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Kazakh New Year – Nauryz

Nauryz is a celebration of an abundance and renewal of the nature. It is tied up to the spring equinox of the day and night, and symbolizes the beginning of a new year. The holiday is associated with the first spring thunder, swelling of buds on the trees and a wide growth of vegetation. The official celebration day is 22nd of March, even though it is considered to last the whole month.

History

This non-religious holiday of spring has been celebrated for over five thousand years by many cultures of the Middle and Central Asia.¹ The name Nauryz is a compound of two Persian words, "now" (new), and "ruz" (day or time), and commonly translated as "new year".² The history of Nauryz is complicated. The totalitarian Soviet system did not recognize the existence of any national identity and any reference to traditional heritage was considered to be an anachronism of the past. So the celebration of Nauryz was cancelled in 1926. It was brought back in 1988 and today the 22nd of March is a national holiday of Republic of Kazakhstan.¹

Celebration

Kazakh people believe, the more generous celebration of Nauryz is, the happier the next year will be. Therefore, there are many rituals and festivities related to this holiday, such as mass games, traditional horse races and other competitions.

In earlier times, one of the competitions was the encounter of two dzhigits, young skillful horsemen, that had to pull each other down from their saddles. The contests were popular among

both boys and girls. For instance, a girl could invite dzhigit to compete with her. It meant the following: if he wins, he would have the right to kiss her. Nowadays these competitions often go as shows played by actors to keep a good memory of the old-time.

To receive a blessing from the aqsaqal, elderly man, or aje, old woman, on this day is considered a big honour and sign of kindness.

Other famous tradition is “Aytis”, a contest of two or more improvising folk poet-musicians that compete in wit and poetic skills.

Food

A great deal of food is prepared during this day, and it symbolizes a prosperity and wealth in the coming year. Often the lamb or beef is cooked in a special way. Their meat is supposed to give people strength and stamina. The families lay a festive table named dastarkhan, that is followed by a blessing from the oldest man among them so that prosperity would never leave the family.

The number seven has a special meaning for Kazakh people, because the number symbolizes seven days of the week and in ancient times was considered as a time unit of the universal eternity. It found its reflection in a recipe of the holiday dish that was composed of seven components, usually meat, salt, fat, onions, wheat, kurt, a type of cheese, and irimshik, a kind of cottage cheese.

Today

Nauryz is being widely celebrated across the whole country every year with staged shows, ornate traditional old houses, so called yurts, and delicious Nauryz-kozhe. On the eve of the holiday, people pay back their debts and reconcile with their opponents. Nauryz is considered as the time, when all diseases and failures would pass by the houses of people. During the day, everybody is in a good spirit, give the big hugs to each other and wish good fortune and

happiness. It is also common to plant trees and say: "Let a man plant a tree on the ground rather than leave a ground in the people's memory."

It is the day of charitable events, folk sporting games, and tendance upon the surrounding environment. This holiday carries a great traditional meaning and appears to be an integral part of modern life.

Sources:

1. <http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/nauryz.shtml>
2. <http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/Nowruz/NowRuz.html>