

# JOURNAL

Mehr–Avan–Adar 1384 AY (Fasli) • Ardebehesht–Khordad–Tir 1385 AY (Shenshai) • Khordad–Tir–Amordad 1385 AY (Kadimi)



## **Yalda and other winter solstice celebrations**



# FEZANA JOURNAL

PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

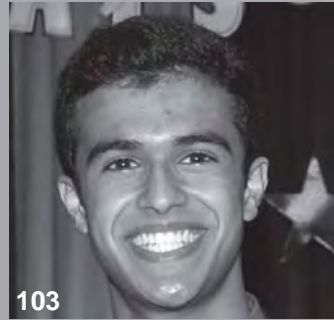
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**Winter 2015**  
**ZOROASTRIAN BANKING**  
**Guest Editor Yazdi Tantra**

*Opinions expressed in the FEZANA Journal do not necessarily reflect the views of FEZANA or members of the editorial board.  
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## A Word from the Editor

### OUR TROUBLED TIMES

Since the last few weeks, the world is in a turmoil, the devastating fires in California, the tornadoes, the torrential rains and the droughts, all on the same continent, the uncertainty of the presidential nominations in the US and the tight election race in Canada. Added to this is the downward spiral of the oil prices with the melt down in China, deluge of refugees into Europe, with horrid and heart wrenching images of them fleeing their areas of conflict. To quote Kofi Anan, the past Secretary General of the UN, "the world is in an existential crises". We are in a period of great uncertainties. Can we or rather should we, as Zarathushtis, do something about it. The answer is **Yes**. Our religion entrusts us to move the world forward.

In the second encyclical ***Laudato Si (On care of our common home)*** Pope Francis raises many critical points which mirror those raised by our Prophet Zarathustra, perhaps the world's first environmentalist, such as: respecting the environment and avoiding polluting Mother Nature, collaborating on solutions for our common home, considering ethics and morals in our daily life, and helping others who are less fortunate. Pope Francis repeatedly points to the urgency of taking concrete steps towards solutions before it gets too late. The FEZANA JOURNAL will be exploring the environmental issue of "Climate Change" and what action we as a community can take. In this FALL issue Khosro Mehrfar sets the stage for this. And in the next Winter issue we will have specialists in the field of climate change as well as interested individuals suggest an action plan which the community can adopt and follow without too much hardship. This topic will also be a panel presentation of the Zoroastrian Group at the World Parliament of Religions, at Salt Lake City, October 15-19. The keynote speaker at the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress will be referring to Climate Change as well.

By the time the Fall issue of the Journal reaches you, the days will be getting shorter and the nights colder and longer bringing us closer to YALDA, the happy and beautiful Iranian celebrations which has been forgotten by many in the first and second diasporas. We were very fortunate to have Massome Price, a well known author of Iranian culture, guest edit this issue giving us insights into this celebration in Iran



and other countries. The articles cover a large gamut of subjects. Fariborz Rahnmoon, Farishta Dinshaw, and Neville Panthaki discuss why and how to revive this ancient tradition. The master chefs Najmieh Batmanglij, Niloufer Mavalvala of Niloufer's Kitchen, Perzen Patel, the Bawi Bride and Rita Kapadia, share YALDA recipes specially crafted for this issue. Kaveh Farrokh, Khosro Mehrfar and Ervad Tehemton F Mirza deliberate on theories about the origins of the celebration of winter solstice. A brief history of the winter solstice festival, its ancient practices and how it is celebrated in various countries and regions today, are provided by Massome Price and Eddie Eduljee who also reviews festivals of light in various countries.

So we invite you dear readers to sit back, take a break from the worries of the world and enjoy this visual delight and relish the specially crafted recipes.

Dolly Dastoor

## A Message from FEZANA President

# Editorial

Dear Presidents of member associations, Corresponding Members, Committee Chairs and fellow Zarathushtis I begin by highlighting some projects that FEZANA and its committees have been working on :

**FEZANA Academic Scholarships:** In 2015, FEZANA received 36 high caliber applications (18 undergraduates + 18 graduates). 14 scholarships totaling \$35,000 were awarded (7 undergraduates + 7 graduates.) I would like to thank Sam Vesuna/WZO Canada for the two new endowed scholarships of Can3000. ( Details to follow in FEZANA JOURNAL Spring 2016)

The FEZANA Executive, would like to thank Dr. Dolly Dastoor, Chair FEZANA Academic Scholarships Committee, the judges & members of this Committee for their efforts in reviewing, evaluating and rating applications, their continued efforts in revising & updating this process, automating it, making it user friendly and transparent.

