

Peyk



Persian Cultural Center's Bilingual Magazine
P.O. Box 500914, San Diego CA 92150

173

January- February 2018

Vol. XXVI No. 173

ISSN:1557-623X

Happy New Year 2018

- **How Did We Permit All of This?**
- **A Nation Finds a Poet**
- **Worldwide Winter Solstice Celebrations**
- **Book Review: The Good Girl**
- **Nutritious: Health Benefits of Vitamin C**
- **Short Story: Ablamboo**
- **Pomegranate Ash, Spinach and Prune Stew**
- **My Journey Toward Racial Justice**
- **Health: Dementia**
- **Anger Is Not a Roadmap to Justice; Activism Is.**

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Persian Cultural Center
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By: Shahri Estakhry



How Did We Permit All of This?

Oh wow, what is going on? How did we permit ourselves to sink so low and so deeply into such sad state of affairs? This can't be the America that I chose to be part of and love. Recently I seem to be repeating over and over that I don't recognize it anymore. Oh, beautiful America, where are you?

My heart is broken and my spirit searching for a peaceful place. Now there is not a day that goes by that someone is not killed, or sexually harassed, or marked as a predator. But then the higher their position in government, entertainment, medicine, industry, sports, armed forces, Olympiads and on and on... the greater their denial. Making each of them disgraceful and obnoxious in the eyes of the society. What was their childhood like that permits so many men to be so cheap and disrespectful to women and act this way? Do they not understand that the women they harass are the same gender as their mothers, who brought them to this world? Do they even care? How and when do they inherit the "powerful" gene of disrespect, dishonesty, and self-righteousness? What gives them the right to permit themselves to be "little gods". Money? Position? Most likely both, and add a good sum of arrogance and the belief that they are untouchable and often ride under the radar of illness. Give me a break! I shiver at the thought of how many underage children and women have been harmed and abused for a lifetime. This is not the problem of just one or the other political party, but rather individual and national integrity that are in need of moral authority and national unity to resolve.

It is well past time to stop the culture of "locker room" talk and verbal harassment of women. How low must a culture be to permit such behavior? It is not acceptable for a culture to permit any gender to feel or behave superior to others. The courage of women who have stepped forth to declare what has happened to them is astonishing and could not have been easy for any of them. They are the pioneers for helping us to bring this "illness of self-righteousness and cultural behavior" under control. All of us must stand beside them and protect their courage.

It is important that we recognize the men who are role models of love, respect, and honesty for their families and our communities. Thank God for them. These situations such as witnessing beloved family members harassed and abused or being lumped into the category of male abusers, cannot be easy for them either. They are not the subject of my anger nor my disrespect. There is no need for them to apologize for the crazy behavior of those within their gender that do not control themselves and behave in such a disrespectful manner!

This new trend of discoveries cannot be easy for any woman and any mother with a daughter. No one should feel unsafe in any moment or in any circumstance. The burden of correction to this behavior falls deeply on all of us.

I urge all to take a few moments to read the LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO WOMEN written in 1995, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2wom.htm>. We all can learn from his wisdom: "I would now like to *speak directly to every woman*, to reflect with her on the problems and the prospects of what it means to be a woman in our time. In particular I wish to consider the essential issue of the *dignity* and *rights* of women, as seen in the light of the word of God... Thank you, *women who are mothers!* Thank you, *women who are daughters* and *women who are sisters!* Thank you, *women who work!* Thank you, *consecrated women!* Thank you, *every woman*, for the simple fact of being *a woman!* Through the insight which is so much a part of your womanhood you enrich the world's understanding and help to make human relations more honest and authentic... Yes, it is time to *examine the past with courage*, to assign responsibility where it is due in a review of the long history of humanity. Women have contributed to that history as much as men and, more often than not, they did so in much more difficult conditions."

I have faith that women and men of today's generations will have the courage to unite and change this culture that degrades all human beings. It is undignified and underserving to all of us, and if it means new leaderships to make it happen, so be it!

Persian Cultural Center's Bilingual Magazine

Is a bi - monthly publication organized for literary, cultural and information purposes

Financial support is provided by the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.

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January-February 2018

Vol. XXVI

Circulation: 6000

Persian Cultural Center

A non - profit national corporation

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Cover Design: Saeed Jalali

PCC NEWS



Jong-e Farhangi Report

Jong-e Farhangi is a cultural variety show that has been a monthly program on the IAC stage for more than three years. Jong emphasizes on literature, visual, performing arts, music, history, and social issues. The program guests use Jong's podium to share their views on a variety of subjects with an eager audience. Jong-e Farhangi is on the second Friday night of the month.

Jong-e Farhangi November 17, 2017

The November program, hosted by Ali Sadr, featured two guests. The first guest, Dr. Mahmoud Karimi Hakak, professor at the New York Siena College, who discussed how the play production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream", despite all proper permits, was shut down on the third night by mobs. The discussion was accompanied by a documentary of the pre and post production footages of the play. The second guest, Reza Bayat, pianist and music teacher, discussed a new method of music instruction and its advantages. The program ended with Mr. Bayat's student performing a few pieces on the piano for the audience.

The December Jong program got canceled due to numerous holiday programs.

Persian Comedy Night with K-von November 4, 2017

The audience at the Iranian American Center enjoyed an evening of fun and laughter as K-von took to the stage. The program was in English along with a definite Persian flare.

Kourosh Taghavi's Students Setar Recital November 11, 2017

Kourosh Taghavi's students' Setar Recital was received by an enthusiastic audience.

Lily Afshar in Concert November 21, 2017

In cooperation with the SDSU Music Department and the Persian Club of SDSU, Lily Afshar the renowned master guitar player treated the audience to an evening of classical guitar at the Smith Recital Hall, SDSU.





PCC Annual Community Bazaar December 3, 2017

Local small businesses, craftsmen, volunteers with clothing, accessories, artifacts, jewelry and food items, welcomed the crowd at the Iranian School of San Diego.



Art Gallery Grand Opening December 9, 2017

PCC and Gallery Yellow presented a new exhibition at the Iranian American Center. The current exhibition under “Landscape”, showcasing several local artists and several art students, will continue until late January. The Gallery is open to public weekdays from 9 am to 3 pm and weekends by appointment. We invite all art lovers to visit this exhibition. The Center will host different collections of art year-round.



Yalda Celebration December 16, 2017

PCC celebrated Yalda with dinner, dance and music at Sufi restaurant following an every year tradition. Armin Vigen and his band along with DJ Julius made the event fun and memorable for all guests.

PCC's Board Meetings

Persian Cultural Center's board of directors holds its meetings every second Wednesday of the month at IAC. The November meeting took place on the 8th and the December meeting on the 13th.

Film and discussion:

- November 3, 2017- The film group showed **“Snow on the Pines”** directed by Peyman Moaadi with Mahnaz Afshar. This movie was made in 2012 and has received several prestigious awards. The show followed by lively discussion.
- December 9, 2017- The movie **“Stories”** by Rakhshan Banietemad was screened at IAC. The movie was continuation of Banietemad's seven movies and has received several international awards including best screen play from the Canne Film Festival. In the second half of the program Dr. Rana Salimi presented a review of Banietemad's films as one of the best movie makers of Iran. The program followed by discussion about the movie.



Docunight

Docunight is a documentary screening program held on the first Wednesday of the month in over twenty cities.

Docunight #43 (November 1, 2017)- **“Boys with broken ears”** by Nima Shayeghi was a documentary movie about the Iranian youth wrestling team members, their struggles, challenges, successes and disappointments. The movie was well received by the audience.

Docunight #44 (December 6, 2017) -Two documentaries about two completely different pop music genre before the revolution was shown. The first short documentary was **“Javad”** by Bahman Kiarostami about Javad Yasari and the second movie **“Scorpion”** by Farid Saremi and Omid Hashemlou was about a pop/rock band in Tehran. The screening was followed by a lively discussion.

Asia Pacific Film Festival

PCC cooperated in showing three movies by Iranian filmmakers or related to Iran. They were:

- “My Enemy, My Brother” 2017, by Ann Shin
- “They” 2017, by Anahita Ghaznavizadeh
- “ No Date, No Signature” 2017, by Vahid Jalilvand

Apologies – In Last issue of Peyk, in the report of “Hafez Day” at the new City Library, we failed to mention Friends of Library as one of the organizers of the event.

