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Shahri Estakhry



Thank You

For Mehregan 1991, Reza Khabazian started a one-page newsletter to inform the community of the Persian Cultural Center's activities and programs. All hail to him! That is when I began my support and work with the newsletter that eventually became today's *Peyk*.

Over the course of the following three decades, the newsletter expanded from its humble single page beginning to its current 8-16 pages, and it also became bilingual in the process. In the early years, Rahim Mohammady--with much credit to him--and I went through the cut and paste era during crazy hours way past many a midnight. Then came the era of today's *Peyk*, with Ali Sadr at the helm, the creativity of Saeed Jalali, and a team of Editorial Board members who deserve so much gratitude. The name changed from the PCC Newsletter to *Peyk* and I took the responsibility of the English editorial.

The years and the times tell us when we must make certain decisions... oftentimes these decisions are not easy, but necessary.

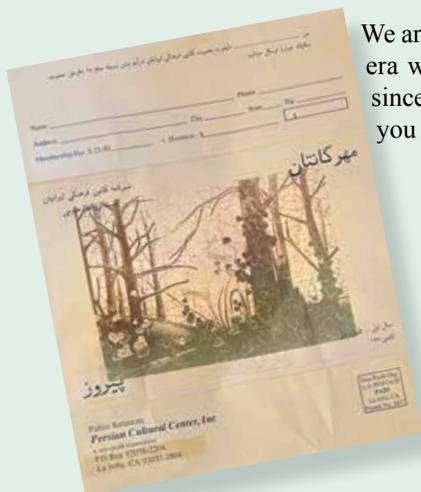
In a few months I will be seventy-nine years old. I am the main witness to my own body and mind growing older and being in need of rest. Many years have passed since I promised my daughter that I would write for her about my amazing life and my adventures. It is time for me to honor that promise and, therefore, I have decided this will be my last editorial for *Peyk*.

I strongly believe it is a huge mistake for anyone in a leadership role not to have the vision of who could and should replace them and move the entity forward with fresh and up-to-date possibilities. There is no private ownership in what we do but passion to present and preserve our cultural heritage and to serve and make a difference to move forward our community in our new homeland.

In finalizing my decision, I began to look for my replacement knowing I wanted a female writer who was familiar with all of the perspectives of our community, as well as the dos and don'ts of *Peyk*. My dear friend Shaghayegh Hanson, Esq., who has served on the Board of PCC and is its legal advisor and has contributed powerful articles to *Peyk*, came to my mind. She is a zealous and resourceful advocate for our community, with a strong and solid voice, bringing much-needed diversity. Happily, she has agreed to replace me on this Editorial page. In welcoming her, I would like to ask you to please give her a very warm welcome and support her with every issue.

This is my heartfelt thank you to my community and deep gratitude to those of you who encouraged me throughout the years and those of you who challenged me to do better. A very special thanks to Sara Agahi for being my behind-the-scenes editor. Reza, Rahim, Ali, Shaghayegh, Saeed, Aria, Shahrzad, and Rachel forever have my gratitude. Thank you one and all.

We are on the doorstep of 2021 when a new era will begin. I hope this era will be one of respect, honesty, dignity, and justice... an era of sincere concern for humanity and our environment. Wishing all of you a very Happy New Year, in good health.



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PCC NEWS

PCC's Board Meetings

The Persian Cultural Center's board of directors holds its meetings every second Wednesday of the month. The last two meetings took place online on November 11 and December 9, 2020.

Docunight - November 2020

The documentary *Iran's Arrow: The Rise and Fall of Paykan*, directed by Sohrab Daryabandari and Shahin Armin, was selected for November's Docunight. *Iran's Arrow* features numerous talking heads who share a common interest for the country's emblematic car, ranging from historical to sociological analyses, from technical to artistic expertise, and from sheer passion to a complicated love-hate relationship. A virtual Q&A with the directors was held on November 15, 2020, hosted by Ahmad Kiarostami.

21st Annual San Diego Asian Film Festival October 2020

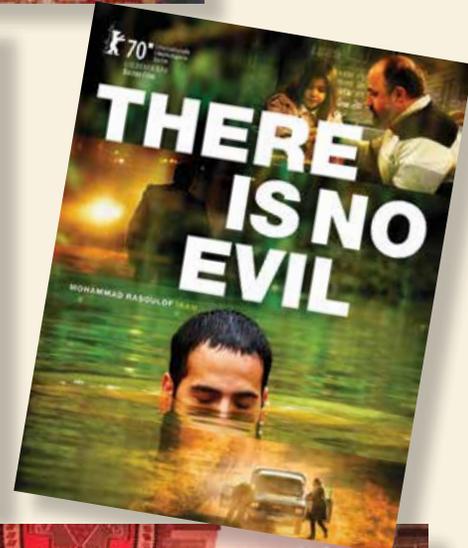
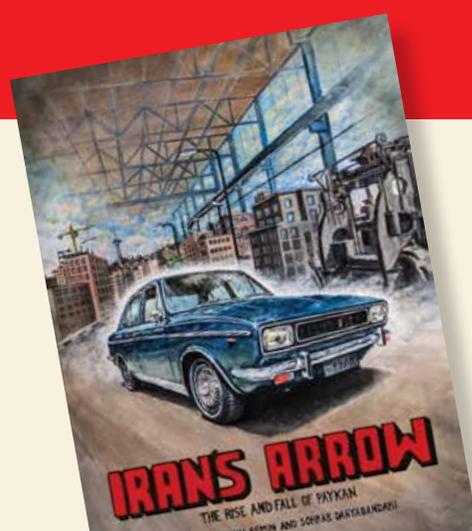
In October 2020, PCC collaborated with the 21st annual San Diego Asian Film Festival, the flagship event held by the Pacific Arts Movement. The two Iranian movies that were virtually screened at the festival were: *There Is No Evil*, directed by Mohammad Rasoulof, and *The Chess Game of the Wind*, directed by Mohammad Reza Aslani.

Virtual Movie and Discussion Series November 19, 2020

Party (1968), a comedy directed by Blake Edwards, was the movie selected for November's virtual movie discussion. A clerical mistake results in a bumbling Indian film actor being invited to an exclusive Hollywood party instead of being fired. Mahmoud Pirouzian hosted the movie discussion, which featured guest Hatef Alimardani, an Iranian filmmaker who reviewed the movie.

Yalda Night Celebration – Online Concert, December 20, 2020

PCC celebrated Yalda night, the Winter Solstice, with an online concert by musical group Vel Shodegan. This unique and cheerful concert was offered free of charge for the community. Many people around the globe celebrated Yalda night. The recorded event is available on PCC's YouTube channel.





Dear Loyal Readers: We need your help!

The first issue of *Peyk* was published nearly 30 years ago in the form of a two-page black and white newsletter. What a long way we have come since then! With the help of a growing number of talented writers, editors, and an amazing graphic designer, our newsletter has transformed into a beautiful magazine filled with original, unique articles and interviews. The *Peyk* staff is comprised solely of volunteers, working purely for the love of the publication and with an extraordinary commitment to community-building.

Did you know that the Library of Congress is a subscriber to *Peyk*? *Peyk* is being received and archived by many academic organizations as one of the achievements of the Iranian diaspora. Our readers span the nation and spread into Canada and Europe, too! Because we value our intelligent and diverse readership, we endeavor to maintain high quality content with an expansive coverage of topics. We strive not to overload our pages with advertisements, although we are grateful for the support.

In the summer of 2019, we established the online version of *Peyk* as well. An increasing number of readers are now able to reach *Peyk* via www.peykmagazine.com. The site is interactive, and you can leave a comment or message for the authors. The past issues are still available at our archive: www.pccsd.org/peyk.

We will gradually reduce the number of printed versions as many of our readers prefer to read *Peyk* online. The cost of paper, printing, and mailing has skyrocketed in the past several years. As a result, we are losing money. So far, we have been able to manage the loss through membership fees, private donations, and private and government grants. In addition, due to tough economic times, some of the few advertisers we did welcome on our pages are not renewing their business with us. Decreasing the advertising revenue puts us in a difficult situation and this is where we need your help to make *Peyk* sustainable.

You can either renew or begin a membership with the Persian Cultural Center (PCC), which comes with a free subscription to *Peyk*, or you can subscribe to the magazine for an annual cost of \$20.

You may consider giving *Peyk* a monetary donation. All contributions are tax-deductible.

For PCC membership and/or a *Peyk* subscription, please go to www.pccsd.org/membership. To show your preference in receiving *Peyk* by mail or online, please send a note to pcc@pccsd.org.

Please join us in our efforts to keep our valued publication alive.

Good wishes to you and happy reading!

Ali Sadr, Editor in Chief





ARIA'S RANTS AND RAVES

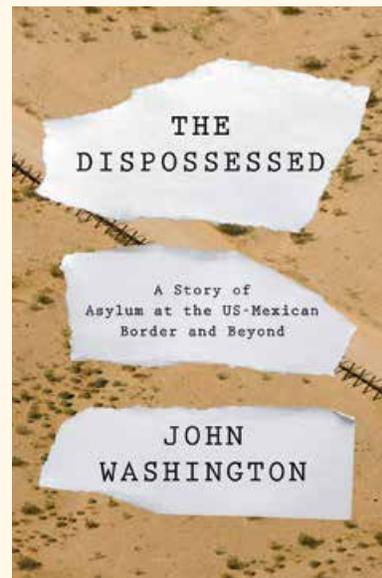
The much anticipated U.S. presidential election is now behind us, but we are left with massive socio-political debris that requires both short term and long term clean up. A part of the problem is that there is no national consensus over what this mess is. I can only offer my own angle. In the age of extreme political and cultural polarization, seven million more American voters agreed that the presidency of Donald Trump was a grotesque episode of democratic norm shattering, naked forms of self-enrichment and corruption, and sociopathic negligence in handling the worst public crisis in modern U.S. history. Well, they may not word it exactly that way but they did come out against Trump. Seven million is not a small number. But thanks to the Electoral College, the arcane and anti-democratic feature of our political system, many pundits are calling this election “close.” In my opinion, any serious clean up would have to begin with Constitutional reform: the Electoral College has got to go. But that is not nearly enough. There is a need to place term limits in Congress and the Supreme Court. We need to address the grossly imbalanced way in which the Senate represents Americans today (California, with 40 million inhabitants, has two senators while 20 out of 50 states, including some Democratic-leaning ones, have an aggregate of 39 million residents with a whopping 40 Senate seats).