**2015 Parliament of The World's Religions:** Twenty Zarathushtis from the U.S. and Canada, will be attending and actively contributing to the Parliament in Salt Lake City, Utah, October 15-19, 2015 .which will be attended by thousands of participants. The group, led by Shernaz Minwalla and Maneck Bhujwala, co-chairs of the FEZANA Interfaith Activities Committee, have been preparing for this event for over a year and we thank them for it. Proposals were submitted to the organizers of the Parliament and FEZANA has been approved to sponsor and conduct five panels and presentations, plus an exhibit booth They are:

1. *Demonstration of a Zoroastrian Thanksgiving Ritual – The Jashan Ceremony*
2. *Relationship with the Divine as Manifested by Various Faiths*
3. *Stewardship of the Environment*
4. *The Interfaith Model – Does It Need Tweaking?*
5. *A Petition for the Establishment of a Religious Arm of the United Nations*

To be an integral player in this world class event is indeed an honor. We thank the FEZANA Interfaith Activities Committee co-chairs, Shernaz Minwalla and Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala, and the many For full coverage Zarathushtis who are participating, [For full coverage see the Winter 2015 issue of the FEZANA Journal.]

**6th. World Zoroastrian Youth Congress 2015:** FEZANA has awarded subsidies to 35 young adults from USA & Canada to participate in the 6WZYC2015 being held in Auckland, New Zealand in December 2015. The 6WZYC2015 FEZANA Subsidy Committee - Sherazade Mehta, Mahrukh Motafram, Tashan Mistree, Zain Mavalvalla and Saghar Behroozi are thanked for their efforts on this Project.

***Dear Subsidy Recipients', 35 of you, are now Zarathushti Ambassadors from North America participating actively in this 6WZYC2015 by practicing Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.***

As Yalda is the theme for this Journal issue, I urge all Zarthushtis in North America to celebrate this festival in their communities to inspire the unity and spirituality of their people. Today "Shab e Cheleh" is merely a social occasion, when family and friends get together for fun and merriment, where different kinds of dried fruits, nuts, seeds and fresh winter fruits are consumed. Pomegranates and watermelons are particularly significant as the red color in these fruits symbolizes the crimson hues of dawn and glow of life

These FEZANA activities are showcased in the monthly FEZANA Bulletin and the quarterly FEZANA Journal [www.fezana.org](http://www.fezana.org).

Your support for FEZANA's goals and activities with your generous donations are vitally needed for planning and coordinating religious education, scholarships, workshops, sports, seminars, publications, etc. all done by committees made up of numerous volunteers who freely give their time, and often their money.

Let us continue to follow the **5-STAR Guiding Principles for FEZANA: Teamwork, Respect Diversity, Innovation, Empowerment & an Optimistic 'Can Do Attitude'**. Let us continue to work individually and collectively for a unified, knowledgeable Zarathushti community in North America.

Katayun Kapadia  
FEZANA - President





### FEZANADONATIONS RECEIVED (in USD) - January 1, 2015 TO June 30, 2015

#### GENERAL FUND

Zarathushti Anjuman of Northern California	550.00
Zoroastrian Association of Michigan	507.00
Ontario Zor. Community Fdn.(NAZC symphony orchestra)	500.00
Persian Zoroastrian Association	300.00
Zoroastrian Association of Alberta	200.00
Pesi Sanjana, Farmington Hills, MI	200.00
Traditional Mazdayasni Zoroastrian Anjuman	150.00
Soli P. Dastur, University Park, FL	111.00
Zoroastrian Association of California	101.00
Aspi Bharucha, Cincinnati, OH	100.00
Jamshed Dastur, New Port Beach, CA	100.00
Jim Dubash, Wellington, FL	100.00
Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania & New Jersey	100.00
Hoshang Khambatta, San Diego, CA	60.00
Iranian Zoroastrian Association	50.00
Lovji Cama, Tenafly, NJ	30.00
Thritree Baxter, Miromar Lakes, FL	30.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,189.00</b>

#### INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Collection at AGM	120.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>120.00</b>

#### ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Feroze & Anahita Sidhwa, Coppell, TX	1,000.00
Trust of Dr. Firoze Ichhaporia, Montreal, QC	801.70
Mehraban Dinyarian, San Antonio, TX	500.00
Aderbad Tamboli, Sugar Land, TX	500.00
Roshan Bhappu, Tuscon, AZ	100.00
Gene & Gooloo Wunderlich, Springfield, VA	60.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,961.70</b>

#### STANFORD UNIVERSITY ZOR. STUDIES

Zarathushti Anjuman of North California	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Association of Houston	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Association of North Texas	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Association of California	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Society of Ontario	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago	1,000.00
Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia	755.00
Zoroastrian Association of Quebec	500.00
Zoroastrian Association of Greater Boston Area	500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,755.00</b>