A NATION FINDS A POET

Today, we identify Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi as the national poet of Iran and his *Shahnameh* as its national epic. Ferdowsi lived in the latter part of the tenth century and the first quarter of the eleventh. He was a subject of the Ghaznavid empire, a Persian-speaking dynasty of Turkic lineage. His era was marked by porous borders and shifting cultural and linguistic boundaries. Khorasan, Ferdowsi's birthplace, was part of a cultural zone that stretched from the Bosphorus to the Bay of Bengal wherein Persian was a transregional language of literary production and cultural importance. What does it mean then to speak of a "national" poet well before the advent of nationalism and certainly long before the formation of an Iranian nation-state in the first part of the twentieth century? The answer lies in the previous century during which Ferdowsi was cast as a national poet.

None of the premodern accounts of Persian-language poets evoke Ferdowsi as an Iranian poet (or, variably, a poet from Iran). Nezami 'Aruzi's *Chahar Maqaleh* (The Four Discourses), composed in the twelfth century, is the oldest known account in which Ferdowsi's oeuvre appears. 'Aruzi introduces Ferdowsi as "one of the landowners (*dehqan*) of Tus," and recounts the oft-cited story of Emperor Mahmud who failed to fully compensate Ferdowsi for the *Shahnameh*. Dowlatshah Samarqandi's *Tazkerat ol-sho'ara* (Memorial of Poets), written in 1487, recounts the same story as 'Aruzi's *Chahar Maqaleh*, but also speaks of how Ferdowsi was tested by such court poets as 'Onsori before gaining access into Mahmud's poetic circle. Ferdowsi is again evoked merely as a poet from Tus. Taqi ol-Din Owahdi Balyani's *Arafat ol-'asheqin va arasat ol-'arefin* (Arafat of Lovers and Parade Grounds of Gnostics), written in 1615, commemorates the work of 3,300 poets, including Ferdowsi.

The author of *Arafat ol-'asheqin* introduces Ferdowsi as a poet from Tus and offers no reference to Ferdowsi's belonging to a political entity called Iran. Reza Qoli Khan Hedayat's *Majma' ol-fosaha* (An Assembly of the Eloquent), completed in 1868, is a Qajar-era compendia of 867 Persian poets. Its entry on Ferdowsi contains a curious (and inaccurate) story about how the manuscript that informed the composition of the *Shahnameh* traveled from Abyssinia to the Deccan and finally to Hendustan before it was brought to Ferdowsi's native Khorasan. Even Hedayat, writing as late as the mid nineteenth century, does not characterize Ferdowsi as a poet from Iran. Each one of these sources is tied to its unique historical context which, while imperial and ecumenical, is not *national* (see Peyk 172). These documents reveal the way Ferdowsi has been viewed in different periods, but more importantly, they expose the fragility of taken-for-granted subjects like his "Iranian identity."

As Dick Davis has shown in "Iran and Aniran: The Shaping of a Legend," Iran as a geographical term in the *Shahnameh* varies significantly from a vaguely defined region to a unified territory ruled by a single king. The Iran of the *Shahnameh* is an unstable and changing geographical concept. Today's Iran is a modern nation-state founded upon a nineteenth-century ideology that views language as the most definitive marker of a nation. The idea of the

Aryan race, the attribution of perceived superiority to biologically predetermined factors, has been formative to the creation of Iran as a modern nation. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the relationship between state and society radically changed as the new Pahlavi regime set to align itself to a global model of "civilized" nation-states. This model had swept the imagination of most political elites around the world in the 1930s and 40s. During this period, Iranian historians and literary scholars, in conversation with their European and South Asian counterparts, began to rewrite their local history with Iran as its national subject. They also tailored their invented national history to fit a civilizational history. Mohammad 'Ali Forughī (d. 1942), who served as Iran's Prime Minister three times, paid close attention to the Persian literary tradition as a way of creating a cultural genealogy for an Iranian nation-state in the making. Forughī and his cohorts deemed *Shahnameh* a uniquely fertile text for their nationalist appropriation. In this process, they mapped their Iran, a political entity with defined borders, onto the *Shahnameh*'s incongruous geography.



In "The Nation's Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination," Afshin Marashi has examined the way the Pahlavi elites used Ferdowsi in the service of nation building. He writes, "The fixing of Ferdowsi's image and its association with the specific political project of Pahlavi nationalism was therefore something very new, never predetermined, and only one of Ferdowsi's possible cultural-genealogical trajectories, a particular trajectory that was conditioned by the political history of the interwar period and by the cultural logic of nationalism during that time." Ferdowsi's imagined place as Iran's national poet was the product of intellectual and architectural labor sponsored by the state. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Pahlavi state began to produce and circulate images of Ferdowsi in film and media. His statues were erected in town squares, including one in front of the first Persian *Faculty of Letters* in Tehran. The *Shahnameh* became more accessible in illustrated, abridged, and simplified formats. The attempts to enshrine Ferdowsi as Iran's national poet were not limited to textual production. In the 1930s,

the Pahlavi state became preoccupied with pinpointing the precise location of Ferdowsi's burial. Once they claimed to have found his grave, the Society of National Heritage (*Anjoman-e asar-e melli*), a newly-established institution, built a mausoleum in 1934, modeled after Pasargadae, the tomb of Cyrus. In October of that year, Reza Shah (r. 1925-1941) inaugurated Ferdowsi's mausoleum in a highly performative ceremony during which he thanked Ferdowsi for his services to the nation. In *Building Iran*, Talinn Grigor has examined the history of the construction of the mausoleum as part of an effort to invent a site of collective national memory, one that drew its authenticity from the "precise" (invented) discovery of Ferdowsi's burial site. The opening of the mausoleum occasioned a series of events in Iran and abroad that took place in the same year.

On November 8, 1934, Columbia University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art marked the thousandth birth year of Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi. Many scholars gathered as "friends of Iran and lovers of her arts and letters" to commemorate the legacy of the "eminent Iranian poet." There was a reception on campus, an exhibition of rare manuscripts of the *Shahnameh*, and four addresses by the chancellor of the university, scholars of Near Eastern arts and literature, and Iran's top diplomat in Washington. Mirza Ghaffar Khan Djalal, the Iranian ambassador to the United States, began his address by remarking that "art and literature have no nationality." Having spoken of Ferdowsi's civilizational stature, Khan Djalal then evoked the Persian-language poet as the native of a land "called by all the cradle of the Aryan race," whose verses have helped restore "unity among the Iranian race." He celebrated Ferdowsi as a poet who revived Iran's "national language" and reminded Iranians who had "forgotten all that meant national pride and glory" of their country's "glorious past and civilization." The ambassador concluded his remarks by praising his own patron, Reza Shah Pahlavi,

who has already achieved great results in his unbending determination to restore as much as possible of the past Iranian glory, and, in order to render Ferdowsi's memory eternal, has ordered the erection of a befitting monument for him and caused the celebration of his anniversary to be a national holiday.

The celebration at Columbia University was one of many that took place around the world in 1934, including a month-long conference during September and October in Tehran. A group of Iranologists and Persian literary specialists was invited from fifteen countries by the Ministry of Education as guests of the Iranian state to travel in the country for thirty days. Organized by Hassan Isfandiari, the first of seven meetings was held on September 29, 1934, at the auditorium of *Dar ol-Fonun* high school in Tehran

and was attended by eighty three scholars. A selection of the addresses and speeches delivered during the month-long ceremony was later published in Tehran as *The Millennium of Ferdowsi: the Great National Poet of Iran*. The volume includes a picture of the young monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and an image of the poet's statue which was increasingly in circulation in the 1930s. In his remarks, Mohammad 'Ali Forughi said that Ferdowsi may be "physically bound to connections with Iranian-ness," but he is "spiritually a child of humanity or if I may say, a father of humanity." Forughi's remarks, uttered in the same vein as Mirza Ghaffar Khan Djalal's speech in New York, reflect the ethos of the Iranian project of nation-building: laying claim to Persian as an Iranian cultural patrimony while promoting it as part of humanity's civilizational heritage. The millennial celebration of Ferdowsi is by no means the only example of the Pahlavi project which was designed to secure Iran's place within what the elites deemed a league of "civilized nations."