Every election is framed by a rhetoric of radical change. Every political campaign makes it seem like the election of their rival would transform the U.S. beyond recognition. But a case for continuity can be convincingly made, especially in foreign policy where both parties pursue global domination. The next four years will demonstrate that creating a rhetoric of change is far easier than changing the structures of power. Regardless of who was going to win this political contest, the following structural problems will remain intact unless there is a legislative will to democratize the U.S. government. Put simply, this is the problem: too much power lies in the hands of too few people. How few? In the case of the tech industry that presides over the biggest surveillance machine ever created in human history, we're talking about people who live within a single zip code. Any system that produces individuals who are rich enough to write their own laws (Uber/Lyft anyone?) is obscenely iniquitous and undemocratic. No political system can justify legislating on behalf of corporate greed and unaccountability based on economic statistics; instead, it creates a web of myths about “equal opportunity,” “pulling yourself by the bootstraps,” and “free market” to rationalize acts of economic and climate barbarism that otherwise cannot be rationalized.

This election cycle, the Democratic and Republican political machines raised unprecedented sums of money. Democrats outspent Republicans by a very healthy margin and demonstrated the extent to which our broken electoral system is awash with money. Politicians like to say your vote is your voice. As enchanting as that phrase may be, in our current political system, that is just *not true*. In this country, money has too much say in our electoral and legislative processes. In 2010, the Supreme Court of the United States made sure the dark influence of money would be further cemented in our political system through a misguided and

anti-democratic decision referred to as “Citizens United.” Unless our lawmakers use their legislative powers to curtail the influence of money from donors and corporations whose bottomline runs counter to workers’ rights and environmental, climate, and racial justice, our elections will be decided largely by obscene sums of money and our elected officials will continue to legislate and rule on behalf of an ever-shrinking group with a shared zip code.

There are other aspects of our flawed socio-political system that will remain intact under Biden. For as long as the U.S. has an astronomical military budget, its aim, no matter in which partisan rhetoric it may be cloaked, will be the pursuit of global domination. Obama’s presidency taught us this lesson quite well. Not only did he carry on Bush’s War on Terror—which produced more war and more terror—he expanded upon it. The Obama/Biden administration often acted as judge and jury by executing “suspects” around the world, a fact that Obama speaks about without any remorse in his recently-published memoir. Reaching a diplomatic outcome with Iran was a step in the right direction, but that came as a result of crippling sanctions that hurt ordinary Iranians. The Biden administration needs to pursue a more even-handed approach to the Middle



East, one that would not turn a blind eye or actively facilitate the human rights violations of countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel. It is not a positive sign that the Biden team has already announced that it won't be conditioning the U.S. monetary aid to Israel.

We have witnessed so many marches in the past four years: the Women’s March, the March for Our Lives, and the protests against the Muslim ban. But none has been more sustained, expansive, and eradicating than the marches for Black Lives Matter. Many

have argued that this was the first time that BLM received wide-ranging acceptance for its efforts to achieve racial justice in the U.S. What often goes unnoticed is the fact that what BLM fights for would also be the best outcome for the safety and mental well-being of police officers. Is it healthy to have a police force so excessively militarized? Is it acceptable to have this amount of economic disparity in the world’s richest country? And when you combine structural racism, poverty, and lack of educational resources with over-policing and a for-profit prison system, you will get a deadly cocktail. This past election, cities like Los Angeles and Seattle voted to invest more in community building, instead of community policing. I am confident that ten years from now, you will see the positive results of investing in humans, rather than in-

vesting in tear gas canisters and riot gear designed to impose “law and order” on a world ravaged by the sheer lawlessness of racial capitalism. Nation-wide changes appear unlikely to happen on a federal level.

Sadly, immigration is yet another area where I expect more continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations. Of course, Biden will be far less cruel and racist than Trump, but that is a very low bar. One needs to realize that cruelty and racism are baked into our immigration laws. Our immigration system, especially with respect to Latin America, has historically worked to preserve the economic interests of corporate America. The latter has needed cheap labor to produce inexpensive goods. Having an undocumented labor force that can be threatened with deportation any time it demands living wages or humane treatment clearly suits corporate America, and the U.S. government has been more than happy to oblige with its illiberal visa policy. Because corporate capitalism feeds off a for-profit educational system, a for-profit medicine and health care system, and a for-profit prison system, our immigration laws and practices treat immigrants as criminals. And no book does more justice to the defining story of our time, the on-going assault on asylum, than John Washington’s *The Dispossessed: A Story of Asylum at the US-Mexican Border and Beyond* (Verso, 2020).

John Washington is an investigative journalist who primarily writes about immigration and criminal justice. He has also translated into English the work of such Latin American authors as Óscar Martínez, Anabel Hernández, and Sandra Rodríguez Nieto. *The Dispossessed* revolves around the story of one Salvadoran young man, Arnovis, and his plight to seek protection in the United States from *maras* or street gangs that threaten his life back in El Salvador. The book follows Arnovis and his daughter from the moment when his life is plunged into danger and uncertainty to their many efforts to seek asylum in the U.S. Arnovis serves as an anchor for a book that covers so much more than one family’s plight. Starting from its brilliant title, Washington frames this as a global story of dispossession. Asylum was created in the early 1950s to provide safe haven to European refugees in the wake of the horrors of World War II. Asylum is a transnational mechanism designed to provide relief and protection for people trapped within their nation-state. But it is not only the nation-state that has dispossessed people like Arnovis— the ultimate dispossession happens at the hands of racial capitalism, the driving force of nation-states, whose genesis was marked by the theft of natural resources and human life.

You may be forgiven to presume, based on its subject matter, that this book would be dull and tedious. Far from it! *The Dispossessed* is actually written with flair and clarity. Washington’s prose becomes deeply lyrical in places where he conveys the twisted and oppressive nature of our immigration laws or the depths of despair and hope that asylum seekers feel throughout their journey. See this passage for instance, on page 50: “When a judge denies a person asylum, they are redispossessing them not only of their story, but of what connects them to their home, the place where *being human* flourishes.” Or consider this passage on page 224: “The United States has built in, into its deepest foundation, the contradiction of claiming to be the land of the free— of ‘safe and agreeable Asylum’— and of engaging in the racist persecution of those clambering for freedom. It is a land of selective welcome and outright refusal.” It is hard not to be constantly moved by Washington’s storytelling and words.

Throughout the book, you will meet different people who are part of this broken human ecology: judges who hold a person’s life in the palm of their hands, ICE agents who terrorize undocumented communities, and some who even rejoice in tearing families apart, brave religious activists who open the door of their churches to asylum seekers who have been wrongfully denied asylum, and fathers who refuse to give up on a safe and dignified future for the children. You will learn about how our immigration laws have historically been written by a small class of male, white, and affluent lawmakers whose racist laws have disproportionately affected more dark-skinned immigrants and asylum seekers like Haitians. You will learn that *coyotes*, or human traffickers, and organized crime did not form in a vacuum. Their presence affirms years of misguided policies, financial and political support for genocidal regimes in Central America, and undemocratic military interventions in that region. John Washington is an ideal storyteller. He has spent years traveling in Latin America, has explored the Arizona borderland, and studied and covered our immigration policies for *The Nation* and, more recently, for *The Intercept*. If there is one book that will show us the human cost of not paying close attention to national politics after Trump, it is John Washington’s *The Dispossessed*. Please support the publication of such compassionate and vital investigation like this; buy your copy at bookshop.org.

There is no reason for despair. All the structural problems outlined in this essay have a legislative solution. Politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, like to sell us this false idea that the U.S. government is extremely limited in its ability to transform the lives of Americans. They’ve been selling us the idea that the U.S. government needs to cede more space to the private sector and seek its partnership in addressing the most pressing issues of our era. Let’s not fall for it! The private sector, as awesome and innovative as it can be, has a different bottom line (capital gain) than the government (public service). The U.S. government has the power to intervene impactfully and meaningfully in the lives of its constituents. That is why, after years of corporate-globalist policies, millions of people resonated with Trump’s idea of a government making crucial interventions in their lives. It is too bad that Trump displayed zero interest in public services, but that does not mean that we should let the Biden administration take us back to a mythical normalcy. No such thing exists.

The U.S. government has the power to address structural problems. It has the power, for instance, to challenge the cartoonish amount of monopoly created by corporations before it is too late. It has the power to make corporations like Amazon and Netflix pay taxes. It has the power to condition corporate bailouts on living wages for workers. It has the power to create new exciting jobs to help our work force move toward sustainable energy. I am an educator; my craft is words. My power is to use language instructively, effectively, and honestly to make you reflect, make you inspired and angry, and ultimately, persuade you to think differently. But our lawmakers don’t just have words or “thoughts and prayers” to offer us. They have one of the most powerful mechanisms available to any of us in a democratic society: the power to make and enforce laws. Don’t buy it when they tell us they don’t have the power to change things and then ask us to make a donation to their next campaign and show up to vote. Voting is *over* in America. It’s time to legislate.



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WHY ARE WE NOT TALKING MORE ABOUT THE “SHECESSION”?

By Shaghayegh Hanson



Many moons ago, I wrote an article in *Peyk* entitled, “It’s Still a Man’s World.” (*Peyk* #121, May-June 2009.) I was making the point that despite the expansion of opportunities for women outside the home, we are still: (1) the main caretakers inside the home; and (2) we are not treated or paid equal to men in the labor force. I never imagined that, just over a decade later, a global pandemic would render these existing inequities the tipping point for women walking the home/career tightrope.