#### FEZANA WELFARE & CRITICAL ASSISTANCE FUND

Kavasji&Pouruchisti Dadachanji, San Diego, CA	3,000.00
Mr. Edul & Niloufer Daver, Green Brook, NJ	2,000.00
Cowasjee Bilimoria, Troy, MI	2,000.00
Zoroastrian Association of Florida	1,203.00
Porus Engineer, Livermore, CA	1,200.00
Shapur Pavri, Houston, TX	1,001.00
Porus & Khar Austin, Miramar Beach, FL	1,000.00
Aderbad Tamboli, Sugar Land, TX	1,000.00
Hoshang Subawalla, Schenectady, NY	750.00
Anita Patel, Coppell, TX	500.00
Jehangir & Arnaz Bharucha, Redmond, WA	300.00
Arda Minocherhomjee, La Jolla, CA	251.00
Farokh & Maneck Contractor, Kenner, LA	250.00
Nozer Dungor, Spring, TX	151.00
Tehmtan & Aloo Mistry, St. Louis, MO	105.00
Phiroz & Perviz Tarapore, Los Angeles, CA	101.00
Parvez Mody, Orangevale, CA	101.00
Bapsi Sidhwa, Sugar Land, TX	100.00
Kersi Shroff, Derwood, MD	55.00
Homi Davier, Sugarland, TX	31.00
Adi Kasad, Downingtown, PA	30.00
S. Tavarria, Schuylkill Haven, PA	30.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,159.00</b>

#### RETURN TO ROOTS PROGRAM

T Chemi Inc	2,500.00
Zoroastrian Society of Ontario	1,000.00
Zor Assoc of Pennsylvania & New Jersey	1,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,500.00</b>

#### RESTORATION OF AVESTAN MANUSCRIPT

Zoroastrian Society of Ontario	4,335.00
Zoroastrian Assoc of Kentucky, Ohio & Indiana	101.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,436.00</b>

#### KHORDEHAVESTA BOOKS PRINTING

Anonymous	875.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>875.00</b>

#### FEZANA JOURNAL SPONSORSHIP

Gene & Gooloo Wunderlich, Springfield, VA	40.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>40.00</b>

