



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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*“Through the transformative power of theatre, Golden Thread Productions aims to create a world where our common experience as human beings supercedes our cultural and political differences... The Middle East lives inside us. As we redefine ourselves, we redefine the Middle East.”*

-From the Golden Thread  
Productions program

Last week, as I watched the San Francisco based Golden Thread Productions ([www.goldenthread.org](http://www.goldenthread.org)) tell the story of Norooz, I couldn't help thinking about the importance of having a performance like this in a public library. All the cultures in a community should be represented by the local public library, so everyone knows it is a welcoming place. But particularly right now, when newspaper headlines about Iran hint at yet another country Americans should fear or hate, having a play about the Persian New Year is essential.

I love bi-lingual presentations, so I was happy to hear both the Farsi and the English, as Vida Ghahremani and Torange Yeghiazarian acted out the history of this “New Day,” the meaning of the word Norooz. Using simple props and expressive language, the two held the absorbed attention of the families in the audience. The performance ended with an explanation of the items found on the Haft Seen, or Norooz table, during the celebration.

Called the cloth of seven dishes, each item on the table begins with the Persian letter Sinn. These include sabzeh, which is sprouted wheat, barley or lentils, symbolizing rebirth; samanu, a sweet pudding, symbolizing affluence; senjed, a dried fruit of the oleaster tree, symbol of fertility and love; sîr, garlic, which keeps disease away; sîb, apples, symbol of beauty and health; somaq, sumac berries, representing the color of sunrise; and, serkeh, vinegar, which disinfects and is the symbol of age and patience.

Vida finished by walking around with an elegantly shaped blue vase full of rosewater. Offering a splash of it to each audience member, the room was soon full of the scent of roses, as each person rubbed it into their hands for good luck.

Norooz has been celebrated for at least 3000 years and it always begins on the first day of spring. Traditionally, Iranians clean and rearrange their homes a few weeks in advance, and on the eve of the

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last Wednesday of the year, bonfires are lit in public places. It is a time to celebrate the birth of a new year and the death of an old one.

Spring is also a wonderful opportunity to examine rituals, celebrations and symbols, since we have not only Norooz, but Easter and Passover as well. This particularly struck me when later the same day I attended my family’s annual Passover Seder. There again was a tray of symbols, a story and a celebration.

In my family, the approach to this celebration of endurance and thankfulness is casual, to say the least. Held in two adjoining rooms, due to the number of people, we move quickly through the story, the prayers, the questions and the wine. Children are everywhere – in laps, on the floor, or calmly sitting in a chair, waiting to read aloud. Since we are a family in which many of us

celebrate Easter as well as Passover, one could say the feelings don’t run deeply. But this wouldn’t be accurate, because despite the duality of our religions, we carry a Jewish heritage that very much affects who we are. It is particularly through the men that I am aware of this, since it is my father’s generation who still carry with them the memories of relatives who spoke Yiddish and had names like Moses and Asher. Every year I come away from this evening glad we continue to add it to our busy lives. It may not be my only root, but I am proud it is one of them.