There is abundant evidence that women are bearing the brunt of the pandemic’s effect on the labor market, such that economists are calling it a “shecession” (as opposed to the “mancession” of 2008, when mostly men lost manufacturing jobs in the Great Recession).¹ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 55 percent of the 20.5 million jobs lost in April 2020 were attributable to women. Most disturbing, however, is this grim statistic: approximately 865,000 women have had to drop out of the workforce altogether since those April 2020 statistics.² A further 2 million women are considering leaving the workforce, taking a leave of absence, or some other downshifting of their careers.³

The consequences of this shecession are alarming, not least because it threatens to wipe out the progress women have made in the labor market over the last few decades.⁴ Before the pandemic hit, in December 2019, women held more payroll jobs than men for the first time in about a decade; that statistic was wiped out overnight.¹

The factors at play are readily apparent. With 7 million Americans reporting unemployment due to caring for children,⁴ one of the hardest hit groups is mothers with young children. When I wrote my 2009 article about how mothers were still responsible for the lion’s share of household/childcare responsibilities, I based my conclusions on my personal experience of juggling a full-time legal career with raising two children in elementary school. I knew my female colleagues were jugglers, too. Recently, a report published by *Lean In*—a nonprofit founded by Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook’s CEO, to support women in the workforce—has confirmed that working mothers are more than three times as likely to be responsible for the majority of the housework and child care during the pandemic.² With most schools and daycares closed, this responsibility has become a full-time job, taken up by mothers, rather than fathers, not just because of enduring gender role assignments, but also because the gender wage gap makes the decision for women to quit work economically prudent. The latest Census Bureau data shows women earn approximately 82 cents for every \$1 earned by their male counterparts.⁵ Economists predict

that if, and when, these women return to the workforce in the future, the wage gap will be more than 2 percentage points wider.⁴

Women of color have also been disproportionately affected because a large number work in industries hardest hit by the pandemic, that is, leisure, hospitality, service, education, and even some parts of health care. For example, women make up 94 percent of child care workers, 73.2 percent of workers in clothing stores, 51.2 percent of workers in the leisure and hospitality industry, 61.2 percent of manicurists and pedicurists, 60.3 percent of maids and housekeepers, and 57.2 percent of skin care specialists.⁶ According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, because these jobs are also underpaid and undervalued, newly unemployed women have less of a financial cushion to fall back on.¹ For single women, the threat of falling into indefinite poverty is very real; a third of single mothers were already living below the poverty line and, since February, at least a million of them have lost their jobs.¹

Given the circumstances, I am left to wonder why we are not giving the full-throated attention to women’s rights issues as we are to the usual gender-neutral matters of fiscal policy. It appears the problem begins at home, because “[c]ouples tend to see men’s unemployment as a problem,” but “reframe women’s unemployment as an acceptable way for women to take care of their family.”⁶ This reframing carries over to mainstream media discussions of the current economic crisis. But overlooking women’s issues in a shecession is not conducive to finding solutions for long-lasting economic recovery.

There is no sense in creating jobs without ensuring that women, in particular, are able to return to work. Policymakers and employers must begin to view the economic impact of the pandemic specifically through the lens of a shecession if we want a speedy recovery. Therefore, any government stimulus package, or employer-based recovery efforts, must include correcting gender disparities by addressing paid sick leave and family leave, affordable childcare, an increase in the minimum wage, onsite daycare centers (as they had during World War II for women in factories), and paternity leave, to encourage an equal investment of time by fathers in the home. Where remote work is possible and/or necessary for women to keep working, employers should make such flexibility available, without treating it as a dead-end to promotion or a wage increase. There are many other solutions that could be undertaken if we set our minds on the relevant corrective measures.

Just as George Floyd’s murder has given us a popular mandate to fix systemic racism, the pandemic’s shecession must also be treated as an inflection point in how we move towards gender parity in the labor market. Failure to make the most of this opportunity now, when the demand and need is the most urgent, is dooming women, including our mothers, sisters, and daughters, to continued struggle in a man’s world, despite working twice as hard in it.

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/unemployment-coronavirus-women.html>

2 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/10/11/865-000-women-were-laid-off-last-month/3609016001/>

3 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/women-work-gender-equality-covid19/>

4 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-30/u-s-recovery-women-s-job-losses-will-hit-entire-economy>

5 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/03/24/482141/quick-facts-gender-wage-gap/>

6 <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/10/21271170/coronavirus-great-recession-2020-pandemic-women-covid>

Mehregan Fall Fête 2020

Despite pandemic precautions necessitating a virtual format, the Mehregan Fall Fête for the Arts of Iran collection presented jointly by the San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA) and the Persian Cultural Center (PCC) on October 11, 2020, was a great success. Featuring the talented Damsaz Ensemble--with Niloufar Shiri on kamancheh, Shahab Azinmehr on tar, Milad Jahadi on tonbak and daf, and the mesmerizing vocals of Jessika Kenney--the virtual concert raised over \$7,000 from 13 community supporters. The recorded event may still be streamed online through PCC's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

This annual event, which raises funds to support the Arts of Iran collection at SDMA, reflects a collaboration between SDMA and PCC dating to before 2015. Funds raised in recent years, along with an increase in the collection's growth, enabled the conservation of selected works and, more notably, the establishment of a dedicated exhibit to the Arts of Iran in 2017. We are grateful to PCC's Anahita Babaei, who has been at the forefront of this collaboration since its inception, and wish to acknowledge some of the trailblazers in the community, such Dr. Ali Gheissari, the late artist Ms. Susan Niamir, and especially Ms. Shahri Estakhry, for spearheading the initiative to support the arts of Iran and the Persianate world at SDMA with a long-term exhibition space.

In 2018, SDMA Trustee Ms. Gita Khadiri took on the responsibility of chairing this important fundraiser, establishing the fête as a much-anticipated annual event and increasing support for the Arts of Iran initiative. With a curator dedicated to SDMA's collections of art from Iran, South Asia, and the Islamic world once again on board, we have now also expanded our acquisition strategy to include contemporary art from Iran and the Iranian diaspora. We are grateful to all those who supported this year's program and are excited to share that we will be directing funds raised from the 2019 and 2020 Mehregan events toward new acquisitions of historic or contemporary works for the Arts of Iran collection in the new year.

As San Diegans and Iranian-Americans, we feel particularly honored to take part in these opportunities to represent our collective culture and heritage through our official museum roles. We look forward to sharing more Iran-focused stories from SDMA with you and hope to reveal the first of our Mehregan acquisitions by the next Fall Fête. Please stay tuned!

Gita Khadiri and Ladan Akbarnia

Arts of Iran at SDMA

Including nearly 200 works dating from the 9th to the 20th centuries, this collection was built from around the 1950s to the 1960s through gifts as well as SDMA purchases with funding from individuals and The Asiatic Arts Committees of the Fine Arts Society, which today comprises the Asian and South Asian Arts Councils. Selections from SDMA's permanent collection of Persianate visual culture dating after the advent of Islam in the 7th century as well as temporary loans of pre-Islamic objects from Iran and the Ancient Near East from other institutions can usually be found in the Arts of Iran Gallery. You can also visit SDMA virtually (zooming in right up to objects and labels!) through SDMA 360, and access special exhibitions, tours, and programs through Virtual SDMA, or search our online collections through SDMA's website



*Ms. Gita Khadiri,
SDMA Trustee*



*Dr. Ladan Akbarnia,
SDMA's Curator of South Asian and
Islamic Art, speaking to viewers in a
pre-recorded video for the Mehregan
Fall Fête on October 11, 2020.*

at www.sdmart.org. An illustrated page from a Timurid *Shahnama*, for example, which went on view in mid-October, features online in Episode 15 of SDMA's Masterpiece Minute podcast, which introduces works from the permanent collection in the format of a brief but engaging mini-talk.



*The Damsaz Ensemble, performing virtually at the Mehregan Fall Fête
on October 11, 2020.*



Zahhak enthroned, a page from a dispersed manuscript of the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings). Iran, possibly Shiraz, ca. 1435. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Edwin Binney 3rd, 1972.223. © Trustees of the San Diego Museum of Art



by Hooshyar Afsar



Electoral College: Past, Present, and the Future

The 2020 presidential election once again casts a national spotlight on the electoral college process. We now know that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were elected with over 81 million votes and 306 electoral votes (with 270 required for being elected). Yet, with all the unsubstantiated claims of election fraud by the Trump camp (that were defeated in about 40 court cases in five “battleground” states for lack of evidence), confusion around the whole electoral college process, the role of state legislatures, and the certification process itself is at its highest. I intend to shed some light on the historical aspects of the electoral college, its present state, and its prospects for the future.

Why An Electoral College?

Let’s start with the original U.S. Constitution. Article II of the Constitution of 1787 is about the executive branch and, naturally, that’s where the term “electors” for president is first used. The term “electoral college” never appears in the original seven articles or the 27 amendments to the Constitution. What does the Constitution say about electors? After stating that executive power will be in the hands of the president who is elected for a four year term along with the vice president, the second clause (paragraph) of Article II continues by saying: “Each state shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress.” Basically, the number of each state’s electors is the sum-total of its representatives to the House--its two senators and state legislatures decide how they are appointed. The rest of Article II, Section 1, is about who may not be an elector and the process of electing the president and vice president, plus the tie-breaker mechanism that is a complicated mess as we shall see further down in this article. As you can see, the Constitution is rather brief on the process of electing the electors and it is left for the states legislatures to decide.

So, why did the framers come up with such a convoluted process instead of the simple national popular vote? Contrary to the myth that the electoral college was created to balance the representation of states with a smaller population versus the more populated ones in choosing the president, the framers of the Constitution had other reasons in mind. In fact, it was the Senate that was created as a body to balance the power of states with smaller populations; thus the idea of each state having two senators, regardless of its population. The only federal body in the original Constitution whose members were set to be elected “by the people” is the House of Representatives. Even the election of senators was left to state legislatures until the ratification of the 17th amendment in 1913 that switched the electoral process for that body to a straight popular vote. The real reason for the electoral college goes back to the 3/5th clause in Article I, Section 2. One may ask: but Article I is about the legislative branch and Section II is about the U.S. House of Representatives, so why

does that have anything to do with the electoral college? The answer is: nothing directly, yet everything indirectly.