It was not only the Pahlavi elites who actively sought to invent a distinct literary genealogy in the service of nation-building; Afghan intellectuals took similar steps in laying claim to the Persian literary heritage to define its Afghan character. In the 1910s, Mahmud Tarzi (d. 1933), an intellectual, publisher and modernizer, began theorizing what it meant to speak of an Afghan national literature. These discussions took place in the pages of his newspaper *Seraj ol-Akhbar Afghaniyah* (The Torch of Afghan News, 1911-1918). In the 1930s and 1940s, the Afghan state, like neighboring Iran and India, helped establish institutions like the *Kabul Literary Association* (1931) and *Afghan Historical Society* (1942) to create an Afghan literary and historical genealogy. The president of the *Afghan Historical Society* was Ahmad 'Ali Kohzad (d. 1983) who also served as the curator of the National Museum in Kabul. In conversation with archaeologists at *La Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan* (DAFA), who made consequential discoveries in Afghanistan, Kohzad participated in creating an official historical identity for Afghanistan. One of the ways in which he worked towards that goal was editing the journal *Aryana* (founded in 1942), a term he used and promoted to refer to ancient Afghanistan.

Continued on Page 8



In his *Afghanistan dar Shahnameh* (Afghanistan in the *Shahnameh*), published in 1976, Kohzad employed his archeological knowledge and newly constructed historical model to tease out elements in the *Shahnameh* that he viewed as Afghan. From the outset, he admitted that the term “Afghanistan” is new and does not appear in the *Shahnameh*. If one carefully examines the names of cities and regions in the *Shahnameh*, he claimed, one would realize that its geography largely corresponds with Khorasan, which Kohzad called ancient Afghanistan. Kohzad celebrated the place of Afghanistan in the *Shahnameh* as a way of making visible his homeland’s contributions to Persian literary culture and bolstering the civilization credentials of Afghanistan. Kohzad’s work, similar to



the Pahlavi elites in Iran, maps a modern political phenomenon, Afghanistan, onto the geography of the *Shahnameh*. Kohzad also credited the poet Abu-Mansur Daqiqi (d. 1005) for laying the foundation of the *Shahnameh* with his tales of and literary lore. Kohzad celebrated Daqiqi as a poet from Balkh, a region in Afghanistan. In 1975, Kabul organized an international conference to celebrate the work of Daqiqi which led to the publication of several books like Kohzad’s *Afghanistan dar Shahnameh*. Making visible Ferdowsi’s

debt to his predecessor Daqiqi, both from Khorasan, was part of broader efforts in Afghanistan to reinvent and appropriate the Persian literary heritage.

Many Iranians may quickly dismiss Kohzad’s assertions. For them, Iranian national identity is authentic and valid while other national identities, be it Afghan or Turkish, are novel, invented, and therefore false. Similarly, they would view the borders of Afghanistan as new and fabricated while Iran for them has *always* existed in its current location. If there is a major takeaway from this article is that there is no such thing as *always* in history. Iranian national identity, a pillar of which is Ferdowsi and his *Shahnameh*, is just as (if not more) invented as Afghan national identity. The fact that they are constructed identities does not make them false or inauthentic. What other tools do we have as humans besides the power to imagine and create, to make meaning? But unless we realize the invented nature of our national identity, we will not be able to consciously participate in *remaking* it in the image of our own values and ideals. That realization begins with a critical understanding of history.

The late nineteenth and twentieth century was a period during which new institutions of political power and literary production displaced older formations of identity. The nation-state as a political model gradually became the norm and drove countries like Iran and Afghanistan to fashion themselves as modern nation states by inventing a distinct cultural genealogy. To gain entry into what they perceived as a league of civilized nation-states, Iranian and Afghan intellectuals set out to excavate the Persian literary tradition in search of texts and tools to construct new identities. It was in this process that Iran imagined Ferdowsi as its national poet. Afghan intellectuals, aware of such developments in Iran, responded by articulating their own claim to the *Shahnameh* and Persian literary culture. Ahmad ‘Ali Kohzad’s *Afghanistan dar Shahnameh* is only one example of such effort. Although

nationalism championed an inward search for an “authentic” identity unique to a particular people or race, its universalized model became a common language that took inspiration from many different cultures. The millennial celebration of Ferdowsi in Tehran in 1934 brought together scholars from more than a dozen countries whose scholarship shaped the way Iran imagined Ferdowsi as its national poet. This quality may point in the direction of an inherent contradiction in nationalism: the expression of national identity may be local, but the ideological forces that inform its expression are transnational.

Many Iranians today no longer associate Ferdowsi with the Pahlavi state and its efforts to frame him as Iran’s national poet. The Islamic Republic, as Grigor has shown in her excellent book, may have partially erased the trace of Pahlavi patronage at Ferdowsi’s mausoleum in Tus; nonetheless, it has conveniently received a ready-made site of national memory visited by thousands of Iranians every year. One may argue that the Pahlavi elites achieved their ultimate objective by co-opting Ferdowsi as the national poet of Iran, a fact that remains contested as evident in Kohzad’s *Afghanistan dar Shahnameh*. To treat Ferdowsi’s idea of Iran as a timeless and unchanged concept is to pretend that none of the political and cultural developments of the twentieth century ever took place. My aim here was not to reject or validate the notion that Ferdowsi is Iran’s national poet; my objective is to historicize and place it within its early twentieth-century context. I do so with the hope that we may problematize the work of political elites, literary scholars, and architects in the 1930s and 1940s who helped remake Ferdowsi in the image of their cultural ideology and political ideals.

Images:

1. Reza Shah at the inauguration of Ferdowsi’s mausoleum in October 1934.
2. The mausoleum of Ferdowsi was modeled after Pasargadae
3. The Millennium of Ferdowsi Conference in 1934 at Dar ol-Fonun, Tehran, Iran.
4. Ahmad ‘Ali Kohzad

References:

1. Mohammad A. Foroghi. *Kholaseh-e Shahnameh-ye Ferdowsi* (Tehran, 1935).
2. David E Smith. *Firdausi Celebration, 935-1935: Addresses Delivered at the Celebration of the Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of the National Poet of Iran Held at Columbia University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the City of New York* (New York: McFarlane, Warde, McFarlane, 1936).
3. *The Millennium of Ferdowsi, the Great National Poet of Iran* [with Plates.] (Tehran: Vezarat-e Farhang, 1944).
4. Dick Davis, “Iran and Aniran: The Shaping of a Legend.” In *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. Ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vajdani (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 39-50.
5. Afshin Marashi, “The Nation’s Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination.” In *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*. Ed. Touraj Atabaki. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 93-111.
6. Talinn Grigor, *Building Iran* (Periscope Publishing, 2009).
7. Ahmad A. Kohzad. *Afghanistan dar Shahnamah: Shahnamah dar Khorasan, ya, Shahnamah dar Aryana* (Kabul: Bayhaqi Ketab Khparawulo Muassasah, 1976).
8. For more on Kohzad, see Nile Green, “The Afghan Discovery of Buddha: Civilizational History and the Nationalizing of Afghan Antiquity.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49 (2017), 47-70.



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Events in San Diego

Persian Cultural Center

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www.pccus.org

Sibarg Concert at IAC

Sunday February 11, 2018

Tickets and information 858-552-9355

IAC: 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121

Play Reading "Mina's Revolution"

TBD February 2018 Play Reading, 7pm at IAC

IAC: 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121

Dornab Concert

Saturday March 3, 2018, 7pm at IAC

Tickets and information 858-552-9355

IAC: 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121

Save the date On 17 March 2018

Nowruz Celebration 1397

PCC cordially invites you to celebrate Nowruz in grand Persian style!

Art Exhibition Open to Public

From 9:00 am to 3:00 pm (Monday to Friday) Weekends by appointments
Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121
Info: 858-552-9355

Movie and Discussion

Third Friday of the month at the Center at 7 pm
Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121
Info: 858-552-9355

DOCUNIGHT

First Wednesday of the month
at the Iranian-American Center (IAC) at 7 pm
Documentary films about Iran or by Iranians

Jong-e Farhangi

January 12, 2018 at 7pm • February 9, 2018 at 7pm

Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121
Info: 858-552-9355

Setar Class by Kourosh Taghavi

Registration and info: (858) 717-6389

Tar & Guitar Class by Farhad Bahrami

Registration and info: (619) 318 1286

Tombak Class by Milad Jahadi

Registration and Info: (858) 735-9634

Iranian School of San Diego

858-552-9355

Egg Coloring and Sabzeh Kari

Sunday March 4, 2018 10am to Noon at ISSD

ISSD Nowruz Celebration

Sunday March 11, 2017 at Mt. Carmel High School/ISSD

Classes: Branch I, Sundays from 9:30am-1pm
Mt. Carmel High School

Classes: Branch II, Thursdays from 6-8pm

Mt. Carmel High School
Mount Carmel High School
9550 Carmel Mountain Road • San Diego, CA 92129

Persian Dance Academy of San Diego

(858) 552-9355 www.pccus.org

Dollar a Month Fund

Tel: 858-552-9355 • www.dmfund.org
www.facebook.com/DollaraMonthFund



Association of Iranian-American Professionals (AIAP)

