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Celebrating National Dessert Day

ational Dessert Day, celebrated every year on October 14, is a sweet reminder to indulge in life's delightful treats. From creamy cheesecakes and decadent chocolates to fruity tarts and warm pastries, desserts bring joy to every occasion. Beyond their irresistible taste, desserts often symbolize celebration, comfort, and togetherness, whether shared with family, friends, or savoured solo. On this day, bakers, chefs, and dessert lovers alike honour creativity and flavour, experimenting with classic recipes or trying innovative sweets. So go ahead, treat yourself to your favourite dessert, and savour the simple pleasures that make life a little sweeter.

#ARTIFACTS

A Blade of Prestige

The 4,500-Year-Old Crystal Dagger of Copper Age Spain



In the heart of southern Spain, nestled within the Copper Age necropolis of Valencia de la Concepción, archaeologists uncovered a breathtaking artifact that has captivated historians and researchers alike, a 4,500-year-old dagger meticulously crafted from rock crystal. This exceptional blade, set in an ivy hill, stands as one of the most extraordinary examples of prehistoric craftsmanship ever found in Western Europe.

Unlike the flint tools commonly associated with the era, the use of quartz crystal, a material both challenging to work due to its brittleness and symbolically charged, signals a highly developed level of skill and intention. Shaping such a hard and fragile mineral into a functional and aesthetically refined weapon would have required not only technical knowledge but also a degree of artistic vision rarely attributed to prehistoric artisans.

The dagger's construction from rare and valuable materials, crystal and ivory, immediately sets it apart from everyday tools or weapons. These substances, prized for their beauty and durability, suggest that the blade was never intended for combat or labor. Instead, it likely served a ceremonial or symbolic role, embodying power, status, and possibly spiritual significance. Its discovery in a la-

This singular artifact, gleaming after thousands of years in the earth, continues to illuminate the rich material tapestry of prehistoric Europe and underscores how much remains to be discovered about the artistry and imagination of our ancient past.

The Parsi New Year : A Tale of Two Calendars

The storm raged for a long time. Then, on the day of the Vernal Equinox (21st March by the modern calendar), the snowstorm passed over, spring arrived, and prosperity returned. Jamshed was now crowned on a new throne, and the good days returned. Evil was suppressed, imperial benevolence grew, disease became non-existent, and people became virtually ageless. The day that Jamshed crowned himself, the Vernal Equinox Day, was celebrated by Parsis as the dawn of a new era. And it was called Navroz (meaning 'New Day') or Jamshedi Navroz.



• Verna Mohon

Different communities across the world celebrate their New Year on different days of the year based on the calendars they follow. The Parsis celebrate their New Year, Navroz, twice a year. Read on to find out why.

Ancient Persian Empire, c. 500 BCE
The blessings of the Parsi god Ahura Mazda and the counsel of Sarosh Yazad, an angel of the god. Early in his reign, Sarosh Yazad alerted him to take precautions against a humongous snow storm that would strike the world and cover it with ice. So, Jamshed moved his people along with a pair of every species of plant and animal to a higher region.

The Parsis are a minority community in India (by one estimate, there are less than 70,000 Indian Parsis). Yet, they have produced a disproportionately large number of high achievers in many spheres: arts, sciences, cinema, business, military and more. They have rich traditions and follow a religion called Zoroastrianism that is at least 3,000 years old.

Parsis from India, c. 1870
One unique tradition is that they celebrate the New Year twice every year. How can a calendar have two beginnings? Let us start from the beginning, from prehistory. According to Parsi tradition, the ancient Persian empire was once ruled for 700 years by the greatest of the Peshdadian dynasty king named Jamshed. (The ancient Persian Empire was much larger than contemporary Iran. It covered vast tracts of West Asia.) Jamshed was wise and compassionate and had the

#CALENDAR



Khurshedji Cama, fourth from the left, back row.

tioned. This became the Qadimi version of the calendar and was followed by some Parsis. The basic issue was still unresolved, though.

In 1906, Khurshedji Cama, a scholarly Parsi reformer from Mumbai (and father-in-law of the Indian freedom fighter Madam Bhikaji Cama), studied the problem carefully and argued that the best way was to add one leap day after every four years. This day could be added on five days that they were already adding in the twelfth month. This was called the Fasli Calendar. Fasli supporters argued this was the accurate solution and other forms of the calendar were being followed for political rather than religious reasons. But the Parsi orthodoxy of India was reluctant to change. Meanwhile, by 1930, the Iranian Parsi community formally embraced the Fasli calendar (though some Iranian Parsis still follow the Qadimi system). The Central and West Asian countries observing Navroz also converted to the Fasli system.

So, in Iran and Central Asia, Navroz or New Year is the Vernal Equinox day or 21st March. That is the 1st of Farvardin in their Fasli calendar. The Indian Parsis also celebrate this as Jamshedi Navroz. But functionally, the Indian Parsi New Year begins on the Shahenshahi Navroz which is a shifting date. In 2023, the Shahenshahi Navroz is on 16th August. In 1992, the

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com



Parsis from India, c. 1870.

Calendar was a good approximation, and reconciled the lunar and solar calculations of a year. Faravahar is believed to be a depiction of a Fravashi (guardian spirit), to which the month and day of Farvardin is dedicated.

