



## *Fire-hopping, haircuts and house- cleaning . . .*

As I write this afternoon, it is snowing in Denver, and the only thing we're hopping are slushy gutters. In Iran, on the other hand, right now, the folks are on the verge of celebrating *Nowruz* (also spelled *Nawruz*). For many of us in the United States, this weekend will be marked by college basketball and hockey tournaments; most of us

will not pay much attention to the fact that tomorrow is the Vernal Equinox -- the first day of Spring. In Iran and other parts of the world, the Vernal Equinox is New Year's Day (the meaning of *Nowruz*). And among the members of the Zoroastrian faith (founded some 2500 years ago in present-day Iran), one of the traditions is leaping over a bonfire. The leaping is accompanied with a traditional song, the words of which literally translate to "My yellowness is yours, your redness is mine," with the figurative message "My paleness (pain, sickness) for you (the fire), your strength (health) for me." The fire is believed to burn out all the fear (yellowness) in their subconscious or their spirit, in preparation for new year. Other *Nowruz* traditions include spring-cleaning of the home and purchasing a new set of clothes, in addition to lots of festive food and visiting.

I'm reminded of other religious/cultural celebrations of the New Year (whenever it is observed). Many Asian cultures also feast, clean house and purchase clothes. Many of the Chinese students with whom I've worked also take the opportunity to get a haircut. Part of the observance of the New Year/High Holidays in Judaism is a metaphorical house-cleaning: determining who needs forgiving, and from whom one needs forgiveness (including God) -- all a preparation for the year to come. Western Christian New Year (four Sundays before Christmas) is also marked by a period of "taking stock" in preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth. We western secular types mark the calendrical New Year with feasting (think "parties"), of course, but also resolutions that the year to come will be somehow different (and better) than the prior year.

A look through a multi-religious/multi-cultural calendar shows that "New Year's Day" is observed throughout the year. Most are associated with some celestial/seasonal event, an equinox or solstice, where issues of light and darkness come into play. And for most, there is an accompanying ritual for renewal. In some traditions, there are multiple times for reflection and renewal.

A 19th-century hymn in the Christian tradition begins with the words "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide".\* Our actual rituals and traditions seem to contradict that; there are many opportunities to make a change, small or large. Me? Well, as I look at the snow coming down, and think about the first day of Spring tomorrow, I realize that my house needs cleaning, and I need a haircut. I may not leap over any fires, but maybe there are some things I can hope to leave behind and some new things to anticipate and work towards. (I'll also look forward to my hockey and basketball teams starting the "new year" as champions!)

Blessings,

Gary

\*The hymn was written by James Russell Lowell in 1845 to protest America's war with Mexico, and, so, can be seen as a "social justice" hymn. My point, above, however applies here as well. There are always times of misuse of power that suggest protest!