*Then said a rich man, "Speak to us of Giving."*

*And he answered:*

*You give but little when you give of your possessions.*

*It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.*

**Khalil Gibran**

### FEZANADONATIONS RECEIVED (in USD) - January 1, 2015 TO June 30, 2015

#### CRITICAL ASSISTANCE SPECIAL APPEAL

Zoroastrian Association of California	2,500.00	Anonymous	100.00
Shahnaz Khani Nasrabadi, Houston, TX	1,000.00	Aban Rustomji, Houston, TX	100.00
Prochy Sethna, San Jose, CA	1,000.00	Pasupuleti & Pervize Krishnayya, Shelton, CT	100.00
Jehangir Bharucha, Redmond, Washington	600.00	Furdoon Mehta, Richmond, BC	100.00
Sherazade Mehta, Dallas, TX	600.00	Sam & Gooloo Polad, Houston, TX	100.00
Yasmin Pavri, Houston, TX	500.00	Behram & Zenobia Panthaki, Falls Church, VA	100.00
Jamsheed Wania, Palo Alto, CA	500.00	Rostam Salamati, Plano, TX	100.00
Paul, Jerri, Jimmy Sethna, Houston, TX	500.00	Sima Salamati Saradh, Plano, TX	100.00
Arnavaz Dua, Waukesha, WI	500.00	Adi & Celia Gazdar, Dallas, TX	100.00
Zoroastrian Association of Greater Boston Area	301.00	Hilla Irani, Lincoln, CA	100.00
Barzin Chiniwala, Conroe, TX	301.00	Raiomand Parsi-Feraidoonian, Vancouver, BC	100.00
Dianne & Burzin Patel, Foster City, CA	300.00	Rustom Dubash, Richmond, BC	100.00
Noshir K Dhalla, Foster City, CA	300.00	Jennifer Dastoor, Mountain View, CA	100.00
Phiroze & Dhunmai Dalal, Los Angeles, CA	300.00	Betty Marchant, Calgary, Alberta	100.00
Borzoo Rostamirad, North Vancouver, BC	300.00	Cyrus Bulsara, Plano, TX	100.00
Minoo Mehrayin, Port Moody, BC	300.00	Adi Dutia, Madison, AL	100.00
Rusi & Natalie Gandhi, Montville, NJ	251.00	Arnavaz Sethna, Missouri City, TX	100.00
Fidelity Charitable-Mukesh & Navaz Lulla	250.00	Bakhtwar Byramji, Houston, TX	100.00
Jamshed Elavia, Sugarland, TX	250.00	Nari Dastur, Cheshire, CT	100.00
Noshir Balsara, Burnaby, BC	210.00	Darius Captain, Granite Bay, CA	75.00
Nazneen & Meheli Warden, Sugar Land, TX	201.00	Arzan Sam Wadia, Brooklyn, NY	51.00
Vira B. Santoke, Huntington Beach, CA	201.00	Viraf & Rashna Bharucha, Katy, TX	51.00
Farrokh Billimoria, Redwood City, CA	200.00	Feroze Meer, Sugar Land, TX	51.00
Freddy Engineer, San Jose, CA	200.00	Daizy Spenta, Sunnyvale, CA	51.00
Zoroastrian Association of Michigan	200.00	Kaihan Irani, Houston, TX	51.00
Zeenia Irani, San Francisco, CA	200.00	Arash Dinyarian, Houston, TX	50.00
Rostam Namdari, Burnaby, BC	200.00	Nina Bhaisa, Cupertino, CA	50.00
Parizad Patel, Modesto, CA	200.00	Parveen Irani, Houston, TX	50.00
Homi Italia, Burnaby, BC	200.00	Faraidoon & Zarina Pundole, Sugar Land, TX	50.00
Yezad Khansaheb, Madison, AL	151.00	R.F. Damania, Clovis, CA	50.00
Shahnaz Jangi, Foster City, CA	150.00	Mehernosh Vadiwala, Fremont, CA	50.00
Kourush Mehrayin, Encinitas, CA	150.00	Arnavaz Sethna, Missouri City, TX	50.00
Yezad Khansaheb, Madison, AL	101.00	Cyrus Boga, Danville, CA	50.00
Nina Daruwalla, Cupertino, CA	101.00	Bapsi Sidhwa, Sugar Land, TX	50.00
Khushrav & Aban Chhor, Fremont, CA	101.00	Feroze & Dilnavaz Meer, Sugar Land, TX	50.00
Naval Cama, Mokena, Illinois	101.00	D. Sukhia, Cognition, BC	39.22
Farrokh Mistree & Janet Allen, Purcell, OK	101.00	Anonymous	31.00
Afreed Mistry, Brampton, ON	101.00	Dali Malaowala, Hercules, CA	30.00
Shahrukh Kermani, Olney, MD	100.00		
Goshpia R Golwalla, Frederick, MD	100.00		
Meher Dastur, Lincoln, CA	100.00		
	13,922.00	Total	16,752.22
		GRAND TOTAL	56,787.92

#### **ZAOM HOSTS THE 2016 FEZANA AGM - APRIL 29 to MAY 1, 2016.**

Zoroastrian Association of Michigan (ZAOM) is hosting the 2016 FEZANA AGM, at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, Farmington Hills-Novis, conveniently located near our small community hall for the Friday AGM evening meal and the Farmington Hills Manor where all are invited to our Gala. **Hotel details to follow**

You will be able to visit the sites of The Motor City, The Henry Ford home to the museum, the village, and Rouge Plant, browse through the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Historical Museum, and dine in Greek Town. We look forward to meeting you and enjoying your company.

**Shernaz Minwalla, President**

*Details for the programs and registration will come soon, so stay tuned.*



## CELEBRATING - JASHAN IN THE BAUG



### An event to remember...

On Sunday June 21, 2015 the **Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation (OZCF)**, located on 10 acres of scenic land, held a huge **"Jashan in the Baug"** on their premises at 1187 Burnhamthorpe Road East Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

The event was organized to recognize our mobeds who over the years have provided religious services to the Zoroastrian community in North America. The event also showcased the *"Arfarghanyu"* donated by the Zanzibar Agiary to the Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation. This Arfarghanyu will eventually be housed in the OZCF Agiary.

The event was held in two tents each 100 ft. by 40 ft. well decorated with beautiful flowers, tables and chairs set up on the well maintained grass. The tents were fully packed by a sold-out crowd of over 700 Zoroastrians. There were well organized parking guides who efficiently parked over 330 cars. The day started off by 2 youths providing a brief explanation of Jashan, religious songs by youths of our Religious Classes and welcome speeches by the organizing committee Co-chairs Rumi Jasavala, Kermin Byramjee and the President of OZCF Mr. Percy Dastur.

The Jashan was performed by mobeds ranging in age from twelve to the mid-eighties. It was a historical day for North America to witness 30 mobeds and mobedyars praying in unison.