The 3/5th Clause and the Shame of Slavery

What is the 3/5th clause? Article I, Section 2, of the Constitution covers the election of the U.S. House of Representatives. In order to determine the number of representatives for each state, Article I, Section 2, says that there needs to be an enumeration of population (we now call this the “census”) every ten years, starting in 1790. Then that Constitutional clause addresses who should be counted and goes on to say that the population “... shall be determined by adding the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other persons.” In plain English, it means all free people (men) plus indentured servants who were similar to enslaved people but had a term of enslavement years, minus Native Americans, plus three fifths of enslaved people for life (also called chattel slavery) who were of African origin. Notice that the Constitution doesn’t use the term “slave” or even “negro.” In fact, nowhere in the original Constitution are the terms “slave” or “slavery” used; only the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865, used the term slavery. The framers of the Constitution, many of whom were slave owners (James Madison, George Washington and, as was recently discovered, even Alexander Hamilton), knew that enslaving people did not go well with the pretense of liberty and democracy. Many of them intellectually opposed it and were ashamed of it, yet went ahead with it and profited from it.

So, how is this related to the electoral college? The way to understand this relationship is to consider the alternative of electing the president by popular vote. If that had been the process, then what would happen to the states that had a large enslaved population? Enslaved people at the time did not have any rights, were not legal citizens, and obviously could not vote. The three-fifths clause meant that they were considered to be less than human. According to the first U.S. Census of 1790, there were roughly 3.9 million people in the United States, of whom 694,280 (17.8%) were enslaved persons. Yet seven states (five of them in the South and two bordering the South) had 93% (640,023) of the enslaved people. This meant that the “slave” states, mainly in the South, would have a significantly smaller number of votes for electing the president compared to their real population if the president were elected by popular vote. For example, Virginia, the most populous state of the Union with over 19% of the U.S. population at that time, had over 292,000 enslaved persons (39.1% of its total population). Assuming 40% of this enslaved population were adult male (women could not vote until passage of the 20th Amendment in 1919), this meant the loss of almost 117,000 potential voters in the presidential elections. So, the advent of the electoral college gave these states many more electors (therefore more weight) based on the inclusion of 3/5th of all the enslaved people (by way of representatives to the

House of Representatives, plus two senators each). Virginia had 12 electors, the highest on the list, and next was Pennsylvania (a non-slave state) with 10. Plainly, the electoral college is another shameful vestige of slavery.

The Tie Breaker Is a Complete Mess!

While a system of popular vote is unlikely to run into a tie (an issue that could be resolved with a runoff election between the top two vote earners), the framers came up with a messy process in Article II of the Constitution that would send the election of the president to the House of Representatives (and election of the vice president to the Senate!) in case no candidate received a majority of electoral votes. Add to this the fact that in Article II, the vice president is the candidate who receives the second most electoral votes, and you have a complete mess that almost ended in a civil war during the U.S. presidential election of 1800. In that year, with the emergence of the first political parties, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr--both Democratic-Republicans--received 73 votes while the candidate of the opposing party (the Federalists), John Adams, received 65 votes. The Federalists were so anti-Jefferson that when the election went to the House of Representatives, the first 35 ballots ended in a tie and only after Jefferson appeased the Federalists and agreed to a certain number of their demands, was he elected on the 36th ballot. To fix this mess from happening again, the 12th Amendment of the Constitution was ratified in 1804 to separate the ballots for electing president and vice president, yet it preserved the messy tie breaker systems in the original Article II.

“One Person, One Vote” is Neglected!

Another major issue with the electoral college is that the person with the smaller number of popular votes can become president. This negates the foundational democratic principle of “one person, one vote” and it has happened five times in U.S. history. It has occurred twice in the last 20 years alone, during the Gore vs Bush Florida Fiasco of 2000 and with Clinton vs Trump in 2016. The other three times were in 1824, 1876, and 1888. It also causes the attention of political campaigns to be only on what are called “Battleground States.” Those states are the only ones up for grabs and presidential campaigns pretty much ignore the other states, depriving over 200 million people from active participation in the presidential campaigns.

The Electoral College Today

While during the first presidential election in February 1789 only five states went by popular vote for choosing the electors, by 1880 all the states used popular vote. Today, 48 states have a winner-take-all process, while in Maine and Nebraska, two electors are elected by overall popular vote in the state and the remaining electoral votes are determined by a plurality of the vote in the Congressional districts. Although many people may think that, with the exception of the election of 2000, the presidential winner is determined on the night of election, that is only news organizations’ projections. Media giants such as CNN, NBC, ABC, FOX, and AP have teams that make projections per state based on the votes reported and their statistical analysis that gives them a high level of certainty to “call” a state for a certain candidate. The media projections have become a tradition, but the transition to a new administration officially starts by order of the General Services Administration after the projection. Yet, each state has its own rules and regulations and its own deadline for certifying the elections. Then the electoral college has a detailed procedure for certifying the presidential election with a deadline of the first Monday after the second Wednesday (don’t ask me why!)

in December (that was Monday, December 14 in 2020). We shall call it “Certification Monday.” The whole process for the electoral college certifying the elections and the final electoral votes counted and recorded is written into federal law in Title 3, Chapter 1, of the U.S. Code.

Basically, on Certification Monday, electors in each state meet and issue official certificates that identify the electors of the candidate who won the state. Then, on January 6, the House of Representatives and the Senate gather together and, with the current vice president as the chair, count the electoral votes from the certificates issued by states on Certification Monday. At the end of that meeting, the candidates with the majority of votes are elected president and vice president. Then, at noon on January 20th, the elected president and vice president take the oath of office during the inauguration and their term officially begins. If there is a tie in electoral votes or no candidate has a majority, there is a tie breaker system where the election of the president goes to the House of Representatives, with each state delegation having one vote (50 votes total) and the election of the vice president similarly goes to the Senate.

If you have reached this point in the article, you have my heartfelt sympathies and congratulations. I am sure you, too, agree that this is one convoluted mess. There are other complications! Only 29 states plus the District of Columbia have laws that bind their electors to the popular vote. There have been multiple cases throughout U.S. history, including during the 2016 election, in which a number of electors voted for someone other than the popular vote getter of their states. They are called “faithless electors” and, in a very close presidential election, they could change the results!

How Can We End This Mess?

Ending this convoluted mess can take more than one path. The more difficult way is a new Constitutional amendment that would change the election of a president to a straight popular vote. According to Article V of the Constitution, ratification of a new amendment requires either 2/3 of the state legislatures or 2/3 of both houses of Congress to propose the amendment and then three-fourths of the states required to approve it. It sounds very difficult yet it could be done as it has been done twenty seven times in U.S. history. Another simpler path is the National Popular Vote bill that each state passes and commits its electors to the candidate who wins the popular vote (for details see nationalpopularvote.com). Currently, it has been enacted by 15 states and the District of Columbia with 196 electoral votes. It needs an additional 74 electoral votes to get to 270 and go into effect.

Ending the electoral college and electing the U.S. president via popular vote will be a huge step in expanding our democracy. Just imagine what would have happened if Al Gore had been elected 43rd president of the United States in the year 2000. There is a big chance that 9/11 could have been avoided, the Iraq war would have never happened, the Supreme Court would have two more liberal members instead of conservative Chief Justice Roberts and arch-conservative Justice Alito. There would have been an unprecedented focus on climate change. Then imagine if Hillary Clinton had been elected in 2016 instead of Donald Trump! There would be at least 200,000 fewer Americans dead because of COVID-19 even if the U.S. had done two times worse than Germany. So many other policy disasters could have been averted. History clearly teaches us that replacing the electoral college with a national popular vote is essential to further perfecting our union.



Abel & Cain:

The Recent Election

Dear readers,

For many years in the Persian section of *Peyk*, we have had a column that has been allocated to debate and dialogue between two fictional brothers, Abel and Cain. These brothers are two years apart and, although they have been brought up in the same family, they have different and sometimes opposing points of view. The column has been a success in the Persian section, and we have decided to translate these discussions into English to see whether they would have a similar impact in our English section. Abel and Cain typically discuss current affairs and talk about their views. We present these views without any judgment and leave the judgment to the readers. The subject of discussion in this issue is the recent presidential election.

Abel: It feels like a heavy weight is removed from my shoulders. After such a long time, I felt a deep sigh of relief. After 4 years of nightmares, lies, and the hoax that was the ruling period of President 45, the fact that, finally, people are coming to the office that know what they are doing gives me a strange feeling! Even though all signs and polls showed that the election would end in Biden and the Democrats winning, I had some worries and expected the Republicans to do something in the last moments to change the results, either with the help of foreign countries such as Russia and Ukraine or through a military coup! It seemed impossible for Trump to accept his loss and concede.

Cain: It is not such a big deal! Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose! The truth is that with all those polls and surveys, I expected it to be even worse. But life goes on. I can't understand why you guys take this stuff so personally. It is an election after all, and out of our control, with billions of dollars spent on winning and losing. Finally, someone wins and someone loses. At least this time I didn't hear anything from the media and politicians regarding foreign intervention. And if Trump got more than 70 million votes, they are truly his. Do you know what this means? It means he has more votes than in 2016. Many of the minorities and women voted for him, again! Probably you guys haven't figured out how to analyze this! It is difficult for you to accept how a third of Hispanics and nearly 20% of black men have voted for Trump, even with all your propaganda against Trump and calling him a racist, anti-minority, and misogynist. Does it mean that all these women and minorities who voted for him are racist and misogynistic? You know very well that Biden didn't win easily. I know you want to bring up the Electoral College stuff again and that Biden has won the popular vote by 6 or 7 million people. But in the battleground states, the votes were very close. Moreover the

Democrats not only couldn't get the majority in the Senate, but they also lost many seats in the House. So what happened? How come Trump is more popular than in 2016?

