. **Communal remembrance of those who have passed** (Ormazd Day and month of Tir)- Two times in a year, we have Communal memorial in remembering our loved ones who have passed. Communal memorial of Ormazd Day and month of Tir is for those who have defended Iran against Turan.

- d. **Shabe Cheleh or Yalda**- It is celebrated on the last night of Fall, which is the longest night of the year, after which days get longer. The importance of light is celebrated on this day. This celebration goes back to a time before Zarathushtra. Today it is recognized a cultural and national Iranian celebration. Families celebrate by getting together and reciting Hafiz poems, reading the Shahnameh, and witnessing the victory of light (Truth).
- e. **Zarathushtra's death** (Day of Khur and month of Day)-In memory of Zarathushtra's passing.
- f. **Sadeh** (Day of Mehr and month of Bahman)-This day is in celebration of learning to control and beneficial use of fire by humans. It is in a sense the start of civilization and industry.
- g. **Communal memorial** (Day of Ormazd and month of Esfand)- This communal memorial is to honor those who passed defending Iran during Arab invasion.
- h. **Chaharshanbe soori**- It is a cultural and national celebration taken from a Zoroastrian celebration when fire is lit on the morning of the first day of the new year (Ormazd Day and Farvardin month). Perhaps after the Sassanid Empire, this celebration changed form and is celebrated on the Tuesday before Nowruz at Twilight.

Annual celebrations	Approximate date according to Gregorian calendar
Nowruz	Spring Equinox around March 20 th
Zarathushtra's birthday	March 26 th
Communal remembrance of those who defended Iran against Turan	July 19 th
Shabe Chelle or Yalda	Winter solstice around December 21 st
Zarathushtra's death	December 26 th
Sadeh	January 30 th
Communal remembrance of those who defended Iran against Arab invasion	February 14 th
Chaharshanbe soori	Tuesday before Nowruz at twilight

3. **Gahanbar**- Gahanbars are six seasonal celebrations observed for duration of five days. They are celebrated in remembrance and protection of Ahura Mazda's creations. Zoroastrians thank Ahura Mazda and donate on these days. On these days, every person should help and donate according to one's ability. Although donation and lending a helping hand is not limited to the Gahanbars but this is a special time to remember and come together in providing aid. The name and day of Gahanbars are as follows:

Name of Gahanbar	In honor of Ahura Mazda's creation	Days of celebration according to Zoroastrian calendar	Approximate date according to Gregorian Calendar

Midtuzaram-gah (Mid Spring)	sky	Day of Khur to Day of Daybemehr from month of Ordibehesht	April 30 th -May 4 th
Midyushahem-gah (Mid-Summer)	water	Day of Khur to Day of Daybemehr from month of Tir	June 29 th -July 3 rd
Paityushahim-gah (End of Summer)	Earth	Day of Ashtad to Day of Anaram from month of Shahrivar	September 12 th - 16 th
Ayashtram-gah (Beginning of Winter)	Plants	Day of Ashtad to day of Anaram from month of Mehr	October 12 th -16 th
Midyarem-gah (Mid-Winter)	Animals	Day of Mehr to day of Varahram from month of Day	December 31 st - January 4 th
Hamaspattmadem-gah (End of Winter)	Human	Last five days of the year	March 16 th -20 th

4. **Individual and Family celebrations**-These events are centered on family and individual celebrations and remembrances. They can be divided in two categories:
- a. **Celebrations centered around the living**-We celebrate certain times in a year special to us. For example, birthdays, Sedreh Pooshi, or wedding anniversary.
 - b. **Traditions centered around those who have passed**-When someone passes, the family members and friends gather to comfort the family of the deceased, give them a helping hand, and remember the person who has passed. This ceremony is accompanied by setting a table which includes different elements depending on the ceremony. Avesta is read on the burial day, third, fourth, and the tenth day, day of memorial, thirtieth day (and every month for a year), and annually (for thirty years).

Why do we conduct ceremonies and have celebrations?

Zoroastrian ceremonies and celebrations are our ancestral, spiritual, and historical wealth. Keeping these ceremonies is not just to honor our ancestral treasures but they are beneficial in today's times as well. These ceremonies and celebrations have helpful and favorable benefits such as:

1. **Communal cooperation and "Hamazoori"**- Ceremonies help those with similar goals and mentality to get together and work with one another towards communal benefit.
2. **Spiritual satisfaction**-Praying and thanking Ahura Mazda for the creations gives us a feeling of peace and spiritual satisfaction.
3. **Getting together and building social connection**-These ceremonies help people to get together and build a stronger connection. Social connection decreases loneliness. Ceremonies improve our social relations and strengthen our connection.
4. **Joy during celebrations, sympathy during memorials**-Celebrations is a base for joyful and healthy gatherings. Memorials are a way of expressing sympathy to the family of the deceased.

5. **Remembering and protecting the communal goals and values**-Zoroastrian ceremonies and celebrations have valuable qualities. For example, Mehregan is remembering to keep our promises, be kind, and stand up against injustice. Sadeh is to remember the beginning of civilization and urban living in Iran. Nowruz is in remembrance of continuous renewal. Zoroastrian ceremonies and celebrations remind us of the values that are important and beneficial today.
6. **Protection of the Environment**-Zoroastrian ceremonies and celebrations have a deep interrelation with ecology and environment. We remind ourselves in all the celebrations to protect everything associated with environment.

How can we cooperate and improve our ceremonies and celebrations?

1. **Participating in ceremonies and celebration**- Increase communal participation in ceremonies makes them more beneficial and enjoyable.
2. **Help in conducting the ceremonies**-Providing financial or intellectual help in conducting the ceremonies.
3. **Understanding and learning about their philosophy**-We need to understand the reasons for the ceremonies and try to make them more enjoyable, beneficial, and everlasting at present time. For example, Gahanbars celebrate Ahura Mazda's creations and a time to help the needy and so we can think about how to help those in need. Tirgan is to celebrate water. We can think about how to preserve and not waste water. We can strive in educating others about the dangers of drought.

Source: Translated from "Amoozesh e Din o Farhang Zartoshti" Grade 7 Barsam Publication, Iran