At the end of the Jashan there were speeches by Councilor Tom Adam of Oakville, Katayun Kapadia President of FEZANA, Bina Behboodi, President of ZSO and Mr. Homi Gandhi, Vice President of FEZANA. Following the speeches the mobeds were felicitated with a beautiful glass award in the shape of a flame in recognition of their services to the Zoroastrian community. (Mobeds not present at the Jashan will be recognized later). Percy Dastur also recognized the Board Members and the Fundraising Committee. Finally, Homi Gandhi, Vice President of FEZANA, and Katayun Kapadia, President of FEZANA, presented OZCF with a replica of Cyrus Cylinder.

A traditional Parsi lunch was served followed by delicious desserts donated by the community. A live band and our Zoroastrian youth singing and dancing, entertained the guests.

The afternoon came to an end with the final draw of the OZCF Sweepstakes, the prize, a trip for two to South Africa. Congratulations to Hoshi and Mehroo Kazak of Kitchener, Ontario on wining the grand prize.

The entire event was telecast live over the web. It was a beautiful day; we had an amazing turnout, some great photography and a drone taking aerial views.

A day enjoyed by all and a truly memorable event for the Zoroastrian Community of North America!

Report Submitted by OZCF.



***The replica of Cyrus Cylinder being presented to the OZCF Board by VP Homi Gandhi and President Katayun Kapadia of FEZANA.***



***All seven OZCF Presidents from 2002 till date.***

*From left Firoz (Phil) Sidhwa, Rumi Jasavala, Niloufer Bhesania; Ervad Kobad Zarolia, Ervad Jal Panthaky, Ervad Firdosh Balsara, Percy Dastur.*



***Afarganyu donated by the Zanzibar Agiary***





*The priests with the OZCF President*



*A small section of the crowd of over 700 guests*



*Senior Zoroastrians at the event*

*Children Praying  
Khudavind Khavind song*



*How can any Parsi event  
be without scrumptious  
food*

*The drone taking the pictures"*

*Photo credit Percy Dastur,  
President OZCF*







## ZOROASTRIANS TO BUILD A CONSECRATED PLACE OF WORSHIP IN NORTH AMERICA

In what can be termed as a landmark decision, the membership body of the Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation (OZCF) voted unanimously at the July 19, 2015 Extraordinary General Meeting to move forward with building a consecrated Dar-e Mehr with Dadgah Fire, followed by the installation of a consecrated Adaran Fire, on the 10-acre property owned by the OZCF in Oakville, Ontario, Canada. This will be the first such Place of Worship in North America and will enable North American communities to ordain priests locally and conduct the inner liturgical ceremonies such as Vendidad and Yasna. (Editor's note: *Houston, TX has received funding and plans are approved for a consecrated place of worship for liturgical ceremonies*).



*OZCF place of worship artist's conception*

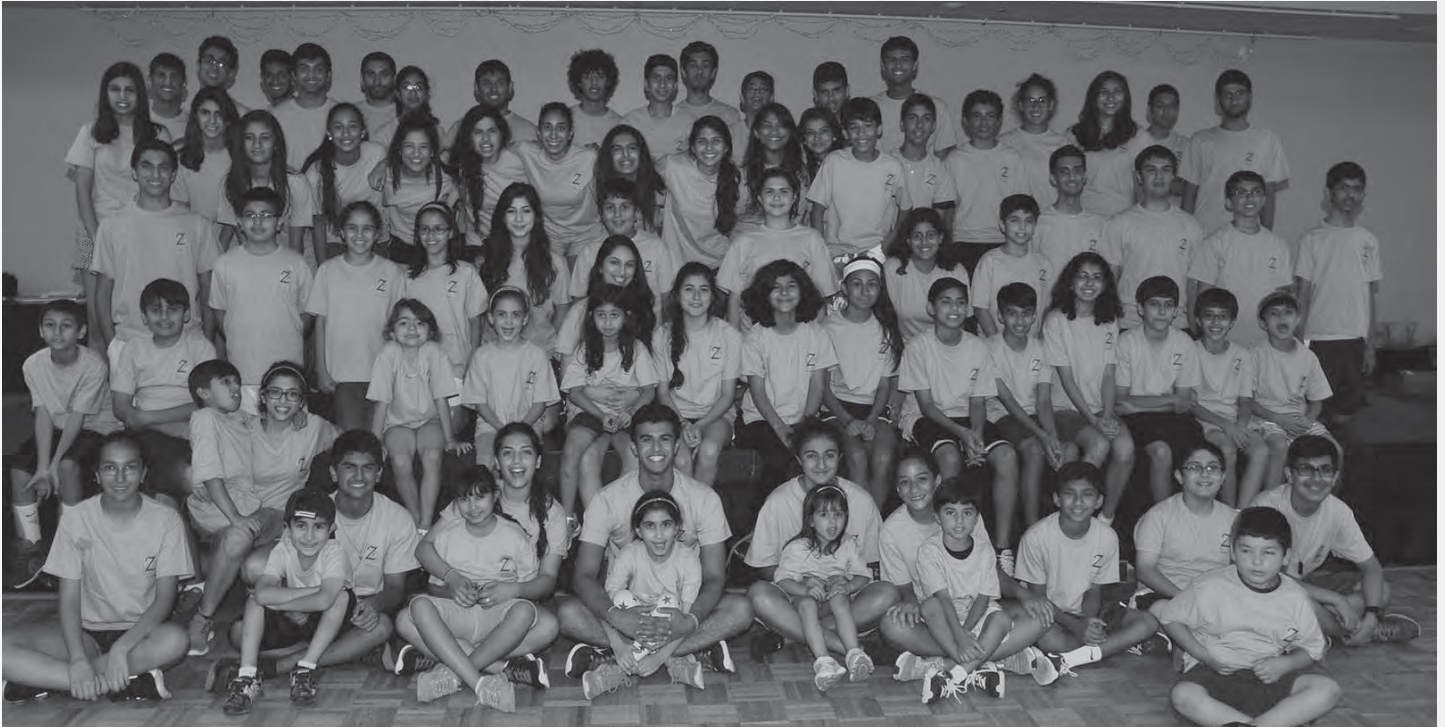
The Place of Worship Advisory Committee (PWAC) with the explicit mandate of the membership will now commence implementation of the development. Next steps involve applying for the required permits and approvals, finalizing architectural and engineering reports and developing construction plans for the proposed building.