Abel: I'm happy that at least you accepted the results of the election and didn't bitch and moan! But I accept what you are saying that the results were much closer than I expected. Although after the 2016 elections, I understood that I should not take the polls and surveys seriously. Again I believe that this time no foreign interference was mentioned and the election was "fair" and "square," unlike in 2016 when Putin and Russia were deeply involved, although Trump still claims that there was cheating and the election was rigged and stolen from him. The fact that we consider elections as something personal is due to the fact that politics is

How come Trump is more popular than in 2016?

important for our generation. We pay attention to the games played in politics.

Certain phenomena are important to us. Human rights, democracy, social justice, peace, and the environment are important to us. When a president or politician is racist, doesn't believe in democracy, makes clear that social justice is not important to him, constantly lies, has no respect for others, champions policies that only serve the rich, undoes all progress made before him, and lets thousands of innocent people perish for political gains, yes, it does become personal. Then, of course, we would try to prevent such a disaster from being repeated for another four years. To answer your question, I don't believe that all those 70 million who voted for Trump are racist, misogynistic, and want to serve the rich. I have to admit, however, that one major benefit out of Trump's

I repeat myself that I don't think all those voting for Trump are racist and support all those ugly qualities, but apparently, they don't have any problem with them! But we do!

presidency was that it brought to the surface all those hidden feelings--racism and fascism dared to show up bluntly in society. Again, I repeat myself that I don't think

all those voting for Trump are racist and support all those ugly qualities, but apparently, they don't have any problem with them! But we do!

Cain: It seems you still have a problem with digesting the facts that a lot of minorities don't see the issues the same way as you do. I know you understand numbers. So have a look at these statistics published by Reuters (and mentioned by the BBC). I'll just summarize them. These are the different social layers that voted for Trump in 2020: 61% white male, 55% white female, 19% black



male, 5% black female, 36% Hispanic male, 30% Hispanic female, and 38% Asians and other minorities. I knew whites would vote for Trump, but 55% of white women voted for him even though Trump is considered misogynistic. That is 3% more white women than voted for him in 2016. And don't 19% of black men have any problem with his so-called racism, as you put it? Thirty percent of Hispanic women don't have any problem with his anti-immigrant policies? I don't think your answer is yes. Perhaps your criteria is wrong?

Abel: No, my standards in knowing which politicians and policies are correct are quite clear. Of course, there are certain other standards, too. I have seen those statistics, too, and they were questionable for me. The fact that the majority of whites voted for Trump is not surprising. In many states, particularly in the "Bible Belt," the race issue is still alive and kicking. For many of them, Trump's tax reforms show that he advocates for capitalism. Trump's anti-immigrant policies and the sham fight with China coupled with Republican propaganda in calling Biden a socialist who would limit individual rights paid off in the broad base of support Trump received. Moreover, Trump's being "religious" and anti-abortion honestly can be the sole reason many people supported

him, which may be especially true with respect to Hispanics. Mind you, I'm against categorizing Hispanics as a unified and consistent group, as they are from different countries

with different cultures and their only commonality is the Spanish language. Argentina, Mexico, and Cuba are very different from one another. In these countries, racism and discrimination also exist. The whites of European origins still have issues with the native Americans and blacks. Also for many of them who are pious Catholics, abortion and religion are extremely important, and that could have made them "single-issue" voters who would be more likely to go with the candidate who espoused pro-life views.

Cain: OK. What about African Americans? What about Asians and other minorities like Muslims and Iranians? You know that many of our fellow Iranians voted for Trump. And again how do you explain not having enough votes for the Senate and the House? Before the election I read in *Time* that the Democrats lost many seats in state legislatures during Obama's administration; they got some of those seats back in the 2018 midterm election and were hoping to get the rest back in the "Blue Wave" of 2020. They not only couldn't get those seats back, but they lost a couple

more states. Wasn't this the "Red Wave" that got the force out of the Blue Wave?

Abel: As I said, values like human rights, peace, social justice, and democracy are still very important for the majority of voters. For some people from any race and color, this might be insignificant. There are other things that are important to them. The reason that Iranians or Muslims, who were the main targets of the "Muslim Ban," supported Trump goes back to their social and class awareness. Many of the Iranians living in the U.S. voted for Trump because they believed his policies would topple down the Islamic Republic. We could hear them on social media. They would argue that Trump would add to economic sanctions and Iran's Regime would fall. We would ask them what came after the collapse of the regime, and they answered it was not important. Just the fall of the government is important! You could tell them that Trump was not trustworthy, that he could turn around and negotiate with the regime, that he had no belief or respect for democracy, but they wouldn't budge. Even that previously famous "artist" was so blunt in saying that a vote for Biden is voting for the Islamic regime! I leave the judgment to you. The annual survey by PAAIA, published last month, showed less than 30% of Iranian-Americans support Trump.

It seems that the "Blue Wave" was not as successful as some thought it would be, but Biden and Harris did get 7 million more votes. Their 80 million votes for a presidential ticket is the highest in history. Some of the states which were historically Republican turned Blue, like Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia. This can't be underestimated!

Cain: Don't you think the leftist mottos of some of the Democrats like Universal Healthcare or "Defunding Police" scared some of the moderates and undecided and made them vote for the Republican candidate?

Abel: I don't know. Maybe for some people in some states that was the case. But do remember that all these mottos made the youth and the left-wing of the Democratic party, like the Sanders and Warren supporters, mobilize to help win the election.

Anyhow, the Democrats and Biden must try to satisfy those 70 million who voted for Trump and believe that they have been stiffed in the election. The Republican Party also must see how they want to work with Trump the bully and what Trump's role will be in the GOP's future. There is a good possibility that the "Trump Cult" breaks the GOP. There are many things to be seen and done.

These are the different social layers that voted for Trump in 2020: 61% white male, 55% white female, 19% black male, 5% black female, 36% Hispanic male, 30% Hispanic female, and 38% Asians and other minorities.



Healthy Weight - Healthy Life

By Mohammad Ahrar, PhD



Introduction

According to medical research, “healthy” weight is directly correlated to good health. There are some guidelines established by the U.S. government, as well as different research institutions, that describe the advantages of healthy weight and the consequences of unhealthy weight. The most commonly used guideline for healthy weight is the Body Mass Index (BMI) which gives a fairly accurate assessment of the percentage of fat in the body and whether a person’s weight is in a healthy range or not.

While research does not definitively conclude that people with a healthy weight live longer than those who are overweight, research does raise a red flag for people who are obese. In this article, we will review factors that contribute to unwanted weight gain and how to maintain a healthy weight.

How to Determine Your Ideal Weight on a BMI Chart

BMI is an index based on the ratio of an individual’s weight and height. It is a simple way to know if a person’s weight is in the healthy range. Samples of BMI charts are shown in the figures below. For example, in Figure 1, find your height on the left column and your weight on the top row. The BMI values for healthy weight are shown in the green zone. *A range of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered healthy.* If the index values fall in the yellow or blue area, you may be overweight or obese. You can also use the chart in a different way. If you want to see what your healthy weight should be, use the values in the green zone for your height and see the weight on the top row that is directly above the index (24.9). That weight is the best estimate of what your maximum healthy weight should be. There are also online sources that automatically calculate BMI using your height and weight (see References 2, 3). For more information about BMI, see *Peyk* #166.

The Consequences of Extra Weight

Being overweight and obesity are not the same. Excess weight can vary in people and a few extra pounds may not be a big issue. The problem is that being overweight can end up in obesity. Doctors refer to obesity as a serious, chronic disease that can inflict substantial harm to a person’s health.

Research from the Harvard School of Public Health shows that, statistically, people who are obese develop higher blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, atherosclerosis (build up of plaque in the arteries), and coronary heart disease. It has also been shown that strokes occur more often in people who are obese compared to those who are not obese.

Further, research from the Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins University indicates that obesity is the major cause of insulin resistance and type-2 diabetes. Even moderate obesity dramatically increases the risk of diabetes. Sleep apnea and respiratory problems are more prevalent in people who are obese, and people with extremely high BMI are also

more at risk for breathing problems, certain cancers, and gallbladder disease. Mental illness such as clinical depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders are more common in those who are obese. Other studies have shown that obesity can affect the knees and hips because of the stress placed on the joints by extra weight. Most of these problems intensify as we age, but by then, it may be too late to reverse the problems. With regard to cancer risk, other research shows that overweight women are more at risk for breast and uterus cancer, and overweight men are at higher risk for colon and prostate cancer.

Risk Factors that Contribute to Weight Gain

1- Family Inheritance

The genes you inherit from your parents may affect the amount of body fat you store and how you metabolize energy (how efficiently your body converts food into energy). Genes are small segments of the DNA that control the synthesis of enzymes and proteins. Enzymes run the chemical reactions in the cells to produce energy and are involved in many other reactions.

Studies indicate that some enzymes may not work the way we like. Some enzymes use nutrients such as glucose to convert to fat, rather than use it as the source of energy. Therefore, people who have genes that activate production of such enzymes are more prone to develop more fat in the body. People have different DNA, and different genes. So, energy metabolism and production of fat in the body will not be the same in everyone. People who have these genes in their family should be very careful about their eating habits and their lifestyle.

2- Dietary Influence

a- Carbohydrates Foods high in carbs such as bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, and sugary foods and drinks are usually highly digestible, and sugar absorbs into the bloodstream rather fast. The carbohydrates in food break down into simple sugars, such as glucose, and absorb as such. As the level of glucose increases in the blood, insulin is released from the pancreas to facilitate the entry of glucose into the cells.