Tel: (858) 207 6232 • www.aiap.org
Last Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM
at Sufi Mediterranean Cuisine
5915 Balboa Ave, San Diego, CA 92111

ISTA (Iranian Student Association at UC San Diego)
www.istauscd.org

House of Iran

House of Iran Balboa Park
Balboa Park, Sundays 12:00-4:00pm
www.thehouseofiran.com

Iranian-American Scholarship Fund

Tel: (858) 552-9355 • www.iasfund.org
www.facebook.com/Iranian-AmericanScholarshipFund

Mehrgan Foundation

www.Mehrganfoundation.org Tel (858) 673-7000

PAAIA

Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans
www.paaia.org

NIAC

National Iranian-American Council
www.niac.org

Book Club Meeting

Last Saturday of each month

Iranian-American Center (IAC)
6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121
Tel (858) 552-9355

Iranian-American Life Science Network (IALSN)

www.ialsn.org

For latest events in San Diego visit:

www.chekhabar.com

San Diego Restaurant Week

California Restaurant Association San Diego County
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Worldwide Winter Solstice Celebrations

By Leily Rezvani



Celebration and the Iranian culture are synonymous. From *Char-Shambeh-Soori* to *Tirgan* to *Mehregan*, celebrations are very apparent in Iranian culture. *Shabe-Yalda* is no exception. In Persian, “*Yalda*” means birth, and in the religion Mithraism, the sun-god was believed to have been born on December 21st. The holiday brings friends and family together to celebrate through food, music, poetry, and many other traditions.

As many Iranians know, *Shabe-Yalda*’s significance extends beyond merely recognizing the longest night of the year. It marks 90 days before the new year and 180 days before the summer solstice. More importantly, it is a time when many people from many backgrounds gather together. Grandparents recount stories of their youth to their grandkids while others eat specific foods in light of their superstitions, such as watermelon to ensure health during warm months. The red color of fruits and nuts symbolizes the hue of dawn and the radiance of life. Watermelon signifies the farewell of the warmer months while pomegranate represents the beginning of the colder months.

UCSD’s Iranian Student Association celebrated the holiday primarily through music and dancing. On December 2nd, Iranians from across San Diego came together to commemorate the holiday during UCSD’s annual event. The celebration consisted of a music performance by the local Persian group *Dornob*, a Hafez recital by Dr. Ali Asadi, an after-party hosted by DJ Mohsen, and other cultural activities.

While Christmas is thought to be the largest winter celebration, possibly due to its amount of advertising, many cultures celebrate the winter solstice in their own unique way. For instance, the Hopi Indians of northern Arizona celebrate *Soyal* through prayer sticks, dancing, and spiritual rituals to welcome *Kachina*, protective mountainous spirits. Since the winter solstice is on June 21st in countries below the equator, Peruvians celebrate the Inca Sun god with a feast. Although the Spaniards banned the celebrations after the conquest, it is still widely observed. *Saturnalia*, the ancient Roman festival, was a celebration similar to modern-day Christmas festivities. Not only does the holiday mark the beginning of winter, but it also symbolizes the end of the planting season. During the week-long celebration, slaves were treated as equals, historically significant. Winter is celebrated by people in all seven continents, including Antarctica. On December 21st, researchers celebrate the beginning of winter by cooking large feasts, watching films, and giving each other handmade gifts. Lastly, Scandinavians celebrate St. Lucia’s Day, a festival of lights, to honor St. Lucia, a Christian martyr. On this day, Scandinavians light fires to divert evil spirits and women wear white dresses with red sashes and wreaths with candles to honor St. Lucia.

Aside from the values of togetherness, generosity, family, and warmth, *Yalda* and Christmas have similarities. For example, the lyrics from Judy Garland’s popular Christmas song, *Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas*, “faithful friends who are dear to us/ gather near to us once more,” are widely recognized on *Shabe-Yalda*. Although *Shabe-Yalda* is supposed to be the longest and darkest night of the year, it is very festive and bright. *Shabe-Yalda* is another example of a great holiday Iranians from various economic backgrounds, ages, generations, and faiths gather together to celebrate. There is something special about the coldness of the season that moves people across the world to warm each other with compassion and care and spend hours with the people they love.

Leily Rezvani is a senior in high school and the Youth Outreach Director of License to Freedom, a non-profit that provides free legal services for refugee and immigrant victims of domestic violence.

Book Review

The Good Girl by Mary Kubica

A review by Ahmad Fattahipour



James, an affluent and prominent workaholic judge in Chicago, does not pay enough attention to the needs of his family. He cares for his older daughter *Grace*, who is an attorney, but not his younger daughter, *Mia*, who is interested in the arts. Mia does not share the wishes and ambitions of her father and ends up failing academically. As a result, she becomes a high school substitute teacher of English.

Eve, James's wife, is an immigrant from England. She comes from a conservative family and is still a virgin at the age of eighteen though being very beautiful. Her British accent, virginity, and beauty are the reasons James marries her – not love. Eve loves her children and continues to live with her husband for their welfare.

Mia has a boyfriend, *Jayson*, whose hard-working and busy lifestyle leaves little time for her. One night when she is waiting for him at a bar, he calls and cancels their date. This frustrates and angers her. A handsome young man, calling himself *Collin Thatcher*, approaches her at the bar and seduces her back to his cabin in rural Minnesota. When they arrive, he tells her that he has been hired to kidnap her on behalf of his boss *Delmar* for a reward. Delmar plans to extort the reward from her father, James. Collin decides, however, to try and collect the reward from James directly and cut Delmar out.

Over the next few months, as the police search for Mia, Collin tortures her. Nevertheless, the two become ever closer and Mia ends up falling in love with Collin. On a particularly cold Minnesota night, Mia and Collin are forced to keep each other warm which results in them making love and Mia becoming pregnant. As the police close in on their whereabouts, Collin ends up getting shot and killed. Mia is rescued and some months later, their son, *Owen* (Collin's true name), is born.


Meanwhile, Mia's father is arrested for corruption. Eve gets a divorce from her husband and receives a large settlement, ensuring her financial security.



As Mia struggles to deal with the trauma of her kidnapping, she starts seeing a psychotherapist, *Dr. Rhodes*, who diagnoses her as suffering from *Stockholm Syndrome* in which a victim falls in love with her captor. It's similar to many domestic violence cases where a woman calls the police to arrest her abusive husband but when the cop arrives, she defends her husband and does not want him arrested. In the case of Mia, it was psychosis as the result of serious and prolonged torture that caused her to suffer from the syndrome.


Twelve years later, Mia goes back to Minnesota to meet Delmar.

The final chapter of the book explains that this was her way of getting revenge on her father, whom she blamed for her tragic life. The novel is a fascinating and thrilling read with a powerful message to parents: neglecting your children can have grave and unforeseen consequences.

This book was a 2014 New York Times Best Seller and is currently being adapted into a movie.

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The Science of Nutrition



Health Benefits of Vitamin C

By Mohammad Ahrar, Ph.D.

Introduction

Vitamins are chemical compounds needed by the body for normal metabolism, growth, and maintenance. Most vitamins cannot be synthesized in the body and must be provided in the diet. Vitamins do not provide energy, but even in small quantities, they facilitate biochemical reactions within the cells to produce energy. There are thirteen known vitamins, four of them (Vitamin A, D, E, K) are considered fat soluble, and other vitamins including vitamin C and B vitamins are water soluble. Fat soluble vitamins were discussed in previous issues of *Peyk*. In this article, we review the functions and health benefits of vitamin C.

Characteristics of Vitamin C

Vitamin C (L-ascorbic acid) is a water-soluble vitamin essential for human health. It works as an antioxidant by donating electrons to free radicals and oxidizing agents that cause damage to the cells which may end up with some form of cancer and cardiovascular disease. Vitamin C can prevent other antioxidants such as vitamin E to become oxidized. The role of antioxidants was discussed in *Peyk* 171.

Vitamin C has an effect on genes that code for formation of collagen in connective tissues. (6)

Plants synthesize vitamin C from glucose and fructose, and accumulate it in their leaves and fruit. Some animals and birds can synthesize vitamin C as well, but humans and other primates cannot synthesize vitamin C because of the lack of an enzyme necessary for biosynthesis of vitamin C from glucose. Therefore, vitamin C must be provided in the diet. Cooking and high heat destroy or drastically reduce the effects of vitamin C.

