

Joint Development Associates International

March 2012



Discover Afghanistan

Landlocked and packed with rugged mountains, Afghanistan's terrain produces some of the most extreme weather in Southwest Asia. Winter is a harsh time, and never yields too soon to gentler days with greening hills and wild tulips. With all of the country at least 300 miles away from ocean water, Afghanistan never enjoys summer sea breezes to ease the heat or mild winter winds to take the edge off the bitter cold. Northerly winds whipping south from Russia often lash the country with forbidding blizzards and blankets of snow and ice. Seasonal transitions can be quick, but for now spring is still a few weeks away.

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Dear Friends,

Despite recent events in Afghanistan, JDA's mission remains strong and promising. We continue to join with the people and communities of northern Afghanistan in developing wholistic solutions that affect fundamental progress toward a more equitable society. We are committed to keeping our staff safe and continually adjust our operations and procedures to that end. We will persist in supporting locally integrated solutions in community development, education, health and economic growth. Our hope is for peace and a country where people are free to learn, grow and realize their dreams.

JDA staff is off from work all this week to celebrate the New Year holiday of Navroz. We wish them good health, peace and prosperity. Eide shoma mobarak!

Navroz - March 20: A time for walking in the grass

Navroz, meaning "a new day," originates in ancient Persian history, but today is one of the most cherished celebrations for Muslim communities around the world. Starting on the vernal equinox, March 20, elaborate festivities around food, dance and song mark two weeks of celebrations. Women gather in homes to cook special dishes, trade stories and decorate the soles of their feet and the palms of their hands with henna. Henna is anti-septic, and it is thought that in ancient times it was a way to disinfect the skin after the dirty, wet winter months.

Holiday foods include Samanak, a sweet dish made from germinated wheat sprouts that simmers all day and night. Another dish, Haft Mewa, literally translates as Seven Fruits and is a syrupy stew of seven different fruits and nuts. The sweet medley may include raisin, pistachio, prune, apricot, almond or walnut, and represents the seven creations and holy immortals.



Houses are filled with families singing and dancing, exchanging gifts and extending goodwill to all, forgetting and forgiving past misdeeds.

We asked one of our trainers in Afghanistan how she celebrates Navroz:

Her family begins cleaning the house two weeks earlier, for dirt from last year shouldn't be brought into the New Year. Her home is readied for guests as the city of Mazar-e-Sharif is a destination for many people during this holiday.

She tells us how to make Samanak. First, wheat seed is germinated and cut when the green leaf is no more than 5 cm so that the wheat juice will still be sweet. Then grind the cut wheat to make juice. Combine this juice with flour and cook low for 9-10 hours, stirring constantly, as the mixture becomes brown and thick.

Symbolic for a whole year's worth of good health, she prepares seven other foods whose names begin with the letter "S" because the word for health, salamaty, begins with "S."

On the morning of the equinox, she shares well-wishes with her family and they eat the Seven Fruits compote. And throughout the day her family welcomes guests to share food and happy new year wishes. It is also tradition to take a walk in fresh grass, enjoy a picnic and be at peace with your family, friends and neighbors.