How do sugars convert to fat? Most cells in the body use glucose to produce energy. Glucose is also the main source of fuel for the brain. But not all tissues of the body react the same when it comes to energy metabolism. The effect of hormones such as insulin can also differ in different tissues. In the fat cells, insulin triggers formation of some enzymes that produce more fat. Additionally, insulin inhibits the breakdown of fats in adipose tissue by inhibiting the enzyme lipase that breaks down fats (triglycerides) to release fatty acids. When fatty acids are not available to the cells to burn and produce energy, the fatty acids in fat cells are converted to fat molecules. As billions of fat cells in the body grow bigger and bigger, extra weight develops, which can eventually lead to obesity. More information about carbs is discussed in *Peyk* #165.



b- Fats Fats and oils are made of subunits of fatty acids and glycerol. Fatty acids (FA) are made up of a chain of carbon atoms attached to a hydrogen atom. When three fatty acids attach to a glycerol, the compound is called a triglyceride. Most fats in food and in the human body are in the form of triglycerides. As you consume fats in your diet, the fat molecules are broken down into fatty acids and glycerol by the pancreatic enzyme and are absorbed through the small intestine (see further discussion in *Peyk* #159). Inside the body cells, a series of intracellular enzymes use the carbons in the fatty acids to produce energy. The longer the chain of fatty acids, the more energy they produce. On average, fats produce twice as much energy as carbs. Excess energy production in the body, either from carbohydrates or from fat or even from protein source, will be stored as fat in fat tissues which will result in weight gain. Gaining weight does not happen overnight; it takes months and years before you become obese. Therefore, people who try to manage their healthy weight should not expect to lose extra weight overnight.

c- Portion Size Probably the most important risk factor for gaining weight is getting into the bad habit of eating large portions of food. Paying attention to portion size may also be the easiest way to control weight. (The importance of portion size in healthy weight is discussed in *Peyk* #189). Keep in mind the obvious fact that a plateful of cooked rice (about 2 cups) has twice as many calories as half a plate. The same is true with any other food.

If your daily energy requirement is 2000 Calories, you can easily fulfill that amount of energy by eating smaller portions of any foods that you like and still maintain your healthy weight. For example, if you like ice cream, instead of having a big portion that provides 400 Calories, you can enjoy a small cone of ice cream that provides 100 Calories. (Information about the caloric value of selected foods and energy requirements based on age and physical activities is discussed in *Peyk* #167.)

3- Lack of Physical Activity

Medical studies emphasize exercise to maintain a healthy weight. Engaging in sports, daily walking, working around the house, even walking up the stairs, and outside activities can burn calories. A sedentary lifestyle, such as sitting on the couch watching TV or being in front of a computer for long hours, can be a risk factor for gaining weight and eventual obesity. Muscles use more energy than any other tissues in the body. The more muscles used during any physical activity, the more energy is used up (see *Peyk* #166).

The American College of Sports Medicine suggests that moderately intensive activities, such as a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes of fast walking most days of the week, provide most of the health benefits and can control weight gain. The activities need not be continuous to provide benefits; in other words, 60 minutes of walking can be accrued in several 10-15 minute walks. (Please visit *Peyk* #168 for more information about the benefits of exercise on brain functions, the cardiovascular system, the immune system, and quality of life.)

Summary

Healthy weight is associated with the general health of the body. Being overweight can have a long-term effect on joints and other organs of the body. Obesity is a serious chronic disease and has severe consequences on one's health. Moderation in food consumption

and paying attention to portion sizes of meals and engaging in physical activities can reduce the risk of obesity. Having an ideal weight provides self-satisfaction. Weight control can be easy and fun. Sharing a large portion meal at a restaurant, cutting down on unhealthy snacks, plus a moderate daily physical activity will open the path for prevention of gaining extra pounds to help you reach your ideal weight. It is your decision.

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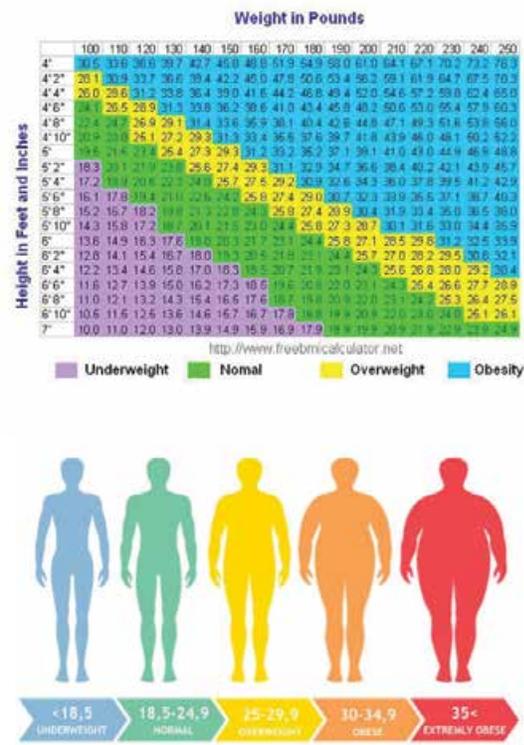


Figure 1- A general Body Mass Index (BMI) chart based on weight (in pounds) and height (in feet and inches).

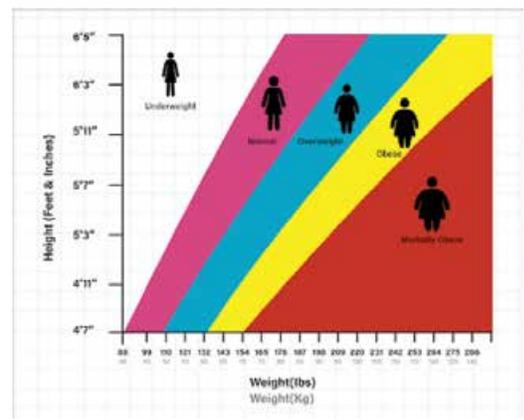
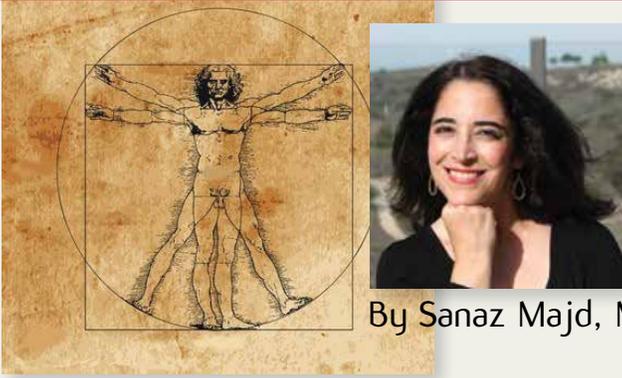


Figure 2- This graph shows the range of BMI for a normal or healthy man in green. The BMI values between 18.5 to 24.9 are a good estimate of a healthy or normal weight.

the chart. This chart provides a good estimate of what your maximum weight should be.



By Sanaz Majd, MD



Pandemic Side-Effect: Delayed Cancer Screenings

According to a *New York Times* story released in September, Americans have vastly halted their preventative health screenings since the pandemic hit. This development is not unexpected, however, as even the medical community has been encouraging everyone to delay non-urgent care. As a result, in April 2020, childhood vaccinations dropped nearly 60%, mammograms and pap smears by 80%, and colonoscopies by 90%. We've rebounded a little since, but we still have a long way to go in order to catch up.

This may be of concern because we do not know how many breast and colon cancers we are not detecting, for instance, or if a disease like measles will remerge with a vengeance.

Note that one of the main objectives of annual physical exams is to catch up with this routine health maintenance. So if you are delaying your physicals, you may not be aware of what screening tests you may be due for.

So in this issue, we will focus on the top five cancer screenings that are recommended by expert groups, including the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), that provide practice guidelines for doctors. Whether you decide to complete these screenings now or at a more opportune time, it is imperative to remain aware of the recommendations so that you can take charge of your health.

Note that these are *guidelines*, which may be modified depending on the risk factors of a person. So it is always best to seek your doctor's input.

PROSTATE CANCER

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men aside from skin cancer. Advanced age is the strongest risk factor, with 80% of those with prostate cancer being over the age of 65. Family history is another risk factor, along with African Americans who also have a significantly higher incidence and mortality rate from prostate cancer. The National Cancer Institute Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results Program (SEER) has also interestingly found a link between a high fat diet and prostate cancer.

The prostate specific antigen (PSA) is a simple blood test used to screen for prostate cancer. But false-positive tests, biopsy complications, and overdiagnosis make the test a somewhat controversial one. In addition, this screening has shown to prevent only 1.1 deaths per 10,000 person-years in studies.

The screening recommendation has evolved over the years, but the current recommendation is to decide on an individual basis for men ages 55 to 69 whether or not to get routinely screened for prostate cancer. You and your doctor can make that joint decision together. For men ages 70 or higher, the harms of screening have generally been shown to outweigh benefits.

BREAST CANCER

The various expert groups do not currently agree on when to first initiate screening in women in their 40s, nor is there a clear-cut consensus on the frequency of mammograms for breast cancer screening in all women. This makes things a little more complicated when providing patient recommendations.

The dispute is primarily due to the risk of false-positive results, unnecessary biopsies, and the emotional impact and distress that abnormal mammogram screenings may cause. Furthermore, the treatment for breast cancer has also advanced significantly through the years, yielding increased survival rates, and it is controversial whether or not more frequent screening would further improve survival.

For instance, the American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends that mammogram screening begin at age 45 and continue annually until age 55, at which point the frequency may decrease to every one to two years. But the USPSTF recommends that for women in their 40s with average risk (i.e., no family history), the decision to start screening should be an individualized one based on personal preference and a discussion with the patient's doctor. Note, however, that women with a first degree relative with breast cancer (such as a parent or sibling) may be considered more than average risk, and thus they may benefit more from screenings in their 40s.

For the average-risk woman in her 50s, mammograms are generally recommended every 1-2 years by the USPSTF until the age 75. For those age 75 and higher, the USPSTF reports that there is not enough evidence to assess the benefits versus harms of screening and, therefore, the decision should be an individualized one. But the ACS recommends individualization of the decision based on the patient's current health and life expectancy.

