



TIME FOR CELEBRATION AND SHARING

BY ANISA P., AGE 14

You may be familiar with the three Bahá'í events in February and March: Ayyám-i-Há, fasting, and Naw-Rúz. Ayyám-i-Há is four or five days long, from sunset on February 25 to sunset on March 1. You may be asking, *What do you do during Ayyám-i-Há?* Well, the purpose is to appreciate the bounties of God. Bahá'ís often donate time and money to charity and participate in random acts of kindness, such as helping at soup kitchens.

This is also a time to exchange gifts, whether homemade or from the store. You and your family can pick a service project or give each other a gift for each day of this wonderful holiday. Ayyám-i-Há is a time to appreciate the people around you. Sometimes on holidays, people are rushing around and forget to enjoy their family because they are so busy with other things. So remember to enjoy this blissful time with your loved ones.

After Ayyám-i-Há is the 19-Day Fast, from March 2–20. Some Bahá'ís above age 15 do not eat or

drink from sunrise to sunset. Yeah, you are thinking: *Why would you starve yourself all day?* The idea is to get closer to God by abstaining from food and drink. You are required to fast from ages 15–70 if you are healthy. If you are sick, are pregnant, travel more than nine hours in a day, or are over age 70, then you shouldn't fast, because it could do more harm than good.

During this time, Bahá'ís also pray and meditate. Fasting minimizes our selfish desires, and it puts us in the shoes of someone who is less fortunate than we are. Next year, I will be fasting, and I look forward to the time where I will get closer to God. I experience the fast by waking up with my parents and eating breakfast, and then I don't eat or drink anything until 12:30 p.m. This is one way I practice a half-fast.

The last holiday is Naw-Rúz! It's "New Day" in Farsi (Persian), and it's the Persian and Bahá'í New Year. There is no set way to celebrate it. It's my favorite holiday, because it is always fun decorating our table with Haft-seen, a traditional Persian setting. It means "Seven S."

Each item starts with S and symbolizes something significant:

1. Sabzeh (wheat or lentil sprouts): Growth, freshness of spring
2. Samanu (sweet pudding): Hard work, patience
3. Seeb (apple): Health, beauty
4. Senjed (dried fruit of lotus tree): Productivity
5. Seer (garlic): Medicine
6. Somaq (sumac): Spice in life
7. Sombul (hyacinth): Spring, fragrance, beauty



Naw-Rúz is on March 21, which is also the first day of spring. The point is to renew and refresh your life, as nature does. My Persian family celebrates it by having Haft-seen, relaxing, and enjoying each other's company. I hope you enjoy these holidays, and best wishes in the new year!