It gave them one problem. A year (time taken by the Earth to orbit the sun) is 365.25 days, so, first, 0.25 days seemed like a very small difference. But every four years, it added to a full day. So, every year, the Parsis were celebrating the Navroz earlier and earlier. In the year 1006 CE, the Shahenshahi calendar had swallowed a full year, so that the Vernal Equinox day of the Shahenshahi and Gregorian calendars had a perfect match! The problem was no longer small and so Parsi scholars consulted the Denkard, the Parsi Religious Manual, for a permanent solution.

What they found was amazing! The ancient Parsi sages had already anticipated this problem. The Denkard offered not one but four solutions: a leap day every four years, or ten leap days every forty years, or a leap month every 120 years, or five leap months every 600 years. The first alternative, a leap day every four years, would have

been most convenient (this is what Pope Gregory chose in 1582 CE). But the scholars chose the third option: a leap month every 120 years. Now, who would remember to make the correction after 120 years?

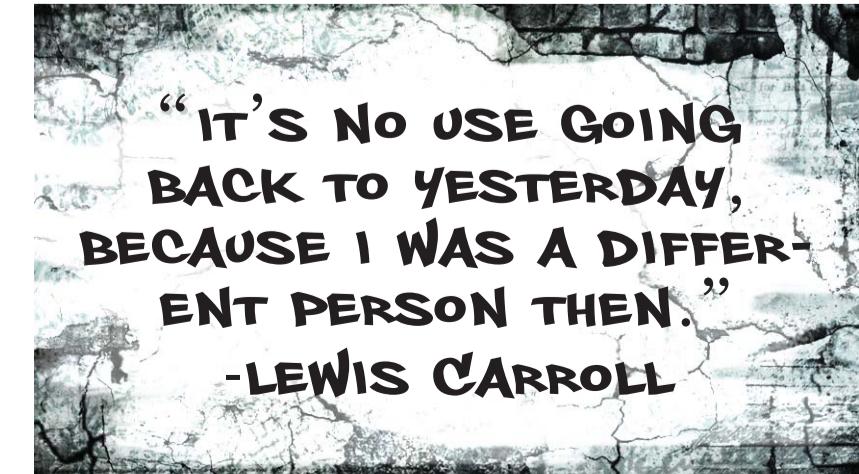
By the 7th century, the Zoroastrian civilization was threatened by Islamic invaders. Many original adherents died, and over the next few centuries, many of them migrated to India. They became the Indian Parsis and they outnumbered the Parsis in Persia. For some years, the contact between the two communities became difficult. Would they independently remember to make the leap month correction? Oddly, the Indian Parsis remembered and made the correction in 1129 CE, but the Iranian Parsis completely forgot! Another 120 years passed. By now, both the Parsi communities had completely forgotten the leap month adjustment.

In 1720, an Iranian Parsi priest, Jamasp Peshotan Velati, came to India and noticed that the calendars for religious dates were not tallying with the Iranian version. Neither party knew why. Around 1745, the priests of Surat in India decided to follow the dates that Velati had men-

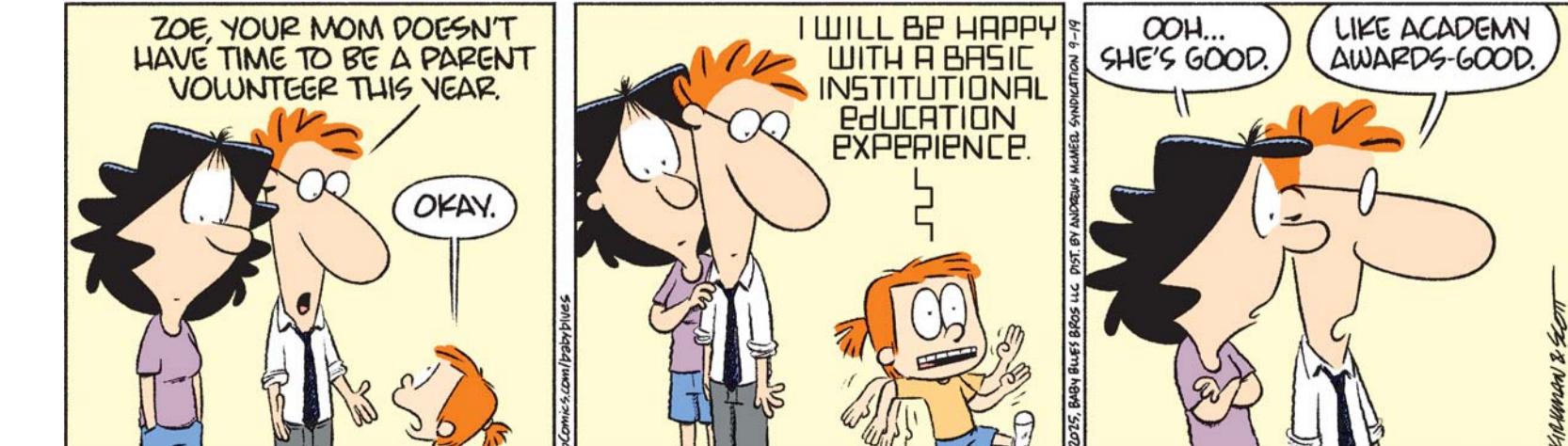


Ancient Persian Empire, c. 500 BCE.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