Absorption

Vitamin C is absorbed in the small intestine. However, the rate of absorption depends on the amount of vitamin intake and other factors—studies have shown that in the participants in an experiment who took 200 milligrams (mg) of vitamin C in a day, 100 percent of the vitamin was absorbed. When participants took 500 mg of vitamin C, only 70 percent of the vitamin was absorbed, but more than half of the absorbed vitamin was excreted in the urine. In the third group that took a 1250 mg dose of vitamin C, only 50 percent was absorbed, and nearly all of the absorbed vitamin was excreted in the urine and wasted. (1)

Reports from the U.S. Department of Health also show that 70–90 percent of vitamin C is absorbed at moderate intakes of 30–180 mg/day. However, at doses above 1000 mg/day, absorption falls to less than 50 percent and unmetabolized ascorbic acid is excreted in the urine.

Role and Health Benefits of Vitamin C

The importance of vitamin C was first recognized when its deficiency caused scurvy, a disease which starts with bleeding gums and leads to internal bleeding that can kill people.

Vitamin C prevents scurvy by promoting the formation of collagen, the most abundant protein in fibrous tissues such as connective tissue, cartilage, bone matrix, tooth dentin, skin, and tendons.

Vitamin C helps heal wounds and bone fractures, aids in the absorption of mineral iron, and plays a role in the synthesis of some neurotransmitters and hormones.

Cancer Prevention

According to the U.S. Department of Health, epidemiologic evidence suggests that consumption of enough fruits and vegetables is associated with lower risk of most types of cancer, perhaps in part due to their high vitamin C content. Vitamin C limits the formation of carcinogens such as nitrosamines and, through its antioxidant function, possibly attenuates oxidative damage that can lead to cancer. Some studies on more than 82,000 premenopausal women, aged 33–60 years with a family history of breast cancer, have shown that consumption of an average of 205 mg/day of vitamin C from food sources was associated with a 63 percent lower risk of breast cancer, compared with the groups who took an average of only 70 mg/day (lowest quintile of intake). But similar studies by other researchers found no such effect on postmenopausal women. At this time, the evidence is inconsistent on whether dietary vitamin C intake prevents cancer. Mayo Clinic studies and many other investigations have not supported the beneficial effect of vitamin C in cancer prevention.

Cardiovascular Disease

Evidence from some studies suggests that high intake of fruits and vegetables are also associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. This association might be partly attributable to the antioxidant content of foods that contain vitamin C, and lowering the occurrence of low-density lipoproteins (LDL), which is a major cause of cardiovascular disease. Results from prospective studies examining associations between vitamin C intake and cardiovascular disease risk are conflicting.

The Common Cold

Public interest in taking megadoses of vitamin C for prevention of the common cold remains high, and some research also supports the idea. In trials involving marathon runners, skiers, and soldiers exposed to extreme physical exercise and/or cold environments, prophylactic use of vitamin C in doses ranging from 250 mg/day to 1 g/day reduced cold incidence by 50 percent.

The evidence to date suggests that regular intake of vitamin C at doses of at least 200 mg/day do not reduce the incidence of the common cold in the general population, but such level of intake might be helpful in people exposed to extreme physical exercise or cold environments and those with marginal vitamin C status,

HEALTH BENEFITS VITAMIN C



such as the elderly and chronic smokers. The use of vitamin C supplements might shorten the duration of the common cold and ameliorate symptom severity in the general population, possibly due to the anti-histamine effect of high-dose vitamin C.

Role in Absorption of Other Nutrients

Vitamin C facilitates iron absorption. Studies have shown that drinking as little as four ounces of orange juice increases the absorption of iron in food four fold. Low levels of iron in blood may limit production of hemoglobin in red blood cells, which may result in anemia. Dietary intake of vitamin C plays a major role in formation of hemoglobin and can prevent anemia. Vitamin C also converts folic acid (a B vitamin) into an active form, which is also essential for red blood cell formation.

Role in Collagen Formation

Collagen is a fibrous protein found in tendons, ligaments, bones, skin, surrounding blood vessels, and soft dental structures. It is the strongest fibrous protein in the body and helps formation of strong connective tissue which can make the gums firm, strengthen bones, promote healthy blood vessels, tighten the skin, and reduce wrinkles. Vitamin C is necessary for production of collagen by activating the genes that code for the synthesis of collagen and elastin proteins. Without vitamin C, collagen molecules are inadequately formed, and supportive tissues become weaker and weaker.

Role as an Antioxidant

The chemical properties of antioxidants were discussed in *Peck* 171. The general property of an antioxidant is to prevent unstable molecules that cause harm to cells and tissues that may become cancerous. Unstable molecules are continuously formed in the cells during energy metabolism.

Vitamin C, like vitamins A and E, has an antioxidant property that protects body cells from the damaging effects of oxidants. But vitamin C not only prevents oxidation of different molecules, it also prevents vitamins A and E from being oxidized themselves. As an antioxidant, vitamin C is being studied for its ability to prevent heart disease, certain cancers, cataracts, and asthma.

Deficiency of Vitamin C

The major concern about vitamin C deficiency is the development of scurvy, a disease that killed many sailors on long voyages in earlier years. Early signs of scurvy are tender and sore gums that bleed easily during brushing. Later manifestations of scurvy relate to the breakdown of collagen, poor wound healing, even separation of previously healed scar tissue. As a result, the end of long bones can soften, becoming malformed and painful, and fractures can appear. The teeth loosen in their sockets and fall out in severe vitamin C deficiency. Hemorrhages occur about the joints, stomach, and the heart, due to weakening of connective tissue and capillary fragility. Untreated scurvy often progresses to sudden death, probably from internal bleeding.

People who smoke and those who avoid acidic foods on a continuous basis are at increased risk of vitamin C deficiency.

Children exposed to second-hand smoke, even at low levels, have significantly lower plasma ascorbic acid level than unexposed children. Feeding infants boiled cow's milk can also cause vitamin C deficiency because cow's milk naturally has very little vitamin C and heat can destroy vitamin C as well. (2)

Natural Sources of Vitamin C

Natural food sources of vitamin C include fruits such as citrus, papaya, cantaloupe, green peppers, berries, pineapple, and guava, and vegetables such as potatoes, cabbage, chard, spinach, kale, turnip leaves, Brussels sprouts, asparagus, and broccoli. The approximate vitamin C content in some selected foods is shown in Table 2.

Stability and Preservation

Vitamin C is not very stable. Exposing the vitamin to air, light, heat, and alkaline pH destroys or drastically reduces the effectiveness of the vitamin. Reports indicate that cooking vegetables reduces the vitamin C content in a food by 20 to 40 percent.

Some studies show that the longer the fruit juices are kept around, the lower will be their vitamin C content. In one study, it was found that the vitamin C content of ready-to drink fruit juice was about 65 milligrams per cup on opening, but after 4 weeks (expiration date), the vitamin content was reduced to less than half. (5) Adding boiling water to broccoli conserves more vitamin C as compared to when broccoli is boiled, because boiling the vegetable increases the oxidation time of vitamin C and reduces its effect.

Recommended Daily Intake

According to the U.S. Department of Health, the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C for adult females is 75 milligrams and 90 milligrams for adult men. (4) The health status of individuals also affects vitamin C needs. Individuals who smoke require an additional 35 mg of vitamin C per day because smoking increases oxidative stress in the body and also increases the excretion of vitamin C from the kidneys. More doses of vitamin C may also be needed in response to other stresses such as fever, chronic illness, infection, and wound healing. People who take medications such as aspirin and oral contraceptives on a regular basis may also need more vitamin C per day. After surgery and extensive burns, higher doses of the vitamin may be needed. Usually, adequate daily consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables meets the daily requirement of vitamin C for most people.

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Ablamboo

By Marriam Zarabi



Before pomegranates became well known for their antioxidants and their tart taste, my mother was frequently stopped at the grocery store to answer questions about pomegranates. Although these types of questions posed by strangers deviate from the “usual” questions we were asked about our race and ethnicity, these questions illuminated an additional difference. This nonfiction story is inspired by an event that took place six years ago at the pomegranate stand at our local grocery store.

Mom, I’m going to pick up some bread. I will come find you in a second? Okay azzizam, my dear, I will be by the fruit.

Oh, anaar, I heard my mom say as she wheeled the cart toward the pomegranate display. Watching her navigate the stand and start sifting through the balls of red, I made my way toward the bakery. For the record, she was alone.

Do I drain the juice? An elderly, thin woman wearing a monogrammed blazer broke my mother’s quest of finding the most vibrant and full pomegranate of the season. *The juice is the best part—it is full of vitamins! What...is it?*

This is a pomegranate. The inside looks like jewels. What is it called?

