

Chaharshanbe Suri: Embracing Fire and Bidding Farewell to the Old Year

Chaharshanbe Suri, also known as “Red Wednesday,” ignites the festive season leading up to Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. Celebrated on the eve of the last Wednesday of the year, this ancient festival transcends a mere spectacle of fire. It’s a vibrant tapestry woven with tradition, symbolism, and the collective anticipation of spring’s renewal.

The Dance with Flames

The heart of Chaharshanbe Suri lies in the bonfires that blaze throughout the night. Streets and rooftops transform into a fiery landscape as families and friends gather. The most recognizable tradition is the act of jumping over the flames, accompanied by the chant “Sorkhiye man az to, Zardiye to az man” (My redness to you, your paleness to me). This ritual transcends mere entertainment; it embodies the core essence of the festival. By leaping over the fire, participants symbolically shed the misfortunes and sluggishness of the past year. The flames consume the negativity, leaving behind a sense of purification and rejuvenation, much like the shedding of old skin to embrace a new beginning.

A Night of Diverse Customs

While the fire rituals hold the spotlight, Chaharshanbe Suri boasts a kaleidoscope of other traditions:

- **Oracle Seekers:** Young girls, particularly unmarried ones, traditionally seek glimpses into their future by approaching fortune-tellers. This practice adds a touch

of mystery and intrigue to the festive night.

- Espand: A Smoke of Purification: The burning of Esfand (rue seeds) fills the air with an aromatic fragrance. This practice is believed to ward off evil spirits and usher in good fortune. The smoke is believed to cleanse individuals and their surroundings, creating a protective shield against negativity.
- A Splash of Symbolism: In some regions, a unique custom involves jumping over flowing water, such as streams or pools. This act symbolizes washing away the inauspiciousness of the past year, paving the way for a fresh start.
- A Celebration of Community: The night transcends individual rituals and transforms into a vibrant display of community spirit. Fireworks paint the night sky with bursts of color, laughter fills the air, and families gather for joyous celebrations. This collective revelry strengthens social bonds and reinforces the importance of shared traditions.

A Legacy Rooted in History

Chaharshanbe Suri's rich history stretches back to the roots of Zoroastrianism, an ancient Iranian religion. Fire, revered as a sacred element, signifies purity and transformation. Jumping over the flames echoes the Zoroastrian belief in the transformative power of fire. It serves as a potent symbol of casting away the impurities of the past year and embracing the light and renewal associated with spring.

A Tradition that Endures

Today, Chaharshanbe Suri transcends geographical boundaries. Celebrated not only within Iran but also by Iranian communities worldwide, the festival serves as a significant prelude to the grand festivities of Nowruz. It's a time for

families to reconnect, reflect on the year gone by, and set their intentions for a year brimming with prosperity and joy.

A Note on Safety: While the allure of the fiery celebrations is undeniable, prioritizing safety remains paramount. Bonfires should be built in designated areas under adult supervision, and participants must maintain a safe distance from the flames. Responsible celebration ensures that the joyous spirit of Chaharshanbe Suri is preserved for generations to come.