A global fundraising program is being developed to move forward on the approximate, Canadian \$2.7 Million (US\$2 Million) project. We have established the 'Gift of Vision' program, through which interested donors or groups may wish to donate towards construction materials or volunteer professional services for the building of the consecrated Place of Worship.

We are also graciously accepting monetary donations. For more information regarding contributions, please contact Mr. Phil Sidhwa, Chair, PWAC ([philsidhwa@hotmail.com](mailto:philsidhwa@hotmail.com)) or Mr. Marzi Byramjee, Chair, PWAC Fundraising Committee ([marzi@regalpresscanada.com](mailto:marzi@regalpresscanada.com)). ***Please stay tuned for more information.***

## **ZAH Z-CAMP 2015 – WHAT A BLAST!**

**Kayomarz Sidhwa, Sugarland, TX**  
Camp organizer



The Zoroastrian Association of Houston hosted the ZAH Z-Camp 2015 from June 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> and it was another resounding success. The Camp was attended by 82 campers from Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, Cincinnati and Oklahoma City and this camp featured activities and events that allowed kids to “think out of the box” and test their “creative side” of the brain. The activities and sessions were conducted by experts in their respective professions and the kids learnt attributes like leadership, teamwork, adaptability, innovation and creativity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Around 6.30 pm on a hot and humid Friday, the first contingent from Dallas trickled in and by 9.00 pm all the entourages were at the ZAH center. Dinner was served and within no time there were just the skeletal remains of the poor “Charga Chicken”. Once the kids were done with dinner they were seen having fun at the basketball court with some catching up with their friends. The adults gorged on the lagan-nu-custard and phudina chai with batasas and after some boisterous laughs and inconsistent noise levels all went to bed waiting for Z-Camp to kick-off the next day.

### **CAMP ACTIVITIES**

Come Saturday, the kids were really pumped up and excited to begin the camp in right earnest. The registration activities concluded and the camp started promptly at 10 am with our customary prayers and housekeeping announcements. The campers were divided into 4 teams, ***Ghela Ghaderas, Bawa Bewokoof, The Chatni ....*** and ***the Perky Peppy Popats*** started their rivalry instantaneously. As usual the camp commenced with some sporting activities and the kids were exposed to games like “Nargolio” or seven tiles as well as some archery





and obstacle races.

The kids feasted on a BBQ lunch after which they heard from some young Zarathushti entrepreneurs and professionals about their *"Kool Careers"*. This was followed by some Bollywood dancing and the kids showed great dancing skills. The marquee event, the Iron Chef Session allowed the kids to display their culinary skills and the dishes they came up with were truly unique and creative.

Soon they started decorating their team t-shirts for the next day and around 8.30 pm the campers started feasting on some delicious *"Dhan Daar Paatio"*. After dinner, the kids caught up with their friends and after some good bonding all were off to bed.



The next day, began with an energetic Zumba session and it was fun to watch how some of the campers did Zumba and slept at the same time. Soon after they got stuck into those wooden logs and tools and came up with some great creations although while this was going on, children under 10 were having the time of their lives playing with waterslides and other water games. Soon after lunch, our final session began with campers creating their photo story of their activities over the weekend. As usual, our *"No soda no cell"* policy was enforced at the camp.