Pomegranate. In my country, it is called anaar. Mhmm. The woman was not impressed, and there also seemed to be a lack of curiosity my mother was encouraging. *Where are you from?*

Iran. We eat pomegranate all the time, especially with friends and family, when we all get together. They say pomegranates are the fruit of heaven. On the longest night of the year, we eat pomegranates and read poetry.

The woman stared at her blankly. *Do you all celebrate Thanksgiving? Now that you are here?*

Unfortunately, this was not an unusual question. *Yes, of course! We have turkey and pie, and we also have anaar.*

Do you peel it like an orange?

Na, na, no no—you can squeeze it and suck the juice. The juice has the most nutrients and is the most delicious.

So you don’t peel it like an orange?

Here, let me show you. My mother grabbed two small pomegranates and handed one to the woman. *Gently push down on the skin until you hear the crunch sound. This is how you get the juice out. It is called ablamboo.*

It is called what? What is this?

Say it with me: aaab-lamb-oo. The “a” sound is like your “a” but add more “aaa” to it.

At this point, I returned to the fruit section to find my mother and an elderly woman holding a pomegranate and making loud “aah” sounds while gently squeezing their respective fruits.

Hi Mom, what’s going on?

Oh hi madaram, I am teaching this nice woman how to ablamboo. Isn’t this fun?

Sure, Mom, but I’m not sure we can ablamboo in the grocery store. Why not? Who says? I am just showing how we do it.

My mom was in full ablamboo-mode, and I knew there was no turning back. She believed in the art of juicing a pomegranate, and wanted to make sure her new friend was doing it correctly. As she continued explaining to her new friend, a new passerby joined the three of us.

What are y’all doin’ with that red ball? she asked with a thick accent. *Oh hi, Lucy!* It seemed the elderly woman knew the woman with the thick accent. *My new friend here is teaching me how to juice this pomegranate—it is called aaah-lamb—*

—ablamboo, my mom interjected. *Would you like to try?* Although it was obvious that my mom’s new friend and Lucy knew each other, my mother took the opportunity to expand the circle and invite Lucy to join.

Well why not, but I’m not exactly sure what is going on right here. Y’all look pretty funny doin’ that!

At this point, I was certain I was ten shades more red than the most ripe pomegranate on the stand. My mother was leading a pomegranate workshop in the middle of the grocery store and despite my objections, she continued. She was short a microphone of incorporating every customer in the store.

Mom, I’m not sure samples are allowed at the store, I said quietly as her new friend and Lucy were exchanging ablamboo tips.

Madaram, what is the big deal? I will pay for it. And we are going to buy them anyway. This is fun! Relax!

Isn’t this fun, Lucy? asked the elderly woman, turning to Lucy.

They are from I-ran but they celebrate Thanksgiving just like us! Only they also eat this. These little red dots inside are full of nutrients and give the juice, she says. As my mom’s new friend and Lucy continued ablamboo-ing, a grocery store employee slowly started making his way toward our small group.

Mom, pllllease, let’s go. I think your new friend and Lucy understand.

The grocery store employee is coming over here; it is time to go.

Madaram, it is okay! I’m sure he wants to learn, too. Unfortunately, my mother was serious.

Memories of eating ajil-shirin, *sweet nuts*, instead of trail mix, anjir, *figs* instead of apples and peanut butter, and taking kabab to lunch instead of spaghetti dominated my ability to tactfully problem-solve this moment: how do I divert the grocery employee’s attention? Should I pretend that we are late to an appointment and distract my mother? How can these women be so interested in pomegranates? Too late, I thought to myself, as the employee started talking to my mother.

Excuse me, ma’am, my name is Steven and I work at this grocery store. I have been working here for 10 years and we just started getting these in, he said, pointing to the pomegranates. *What is this and what do I do with them?*

This can not be real life, I thought to myself. Instead of asking my mother to stop, telling her that they do not provide samples, much less public demonstrations of how to eat fruit, he was asking her *how* to eat pomegranates.

Hi Steven, of course, let me show you. In my country, this is called anaar. You can juice it—the juice is the most nutritious part—by gently squeezing....

You know how the rest goes.

Marriam is a young professional exploring her dual identity through narrative and written prose, often writing about her personal experiences as a second-generation Iranian growing up in Kansas City.



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Recipes for Winter Days ...

From: *Recipes My Mother Taught Me*
Maryam Khatamee Cornejo

(Pomegranate Ash with Meatballs):

Makes 10 servings
Start to finish: 2 ½ hrs

Ash:

1 cup rice	½ cup chopped fresh basil
2 cups chopped fresh parsley	2 cups chopped fresh cilantro
½ cup chopped fresh tarragon	2½ tsp sea salt
1 tsp ground black pepper	1 ¾ cup pomegranate paste
¾ cup red kidney beans, washed and drained	

Meatballs:

½ lb ground lean beef	1 egg
¼ cup finely grated onions	½ cup chopped fresh parsley
½ cup chopped fresh coriander	¼ cup chopped fresh tarragon
1 Tbsp chopped fresh basil	1 tsp sea salt
½ tsp turmeric	½ tsp ground black pepper
½ cup rice soaked in 1 cup water and 2 tsp salt for 1 hr., then drain and set aside	

Mint & turmeric mixture:

½ cup extra virgin olive oil	1 ½ Tbsp spoon turmeric
4 Tbsp spoon dried mint flakes	

1. In a large pot (10 quarts), place rice, kidney beans, 2 ½ tsp salt, 1 tsp pepper, and add 12 cups of water. Cover, bring to a boil over medium heat for 1 ½ hrs (until beans are cooked), stirring occasionally.
2. Meanwhile, in a small nonstick frying pan, heat ½ cup oil, add turmeric, stir for 30 seconds, remove from the heat, and add dried mint flakes. Stir well, then set aside.
3. Add to the pot the ash ingredients of chopped parsley, basil, tarragon, cilantro, and the mint turmeric mixture. Continue cooking for 20 more minutes. Stir occasionally.
4. In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients for meatballs, mix thoroughly, and shape into meatballs the size of a medium tangerine, adding one by one to the pot. Cover and cook over low heat for 35 minutes.
5. Pour pomegranate paste into the pot, simmer over low heat for another 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Check the seasoning, ladle the ash into a tureen or individual bowls, and serve warm.



Spinach and Prune Stew:

Makes 10 servings
Start to finish: 3 hrs.

2 lbs stew meat (beef, veal, lamb)	1 cup finely chopped cilantro
4 cups finely sliced onions	2 ½ Tbsp dry fenugreek
2 cups (10 oz pitted prunes)	1 ½ tsp turmeric
2 Tbsp salt	1 tsp ground black pepper
1 ½ Tbsp lime juice	7 cups of water
½ cup extra virgin olive oil (8 tbs olive oil)	
5 lbs of fresh spinach chopped, steamed, and squeezed dry (or 4 boxes frozen chopped spinach, 10 oz each, thawed and squeezed dry)	

1. Heat up five tablespoons of oil in a Dutch oven, over medium high heat. Sauté onions until golden. Add meat, sprinkle salt and pepper, stirring frequently until meat is golden brown on all sides. Add turmeric and stir for another minute. Add 7 cups of water, stir, and cover. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low. Simmer for 40 minutes
2. Heat up remaining oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium high heat and sauté the defrosted spinach for about 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Add dry fenugreek and cilantro, stir, and sauté for 2-3 more minutes.
3. Add spinach/cilantro/fenugreek to the meat mixture. Add prunes. Cover and bring to a boil. Cook over low heat for another 1 ½ hrs or until stew has reach a thick consistency.
4. If meat is tender, add just the seasoning and transfer the stew into a deep serving dish. Serve warm and with *chelow* (fluffy saffron steamed plain basmati rice).



Racism in the United States and the Iranian-American Community: My Journey Toward Racial Justice

By Hoosh Afsar

“It may be impossible to overstate the significance of race in defining the basic structure of American Society.” –Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

Introduction

Being a student of both Iranian and American history, I always had a keen interest in social justice and, consequently, racial justice in the United States. 2016 Presidential elections and rise of overt racism and white nationalism prompted me to take action. This article is part of my educational endeavor to raise awareness about racism in the United States and where we could begin to address its impact on the Iranian-American community.

Let's begin with a brief history of racism in the United States and the racial justice movements.