So to summarize, until there is a consensus reached by various expert groups, seeking your doctor's input and combining it with your own personal preferences can help guide you on when to initiate screenings in your 40s and whether to complete the screenings every year or every two years thereafter.

CERVICAL CANCER

For the average healthy female, a “pap smear” (cervical cytology) is recommended every 3 years beginning at age 21 until age 29. Then, for women ages 30 and above, a pap smear along with a Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) co-testing every 5 years is recommended.

This HPV test typically is included in the pap smear at most doctor’s offices, but to be certain it would be wise to inquire. Otherwise, without the co-test, pap smears would still be recommended every 3 years instead of 5 in this 30 and higher age group.

Cervical cancer screening can cease for most low risk women at age 65 who have had adequate prior cervical cancer screening.

COLORECTAL CANCER

An update to this recommendation is also in progress. New data shows more adults are being diagnosed earlier with colon cancer in their 40s, and that we may actually benefit from earlier colorectal cancer screenings. The proposed new age for initiation of screening is 45.

Until this change is finalized, however, most doctors are currently recommending colonoscopies beginning at age 50 until reaching age 75 for the average-risk adult. For those aged 76 to 85, the decision to screen is deemed an individual one after considering overall health and previous screening history. Those who are healthy enough to be able to sustain colon cancer treatment if detected and have a greater life expectancy can decide to continue screening in this age group.

Frequency of screening depends on findings on the test, but a completely normal colonoscopy typically denotes a repeat in 10 years.

LUNG CANCER

Lung cancer is the leading cause of death from cancer in American men. Besides cigarette smoking, other risk factors include second hand smoke, family history of lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), radon exposure, asbestosis, and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

There is an updated recommendation in progress for lung cancer screening currently, so the recommendations may soon change. But the current recommendation is an annual low-dose chest CT for smokers aged 55-80 with 30 pack-year history (measured by multiplying the number of packs smoked per day by the number of years the person has smoked) who still smoke or have quit within the last 15 years.

Screening can cease once patients have stopped smoking for 15 years or if they develop a medical problem that greatly limits their life expectancy or their ability to undergo lung cancer treatment if discovered.

Hopefully this quick synopsis has answered some of your most pressing questions regarding what is due at what age when it comes to cancer screening. If you are unclear, or have questions

regarding what other preventative measures you may require (vaccines, blood work, osteoporosis screening, etc.), checking in with your doctor is a worthwhile effort.

Sanaz Majd, MD is a board-certified Family Medicine physician and host of the Majd MD YouTube channel, reviewing the latest medical topics and headlines: www.youtube.com/MajdMD. You can also follow her on Facebook or Instagram: @SMajdMD.



Public Announcement

10 ENERGY TIPS TO SHAKE THE WINTER'S CHILL

Many of us are spending more time at home so we're probably using more energy. Here are some no-cost and low-cost energy-saving tips. We know that every little bit helps, especially now.

1. Switch your ceiling fan's blade rotation. Hot air rises so reverse your fan's blades clockwise to help push the warmth back down to you.
2. Use your exhaust fans sparingly. Your bathroom fans and over hoods are overlooked sources of heat loss in the winter because they can pull warmth from your home.
3. Weatherize your home by caulking and sealing all seams, cracks and openings to the outside. This can save 10% – 20% on your heating bill.
4. Rock your winter wardrobe indoors. Make your home your runway and stay bundled in your winter best. Turn your thermostat down 7° - 10° for 8 hours a day, like when you sleep, and you can save up to 10% on your bill. So, slip on your fuzzy socks and flannel pajamas!
5. Let the sunshine in. Take advantage of the world's best furnace – the sun! Draw your curtains during the day to naturally heat your home.
6. Check your home's insulation. It's like a winter coat for your house. The heavier it is, the warmer your home will be.
7. Reduce heat loss from your fireplace. Keep your fireplace damper closed unless a fire is burning. Keeping the flue open is like keeping a window wide open during the winter – warm air goes right up the chimney.
8. Use less hot water (it takes energy to heat up water), wash your clothes in cold water and install low-flow faucets and showerheads.
9. Save up to \$125 on a smart thermostat. Now through 12/31/20, you can save \$75 on the purchase of qualifying smart thermostats. It can be combined with manufacturer rebates for savings up to \$125. Learn more at sdge.com/instant.

Use lids on pots and pans. When you do this, you're conserving heat which reduces cooking time and saves energy.

For more energy-savings tips, visit sdge.com/winter

Events in San Diego

Persian Cultural Center

Tel: (858) 552-9355 Fax & Voice: (619) 374-7335
www.pccsd.org

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all programs will be conducted virtually, via ZOOM.

Jong e Farhangi

Friday, January 8 and February 12, 2021, 6 PM

Movie and Discussion

January 28, 2021 at 7:30 PM

Movie: *Winter Sleep* Guest: Tania Ahmadi

February 25, 2021, at 7:30 PM

TBA

Poetry Night

January 20 and February 17 at 6 PM

Creative Writing Workshop with Hossain Mortezaeian Abkenar

Advanced: Sundays 1 to 3 PM

Beginners: Start in January 2021

For more information and registration contact PCC

Docunight

First Sunday of the month

Iranian School of San Diego

(858) 552-9355

Persian classes: Sundays from 10 AM to 12 noon

Setar class: Sundays from 1 to 2 PM

Dance classes: from 12 noon to 2 PM

Persian Dance Academy of San Diego

Dance classes for all ages at the location of Iranian School
Sundays from 12 to 2 PM

Dollar a Month Fund

Tel: (858) 552-9355 • www.dmfund.org

www.facebook.com/DollaraMonthFund

AIAP (Association of Iranian-American Professionals)

Tel: (858) 207-6232 • www.aiap.org

ISTA (Iranian Student Association at UC San Diego)

www.istaucsd.org

House of Iran House of Iran Balboa Park

www.thehouseofiran.com

Iranian-American Scholarship Fund

Tel: (858) 552-9355 • www.iasfund.org

www.facebook.com/Iranian-AmericanScholarshipFund

Mehregan Foundation

Tel: (858) 673-7000

PAAIA Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans

www.paaia.org

NIAC National Iranian-American Council

www.niac.org



IABA Iranian-American Bar Association
www.iaba.us/chapters/san-diego

Book Club Meeting

Iranian-American Center (IAC)

6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121

Tel: (858) 552-9355

Iranian-American Life Science Network (IALSN)

www.ialsn.org

پیک
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MUSEUM MONTH

HALF-OFF ADMISSION TO 40+ MUSEUMS

San Diego Museum Council

MUSEUM ADMISSION PRICES VARY.

Feb 1 - Feb 28, 2021

CALIFORNIA TOWER

SEE SAN DIEGO FROM NEW HEIGHTS! Feb 18, 2020 – ongoing, Balboa Park

SAN DIEGO BIRD FESTIVAL

VARIES BY EVENT

(858) 273-7800

Feb 17 - Feb 21, 2021 Mission Bay and Beaches

VIRTUAL SDMA+

San Diego Museum of Art

Jun 9, 2020 – ongoing, Downtown

BALBOA PARK: HISTORIC HIGHLIGHTS & SECRET SPOTS

EXPLORE A CULTURAL TREASURE W/OPTIONAL 1-DAY PASS

(619) 432-7560 Jan 10, 2020 – ongoing, Downtown

SPACE: OUR GREATEST ADVENTURE

San Diego Air & Space Museum

SPACE IS FREE WITH PAID GENERAL ADMISSION

(619) 234-8291

Oct 15, 2019 – ongoing, Balboa Park

MASTERPIECE MINUTE

A WEEKLY PODCAST FROM THE SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART

San Diego Museum of Art

Jun 4, 2020 – ongoing, Downtown

A Vegetarian's Delight

From: Silk Road Cooking

By: Najmieh Batmanglij

Caspian Butternut Squash, Bulgur & Wild Orange Soup

Servings: 6

Prep. time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

This soup, very popular in the Caspian Sea region, is also popular in Italy, where sage is used to replace the parsley, and Parmesan cheese is used in lieu of bulgur.

Ingredients: 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil or butter; 1 onion peeled & thinly sliced; 1 fresh hot green chili chopped or ¼ tsp. cayenne; 4 cups butternut squash, peeled & cut into 1-inch pieces; 1 cup ground walnut; 2 cups vegetable stock or water; ½ cup rice flour* diluted in 2 cups water; 1 cup bulgur rinsed in a fine-mesh colander and soaked in 1 cup of milk for 40 minutes; 2 tsp. salt; 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper; 1 tsp. cinnamon; ½ tsp. ground cumin; ½ tsp. cooking rose water (optional); 1 cup parsley leaves or 6 sage leaves; 1 cup Seville orange juice or 1 cup of orange juice mixed with ¼ cup lime juice

Directions:

1. Heat the oil in a medium-sized pot, over medium heat. Add the onion and stir-fry for 10 minutes until translucent. Add the chili, butternut squash, and walnuts and stir-fry for 1 minute.
2. Add 4 cups vegetable stock. Bring to a boil. Partially cover and simmer over medium heat for 30 minutes until the squash is tender.
3. Add the diluted rice flour, bulgur soaked in milk, salt, pepper, sugar, cinnamon, cumin, and rose water and bring to boil, stirring constantly. Cover and simmer over low heat for another 20 minutes. If the soup is too thick, add some warm water and bring back to a boil. Add the parsley and Seville orange juice, and adjust seasoning to taste.



Persian Cauliflower Kuku (Quiche)

Servings: 6

Prep. time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 25 minutes

Because cauliflower was called choux de Chypre (Cyprus cabbage) in French, some have thought it came from Cyprus. It is more likely, however, that it came from India or southern Iran and was later introduced into Europe.

Ingredients: 6 eggs; ½ tsp. baking powder; 1 Tbsp. flour or bread crumbs; ½ cup milk or soy milk; ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated, or fresh mozzarella, shredded; ¼ cup vegetable oil or butter; 1 small onion, peeled & thinly sliced; 2 cloves garlic, peeled & crushed; 1 small head cauliflower or 1 lb. frozen florets, coarsely chopped; 2 tsp. salt, ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; 1 tsp. ground cumin; ¼ tsp. ground paprika; ¼ tsp. turmeric; 1/8 tsp. cayenne; ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley or basil.