Each camper was charged a nominal fee of \$25 with the rest of the expenses covered by our benevolent donors. The camp was a great success with all of us making great new friends, long lasting relationships and above all bringing the entire Community together. Finally, thank you to all the parents, volunteers, donors, presenters and our campers without whom this camp would not have been possible. See y'all back next year!

**Photos Courtesy Percy Katrak**



# 9th Zoroastrian Unity Cup Soccer Tournament



**September 5th & 6th, 2015  
Los Angeles, California**

Aviation Park in Manhattan Beach CA was buzzing with teams and supporters on September 5 at the start of the 9<sup>th</sup> Zoroastrian Unity Cup Games. There were 11 adult teams, 2 youth teams and for the first time in the history of the tournament an all-girls team competing. In all there were over 100 players who participated in a total of 26 games over the course of two days. On both days there were over 100 supporters cheering the teams

The participants were from all over the US – the states represented were California (northern and southern), Oregon, Texas, Nevada, Arizona, Iowa, and New York.

Team Yellow Strikers from Orange County CA were crowned champions of the tournament. The team Z-Squad got 2nd place and team Azad won 3rd place all from California, although they did include some out-of-state participants, including one from New York on the 3rd place team.

Individual prizes went to

- **Tournament MVP:** *Liz Farsi*
- **Finals MVP:** *Jamshid Iraj*
- **Best Goalie:** *Shayan Ashtari*
- **Best Sportsmanship:** *LikeAGirl (whole team)*

For full team rosters visit <http://zathletics.com/results.html>

A very successful social event was held on September 5<sup>th</sup> at the Crowne Plaza, attended by over 200 people who danced all night to the live music of DJ Soroush and the Rush Entertainment team, Delicious Persian food was catered by Hatam Restaurant of Mission Viejo, CA

**Report Nima Patel, ZSC, California**



## 9th Zoroastrian Unity Cup Soccer Tournament



*Team Yellow Strickers. The Champions*



*Team Z Squad 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Trophy*



*Team Azad 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Trophy*



*All Girls Team*



*Youth Team Chelsea*



*Youth Z Team*

# **INAUGURAL KAMRAN SEMINAR FEATURES DR. JENNY ROSE**

BY ANNE KHADEMIAN, PH.D.



*From left Mehraban Manoochehri, Shahin Kamran Foroutan (Vice President of the Kamran Foundation), Dr. Jenny Rose, Zarir Khademian and Anne Khademian. Missing from the picture is Morvarid Behziz. Mr Kamran's picture is hanging on the wall.*

With the long term goal of supporting and inspiring independent scholarship and research related to Zoroastrian history and ideas, the inaugural Kamran Seminar was held on July 18<sup>th</sup> in the new Karman Dar-e Mehr in Boyds, Maryland outside of Washington, DC. **Dr. Jenny Rose of Claremont Graduate University**, a distinguished scholar of Zoroastrian studies, presented the keynote lecture entitled, *"Then Zoroaster brought the Religion:" Tracing the Zoroastrian Religion from Chilpiq to Chin*, and was recognized as the first Kamran Seminar Fellow.

Illustrated with much of her own photography, Dr. Rose presented fascinating evidence of the practice of the Zoroastrian religion in China, from Chilpiq to China, predating Sassanian Iran. Through funerary imagery,



written manuscripts, and other surviving artifacts and structures, Dr. Rose brought to life examples of the Zoroastrian faith across the Silk Road and the variation in ideas and practices from the Sassanian times, as well as the common core ideas. She ended her talk by noting the discovery of a manuscript in the library cave of Dunhuang in western China near the Gobi Desert. The top two lines of the manuscript were the ancient and sacred prayer, *Ashem Vohu*, written in Sogdian, but in older Iranian language, possibly an archaic form of Avestan. This ancient manuscript predates the earliest manuscripts from Iran and India by 300 years. The lecture was followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion with the audience. Following lunch, three young musicians from the community--Artin Aidun on violin, Yasna Goshtasbi on piano, and Yasna Khademian, voice—performed a version of “Mekham Beram Kooh” originally arranged and performed by Darya Dadvar. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4Fuoj7OWHs>.

A round table discussion with Dr. Rose followed to learn more about the challenges of research in this field, the role of academia and private foundations in supporting the research, the big questions that drive the work of the field, and her own path to becoming a leading scholar in Zoroastrian studies. Questions from the audience followed. The seminar concluded with a presentation by Mrs. Bonoo Kamran to Dr. Rose of a glass plaque commemorating her lecture and recognizing her as the first Kamran Seminar Fellow. *(photo below Ms Banoo Kamran with Dr Jenny Rose)*



The seminar motivated by the life of the late Mr. Khodamorad Kamran, and rooted in a basic Zoroastrian idea will be held annually.