Slavery was used for centuries as the engine of economic growth in the new American colonies. Why slavery? As civil rights litigator and legal scholar Michelle Alexander states in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (page 23), “the concept of race is a relatively recent development. Only in the past few centuries, owing largely to European imperialism, have the world's people been classified along racial lines.” As the North American colonies grew and plantations became larger, demand for labor increased. Simultaneously, the invention of the cotton gin in the late eighteenth century significantly increased the demand for cheap labor in the southern American colonies. “The growing demand for labor on plantations was met through slavery,” while “American Indians were considered unsuitable as slaves, largely because native tribes were clearly in a position to fight back” and “European immigrants were also deemed poor candidates for slavery ... because they were in short supply and enslavement would ... interfere with voluntary immigration to the new colonies,” plantation owners viewed “Africans, who were relatively powerless, as the ideal slaves.” (*The New Jim Crow*, page 23-24)

To feed this demand, millions of Africans were shipped under brutal conditions to the New World. Citing the Trans-Atlantic Slave Database, noted historian and professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. wrote that between 1525 and 1866, of the astounding 12.5 million Africans shipped to the New World, an estimated “10.7 million people survived the dreaded Middle Passage, disembarking in North America, the Caribbean and South America.” (“How Many Slaves Landed in the US?,” *The Root*, January 6, 2014) And as New York Times Op-Ed columnist Charles Blow wrote in his recent September 28, 2017, piece, the conditions on the slave ship voyages were so horrific that “[t]he overall slave trade in North and South America caused about 1.8 million deaths. There was so much human flesh being tossed over the sides of those boats — or jumping — that sharks learned to trail the boats to feast on it.”

Of those who survived the Middle Passage, only about 390,000 made it to North American soil, or about three percent of the total. Yet, despite all of the carnage and the limited number of slaves who were actually shipped to North America (in comparison to other locations in the New World), North American slave owners were so effective in breeding slaves that by the end of Civil War there were



four million slaves in all the states where slavery was legal.

With slavery established in North America in the eighteenth century, it is impossible to ignore that “the structure and content of the original constitution was based largely on the effort to preserve a racial caste system – slavery – while at the same time affording political and economic rights to whites, especially propertied whites.” (*The New Jim Crow*, page 25) Scholar Alexander argues that the racial caste system was devised to provide cheap labor while preventing the unity between black slaves and poor whites; large plantation owners made sure that poor whites were led to believe that in any case their situation was “better” than the slaves. Alexander further argues that this goal has been kept in place as the racial caste system has evolved through the centuries of American history. (*The New Jim Crow*, pages 24-25, 27, 35, 38-39, 44-45)

After the end of the Civil War, the passage of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth constitutional amendments, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1866, made slavery illegal and granted citizenship and the right to vote to African Americans. For a brief twelve-year period referred to as “reconstruction,” there was hope for reconciliation and inclusion of freed slaves and African Americans in general in economic, political, and social aspects of life in the American society. Under the protection of federal troops in the southern states, “African Americans began to vote in large numbers and seize control, in some areas, of the local political system.” Literacy rates climbed and by 1870 “... at least 15 percent of all Southern elected officials were black.” (*The New Jim Crow*, page 29) Unfortunately, as historian and civil rights activist W.E.B Du Bois noted in his seminal work, *Black Reconstruction in America* (page 30): “[T]he slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”

The reaction to black political power from the southern whites during the brief period of reconstruction was severe and extreme. A resurgent Ku Klux Klan brought such terror on the African Americans and members of the Republican Party (who ironically were on the side of racial justice at the time) in the South that federal troops withdrew, catalyzing an end to reconstruction for all intents and purposes.

According to a landmark Equal Justice Initiative report on lynching in America (<https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america>), there were “4,075 racial terror lynchings of African Americans



By Sanaz Majd, MD

Dementia

Watching our loved ones age is surely one of the most challenging experiences in life, whether you are a spouse, sibling, offspring, or a more distant family member. And now with an elderly population with an increasing life expectancy and an ever-growing Baby Boomer population (those born between 1946 and 1964), we must all be prepared for what the future holds. According to the Population Reference Bureau (prb.org), the number of people over the age of 65 will double from 46 million today to over 98 million by 2060. And according to a new study just published in *Alzheimer's and Dementia* (The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association) the number of people with clinical Alzheimer's Dementia or mild cognitive impairment will more than double from 6 million today to 15 million people in the U.S. in the next 40 years.

Dementia is definitely one of the most complex yet very common medical issues in the elderly, and one that hits home for those of us caring for our aging parents and grandparents in these later stages of life. It can create potentially unsettling feelings of sadness, concern, and even frustration.

Memory complaints are a common presentation of dementia. But loss of memory can also be a normal part of aging to some extent. So how do you know when you should be concerned about your loved one? How do you know if they may be suffering from dementia?

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a general term that reflects a deterioration in intellectual ability that interferes with social and cognitive functioning. It is a progressive disorder, meaning that it worsens through time.

Only about 1% of the population suffers from dementia at age 60 – the onset is uncommon at this age. But by age 85, it can reach a high of 40%.

Symptoms of Dementia

Most people who are suffering from dementia are not always aware of their cognitive decline. More often than not, it's brought to the doctor's attention by a concerned family member. One of the earliest signs is forgetfulness; in particular, *short-term* memory loss, as opposed to long-term. In the beginning stages, those with dementia may be able to recite vivid details of previous experiences, but they are unable to retain or learn new information.

For example, they may not remember a conversation from earlier in the day. As a result, they tend to repeatedly ask the same questions. They may forget they spoke to Ameh Massih a couple of hours ago on the phone and may call her again. They may forget they were cooking *tarchin* and leave the stove or oven unattended. Or they may frequently misplace objects—although many of us without dementia also guilty of this, the severity and frequency are greater in those with dementia.



As dementia progresses, those suffering from it may then develop the following challenges:

- **Handling complex tasks:** They may have difficulty with complex chores such as paying the bills on time, handling their finances, or cooking a meal.
- **Reasoning ability:** For example, they may have difficulty coming up with a reasonable plan to solve problems, such as what to do if they get locked out of their home without a key, or if the bathroom is flooded.
- **Psychological changes:** They may get easily agitated, become suspicious, or perhaps even more passive and less responsive.
- **Behavior:** They may find it challenging to find the right words to express themselves or tell a detailed story.
- **Spatial ability:** They may get lost while driving to previously familiar places, such as the supermarket or Khaleh Pari's house. They may experience frequent car accidents. It's *vital* that you discuss this with the doctor if the safety of the person or other drivers is in any way a concern. The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) can retest and ultimately make the decision based on the patient's scores; the physician can report for testing, but does not make the ultimate decision.

In the later stages, those with dementia may experience *long-term* memory loss. They may even forget faces. Painfully, this may include close contacts, which is heartbreaking for family members, as you can imagine. They eventually have trouble with activities of daily living in the late stages as well, such as getting dressed, eating, and toileting. At this point, many will require 24-hour care and are unable to be left alone.

Diagnosis of Dementia

Once there is a concern for possible dementia, your doctor may screen for it using a tool called the "Mini Mental Status Exam," comprising of 30 questions testing cognitive ability. It is easily found on the internet for families to administer the quiz, but is always best administered by a trained health care professional. One of the shortcomings of the test is that those with a higher level of education can falsely test higher (and vice versa for those with lower education achievement).

It's also vital to rule out other causes of cognitive decline, such as thyroid disorder, stroke, depression, alcoholism, or even sexually transmitted infections that can linger for many years, such as HIV or syphilis. Your doctor may order a blood test, in addition to a possible head CT (although head CTs are often low-yield for most).

Treatment of Dementia

Treatment may depend on the type of dementia. Although medications may help slow down the progression of the disease, sadly they cannot reverse it.

Alzheimer's is by far the most common type of dementia and has a hereditary component. However, there are a few other types to note, such as vascular dementia (due to plaque buildup in the brain blood vessels), Parkinson's, alcoholic dementia, Lewy Body dementia, and frontal lobe dementia. If there is question, a full neurologic assessment and testing with a neurologist may be a consideration.

In summary, if there's any concern that your loved one may be suffering from dementia, there's no harm in bringing it to the doctor's attention. Be ready to provide specific examples, and writing them down in a journal as they occur through time may be the first step and a useful tool to review with your doctor.