Note: You may replace the cauliflower with a combination of 1 lb. mushrooms and 1 lb. spinach. Or use 1 lb. leeks (thinly sliced, white part only), asparagus, zucchini, or eggplant.

Directions:

1. Break the eggs into a mixing bowl, add the baking powder, flour, milk, and cheese, and whisk lightly.
2. Heat the oil in a medium-sized nonstick skillet over low heat. Add the onion and stir-fry for 5 minutes until translucent. Add the garlic, cauliflower, salt, pepper, cumin, paprika, turmeric, chili, and parsley, and stir-fry for 5 to 10 minutes until the cauliflower is soft.
3. Pour the egg mixture over the cauliflower in the skillet. Cook over low heat for 6 to 10 minutes until set.
4. Place the skillet under a preheated broiler for 1 minute to brown the top.
5. Serve warm or cold with yogurt and flat bread. Garnish with herbs.

Noush e jan (enjoy in good health)!



MONOLOGUES BY THE THEATER STUDENTS OF THE IRANIAN SCHOOL OF SAN DIEGO



The ISSD Theater Class Description:

This unique performance is an introduction to practice-based research in the fields of live art, performance-making, and visual practices. Students are invited to create a monologue exploring what it means to be Iranian and American. We use autoethnography as an approach to research ideas of Self. Autoethnography as a practice helps us recognize power relations that perpetuate inequalities. Engaging in the aesthetics of the self while thinking critically about social norms generates a new set of relations, possibilities, and futures. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.

The goals of the class include the following:

- *To partake in creative exchanges with others.*
- *To engage thoughtfully in the documentation of one's practice, developing images, writings, designs, video, sound files, and links alongside deep reflection, group conversation, and feedback.*
- *To contribute to a shared sense of others' practice, building a vocabulary of critique, which in turn strengthens one's reflection on and critical awareness of one's work to become more influential citizens, artists, thinkers, and communicators.*

Zoya Sardashti- instructor

Performance:

What My Iranian American Identity Means

Parmida (14)

To be different is to be unique. To be unique is to be yourself. Hello, my name is Parmida and today I want to take the time to truly understand what it means to find yourself: Who am I? I'm sure everyone has asked themselves this question at least once in their lives. Though there is no black and white answer, it's truly a captivating discussion. Our identity is what gives our life a story to follow. Without such a unique disposition, we are merely bland vanilla characters surviving through a magnificent story. I remember this one time I was at a new student orientation with a group of diverse individuals. I felt like I fit right in with them until we went around explaining our backgrounds. I've heard eye-opening stories about one's parents who escaped the Vietnam war, another who sailed through China, and others who were Indian, Dutch, Czech, ah you name it. Then suddenly all eyes were on me. It was

as though someone shoved a blinding spotlight positioned over my head. Me? That's when it was my turn to answer the burning question: who am I? Well, I may be Persian, or Iranian. Persian Iranian? American? Wait — Iranian American. I feel like my identity in particular may not be as xyz as another's story or heritage, but at that moment I felt proud. I have two parents who were born in the same city of Iran, and who later raised me in Germany. From there my storytelling began. I felt everyone's eyes on me, with their undivided attention. Was I really that interesting? I began to ponder my life until that point. I have a truly fascinating identity, and I am forever honored to be able to share my story.

Annis (15)

I am here today to give you a window (**Want some tea?**) into what it's like to be an Iranian American. The best part, for me, is *Nowruz* or the Iranian New Year, which happens each March. Iranian culture is (**Sugar Cubes?**) one that is ancient and continues to endure today. Our history can be found in the ancient artifacts and (**Want Seeds? I got you.**) sculptures, which are rich in meaning and symbolism, found both in Iran and in museums around the world. Please check out the House of Iran in Balboa Park. Iranians believe in many different religions including Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and the Baha'i Faith. Iranians are very social people; we like to get together as a community. Iranian parties include dancing, delicious food, and music. Soccer is a big part of life in Iran, it is our favorite sport, it is something that brings us together. (**Here's your destination -- have a good day.**)

Neelu (13)

It happened. Again. It's been about 3 times so far. I don't know if they actually know. It happened as Katie, Josh, and I were walking to the other side of camp. Katie was scrolling through Instagram when she showed us the picture.

"I heard that Iran isn't giving us oil or whatever," she said ever so casually. Curious, I wanted to see what they would say next.

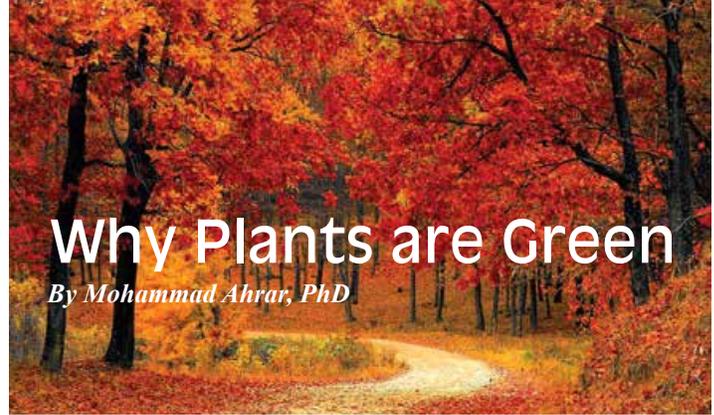
"I know, right," Josh laughed.

I was shocked how they could say something like that to me in front of me. What did they think Iran was, some old useless country or something? I didn't know what to say. I mean, if I told them, I would probably lose my only friends in camp. That day, I didn't tell them anything although now, I kind of wish I did.

(in Farsi)

Iran is just like other places. They didn't know anything. I am not American.

I am Iranian American.



Why Plants are Green

By Mohammad Ahrar, PhD

Ali Reza (15)

Most of us are proud of being Iranian and enjoying ourselves as Iranians, but what about our being Iranian is important? The history? Geography? Something else? What lies in Iran that unites all of us?

The boundaries of our country have undergone great changes over the years, which would certainly be the case if Iranians were geographical boundaries. But we're not. Many people were once Iranians who are not now.

I think being Iranian is rooted in our culture and attitude.

The rich and ancient Iranian culture is a symbol of all Iranians.

A culture dating back more than 2500 years to an ancient land.

This culture may have been a little out of place in recent years, but its purity and antiquity help to make all Iranians anywhere in the world, in harmony with other cultures, always consider themselves Iranian.

I feel the essence of being Iranian is the devotion and attachment to this rich culture that makes a child born outside of Iran who has never even visited Iran find himself proudly Iranian.

I am proud of being Iranian even though I am thousands of miles away now.

Mana (11)

Dear diary, today is the first day of the second week of 7th grade in America. It's much different than all of my years in Iran, especially when we only get to physically be at school 2 days a week and, when we do go to school, we have to wear masks covering our noses and mouths. The days we do not go to school, we have Zooms. I like when we do the Zooms better because Lexi, the mean girl, doesn't get to make fun of me for being Iranian. But when I went to school on the first day after Becky and her friend, Lexi, told me to get lost, I bumped into a girl named Layla. After talking to her for a while we became good friends. I also found out that she is Iranian too! We do our homework on our own personal Zooms together and talk for hours and hours. I don't care what the bullies have to say about us. I am proud of being Iranian no matter how much people make fun of it.

Ilya (14)

Being Iranian is a unique and varied experience. I'm glad to share with you what being Iranian is like. Starting with family, Iranian families are very close with each other. We go to parties and celebrations together and sometimes get back at 2 in the morning! When we go out to a restaurant with other families, our parents argue on who's going to pay for the meal. We talk loudly and joke often, causing some people to stare and think that we're fighting. We often have really nice rugs and our parents watch dubbed movies on high volume. We have this thing Iranians say, "Irani Bazi," which means being clever. As a stereotype, we own Mercedes or BMWs. On the dining table, we have a variety of tasty and delicious foods. Our dads are great on the grill, too. We party and enjoy friends, while also talking behind their backs! When one of our kids is sick, we give them a turnip. In the winter, we eat Baghali with vinegar, and we can't forget Laboo! Our parents want us to get good grades and become doctors. We care about each other (and connect like no other religion). Iranians are different and I am proud to say that I am Iranian.

The Basics

Plants contain different pigments, such as chlorophyll, which come in different chemical structures. They are referred to as photopigments because they absorb specific solar rays. These photopigments are concentrated in microscopic bubble-like chambers called chloroplasts. In the chloroplasts, enzymes run the photosynthetic reactions, during which plants absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce oxygen that is released into the atmosphere. The photopigments in chloroplasts not only play an important role in the lives of animals but also give color to the planet Earth.

Why We See Plants in Green Color

Different forms of chlorophyll absorb different solar radiations. Only wavelengths between 400 to 700 nanometers are visible to the human eye and we see them as dark blue to very red. **Chlorophyll a** in green plants absorbs blue-violet and red light but reflects green light (about 550-nanometer wavelength). **Chlorophyll b** absorbs blue and orange and reflects yellow-green light. During a plant's growing season, the concentration of chlorophyll in the leaves is highest. Because green light is reflected from the leaves, the human eye perceives leaves to be green.

Why Plants Look Colorful in the Fall

Besides chlorophyll, plants have different forms of photopigments, including carotenoids, which also come in different chemical structures. Most carotenoids absorb blue-green light and reflect yellow-orange-red (about 575-700 nanometer wavelengths). As the weather gets cooler and the angle of the sun changes in the Fall, the concentration of chlorophylls diminishes. Therefore, the proportion of carotenoids to chlorophyll increases. Because carotenoids absorb most light waves (between 400-550) and reflect yellow-orange-red, the human eye perceives the Fall leaves to be so colorful.

And now you know!

The Sun Emits a Spectrum of Wavelengths
Only some wavelengths are visible to human eye.