Where to Go For More Information:

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000739.htm>

<https://medlineplus.gov/alzheimersdisease.html>

<https://www.alzheimers.gov/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/aging/aginginfo/alzheimers.htm>

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Continue from Page 17

Racism in the United States and the Iranian-American Community: My Journey Toward Racial Justice

My Story

Back in December 2016, I came up with the idea of forming a national organization to bring racial justice organizations together in a united front with the vision of ending racism. My idea was along the lines of the "Truth and Reconciliation" process in South Africa after the end of apartheid in the 1990s. I always felt that such a process after the Iranian Revolution would have served our native homeland better than the violence that ensued thereafter. I was also inspired by the work of the Equal Justice Initiative (eji.org) and its founder Brian Stevenson, who is working toward a truth and reconciliation process here in the United States by focusing on the truth of racial injustice in the United States, both in its historical context and its current forms. As a result, I embarked upon the path of creating the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (NTRC).

I wrote NTRC's charter with the initial goal of educating ourselves and our communities about the history of racism and the current racial caste system in the United States. I sought advice from many activists and leaders of the racial justice system in the United States. Next came formation of a board of advisors, composed of community leaders who have diligently met on a weekly basis since the beginning of the year. From the start, NTRC's Board

of Advisors and I committed ourselves to the guiding principle of listening without preconceived notions and conducting our educational process as a never-ending inquiry through which new and creative ideas could emerge.

The most fascinating aspect of this process is my own transformation. What I have learned so far and continue to learn every day amazes me on how far I have come and what a long journey I have ahead of me. I see this as a multi-generational process. In fact, the initial goal of "Ending Racism, Here, Wherever and Forever" has now evolved to more of a vision and a commitment to raising awareness and to color consciousness as opposed to "color blindness."

Our Experience So Far

With the lively and creative discussions at NTRC's Board of Advisors meetings, the issue of educating ourselves and gaining credibility in the racial justice movement gained more ground. The creative process led to the idea of our Racism Awareness Project (<http://rapusa.org>), which began with pilot educational events about racism in the United States targeting the Iranian-American community. We have had two successful pilot events where we have screened parts of the 2016 Oscar-nominated documentary "13th" and conducted anonymous surveys and group discussions. Both pilot events have been well received by the participants, and we used feedback from the first event to make the second one more effective. The second pilot event, held in Atlanta, was even better received and several people have now volunteered to participate in an organizing committee to plan our first public event in that city. One clear bit of feedback has been the importance of racism in the Iranian-American community and the necessity of raising our level of education and community awareness on that subject.

With the movement to resist the Trump Administration's Muslim ban and with the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Middle Eastern tendencies, we now have a new-found focus on the rise of discriminatory policies and hate crimes against our community and immigrant communities in general and their relationship to racism in United States. The numbers are in; in July 2017, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported a 91% increase in the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the first half of the year compared with the same period in 2016. The xenophobic undertone of recent events in Charlottesville and Phoenix, coupled with Trump's open sympathy with proponents of racism and white supremacy, show the necessity of our approach. We are also pursuing a new level of public awareness on how xenophobic and anti-immigration policies have gone hand in hand with strengthening racist policies and legislation throughout U.S. history.

What The Future Holds

The process of educating ourselves, our community, and the public in general about racism and striving for racial justice is a long and protracted process. We have started a transformational journey. Our educational events have been received with unequivocal support and enthusiasm from almost all of the participants. Our experience so far has helped solidify our commitment to share our ongoing transformational experience with our community and the American public. The events of the last twelve months—specifically, since the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the movements that have emerged as a result—have definitely made us more motivated. The future is surely uncertain, yet our actions can and will make a difference.

Anger Is Not a Roadmap to Justice; Activism Is.



On December 18, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Visa Waiver program, known as H.R. 158, which was designed to restrict dual nationals of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Sudan (and those with such heritage) from obtaining visas to the United States. *Peyk* (# 161) published an article in which many of our readers voiced their objections to the new law. In December 2017, the Supreme Court has decided (in a 7-2 vote) to allow President Trump's travel ban to take effect while the Court hears the case. The ban generally bars citizens of Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen from visiting the United States.

This ban is baseless and unjust. It is designed to collectively punish millions of people solely based on their nationality while there has been no evidence that it will bolster our national security in any way. It will further isolate our country by significantly limiting academic and cultural exchanges between the U.S. and these countries. This ban fits a larger pattern of xenophobic policies put forth by this administration to curtail the movement of people who look and speak differently. Members of our precious undocumented community, who have for decades carried this country forward on their resilient backs, have borne the brunt of these xenophobic policies.

We live in a world where politicians worldwide are committed to ensuring that giant corporations can move with ease from one country to another in their quest to expand their wealth at the expense of exploited laborers. These corporations are not fighting poverty by creating jobs in economically stricken parts of the world; they sustain poverty by paying inhumane salaries and actively damaging our planet. They set up and benefit from an ecology of abuse. Many of our elected politicians, be it in Mexico or the United States, will not lift a finger to help their fast-disappearing middle class while making a scapegoat of honest and hard-working immigrants for political gain.

The travel ban was introduced less than two years after the Visa Waiver program was signed into law. The speed with which our country and our world are changing has left many of us feeling aghast and angry. Every night, a host of comedians and news anchors on TV express their shock and objections to America's drastically changing political culture. I am glad that they are there. If not for our sanity, their humor and righteous anger are needed to remind us that xenophobic policies should never become normalized. But it is not enough to be aghast; anger will not provide us with a roadmap to a more just and inclusive society.

Do not get me wrong. I am angry and I feel deeply betrayed by the direction in which our country has gone. Like many of you, I left my homeland in search of social justice. This is the country that has made me challenge my assumptions about gender norms and sexuality. Here, I became more aware of racism and its historical and ongoing impact on communities of color in the U.S. I took these critical tools and applied them to Persian literary culture. That has allowed me to forge new historical connections in Persian literary history well beyond the limited narrative of Iranian nationalism with which I grew up. For this, and much more, I am indebted to my liberal American education.

In a way, the U.S. has already prepared me for its dark and testing days. Now that values of civility and inclusion are being tested on unprecedented levels, it is time to embody and teach those values more widely and energetically. This is not the time to withdraw from the world or consider moving to a different country, to merely be aghast and angry. Only activism and civic engagement can give us a roadmap to a more racially and economically egalitarian world.

Let us start with our professions. No matter what we do, we have a presence and our voice matters. As an educator, I am around students in their late teens and early twenties who are in search of their political identity. I try to be transparent and honest when I express my political views. At times I have failed in my mission, but I don't hold back from openly admitting so. I encourage my students to be vulnerable and I challenge them to always keep informed. I support them to choose rewarding adventures and stay in touch with them as they mature and find their place in the world. Two of my students have traveled to Tajikistan to study Tajik Persian, an experience that has changed their lives. They shared with me that it was in the space created by education, the study of languages in particular, where they have felt the most content and enlightened. Reversing xenophobic policies will not be possible without a long term plan that would valorize, rather than actively combat, the study of other languages and cultures.

Regardless of what we do, we can reach out to marginalized communities who were not afforded the same economic and legal privileges as we have. Last January, one of my students took me to the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, a community-based organization in Berkeley that offers legal services to asylum seekers. As a volunteer, I have interviewed dozens of undocumented immigrants and heard their stories of soul-crushing pain and incredible resilience. I am humbled by the grace and integrity with which they deal with these uncertain and horrifying times. They seek in this country a safe haven from the political chaos of their homelands and in turn they've offered their honest and tireless labor. They embody the most humane values of this country.

Our activism will not fulfill its potential if it only remains on an individual level. We need to come together as a community to use the critical tools that we have gained in our adopted homeland to critically examine our local history and confront the prejudice that exists amongst us. Too many Iranians are still beholden to notions of Aryan racial superiority. Just look at some of their platforms online, proudly rubbing shoulders with white supremacists. We need to reject their ideas as a community. Some of us regularly use racial slurs to refer to other minority groups in America, and when confronted, we even refuse to admit that these slurs are hurtful and inappropriate. This is not unique to the Iranian community in America. It is the task of each community to educate itself on the history of discrimination in this country and apply the same critical understanding to shed light on the uncomfortable aspects of their cultural history.

These ideas may not bring us instant gratification as a damning rejection of the current president on a late night comedy show would. But this is not about surviving the next four years or strategizing for the next eight years. This is about building a culture anchored in compassion and social justice. In the next election cycle, we may be able to push out politicians who have voted to economically marginalize middle and low class Americans or have endorsed the president's racist ban, but what about the thousands and millions of Americans who have cheered those actions? Some of those Americans are among our own community, and many of them fear openly admitting their support for the current administration. It is important to express our righteous anger through non-violent protests lest these trends become normalized, but we must understand that anger will not give us a roadmap to justice. Activism will.