First, the seminar is motivated by Mr. Kamran’s commitment to the Washington, DC Zoroastrian community, his energetic life, and his emphasis on taking action to move forward. The organizing team was inspired by his action-oriented approach to life as a blueprint for forging the Kamran Seminar. While Zoroastrian communities across the globe share a faith and religious ceremonies, and cultural and social celebrations and holidays, a strong understanding of history as well as a healthy embrace of criticism to ask challenging questions and to embrace new ideas is essential as well. The organizing team aims to foster an annual event where challenging and innovative research can be presented, and where the audience can pose questions,

discuss and engage with the scholars, and scholars have an opportunity to get to know the audience, as well.

Second, the seminar is inspired by a key premise of the Gathas: everyone has a responsibility to seek the truth, to ask critical questions, and to continuously examine our thoughts, words and deeds in light of fairness and equity, and in light of evidence, discussion and reflection. Ushta, or happiness, results from the continuous exercise of Vohu Manna, the good mind, in pursuit of Asha, the truth. This focus on the pursuit of truth and the responsibility of each individual for their choices and actions parallels Western liberal philosophy and the evolution of the scientific method. Whether or not the words of Zoroaster were the inspiration for the Enlightenment and liberal thought is difficult to demonstrate, but the embrace of critical thinking in the quest for truth at the heart of the Zoroastrian faith motivates the effort to think forward. In this spirit, the Kamran Seminar focuses on independent scholarship, research, and critical dialogue regarding Zoroastrian beliefs, history, and culture.

The Kamran Seminar is organized by Morvarid Behziz, Mehraban Manoochehri, Anne Khademian and Zarir Khademian. Shahin Kamran Foroutan and Mrs. Banoo Kamran represented the Kamran Foundation. The lecture and the round table discussion will be available shortly on the Kamran Seminar web page.

**Anne Khademian** is a member of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington, Inc. (ZAMW) and a community volunteer.. She is the director of Virginia Tech’s School of Public and International Affairs and a professor of public administration and policy.

## New teams at FEZANA member associations

### *Zoroastrian Association of Quebec - ZAQ*



*Standing the 2015-17 committee Mitra Bahrami, President Vida Feredoonzad, Abtin Jahan; Zareen Austin, Vice-president Aazeen Irani, Secretary Khushnuma Daruwalla. Treasurer Farhad Feredoonzad. Seated from left the outgoing committee Dolly Dastoor, Ervad Jal Panthaki, Rohinton Marolia, Firooza Aubry.*

On May 24, 2015, the ZAQ elected a young and dynamic team to lead the association for the next 2 years

**President Vida Fereydoonzad**, born and raised in Montreal, graduated with a bachelors degree in 2011 at HEC Montreal and have since been working in the field of Marketing.. She volunteers her time on many committees, ZAQ 2013-15 and on the executive committee of the *60 million girls* foundation, a non-profit organisation her mother, Wanda Bedard, founded to support girls education in developing countries. She attributes her love and interest for Zoroastrianism to her grandmother Mahin, who she remembers reciting her prayers every morning and night in her room.

"We are motivated to make positive change and get more community members involved in enriching our activities and growing our association. One of our main objectives over our next term is to continue to work on getting the next generation involved and engaged.

**Vice-president Aazen Irani** Came to Canada from Pakistan in May 2011 and currently in her second year as a Nursing student. She has been on the committee for the 2013-2015 term and have been chosen to serve ZAQ for a second term from 2015 to 2017

**Treasurer Farhad Fereydoonzad**. Came to Montreal from Tehran in 1976, holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering from McGill University and works in Pulp and Paper industry in Engineering, management and product sales. Member of ZAQ since 1977 and organizing sports activities since 2011 "I am happy to be part of



such a young and enthusiastic group to serve our community and provide a teaching and learning environment for our youth and adult community members”.

**Secretary Khushnuma Daruwala** –Originally from Mumbai, has lived in Montreal since 2010 and work as a Software Developer for Acquisio Inc. She has a Bachelor,s degree in Electronics and Communications and a Masters degree in Software Engineering from Concordia University.

**Zareen Austin** Originally from Cortlandt Manor, New York. After a degree in Biology, she came to Montreal in 2002 to attend The International Academy of Design in Montreal. She now enjoys a career as a graphic designer. “I am grateful to be involved in the Zoroastrian community, and am happy to serve on the ZAQ Executive Committee for another term. I think it’s important to teach our children the beauty of Zoroastrianism and how it can gently guide us in everyday life.

**Abtin Jahanbakshzadeh** Left Iran 9 years ago, lived in France for 3 years and then moved to Montréal in 2009 He is an engineer PhD candidate in Mining and Geotechnical engineering at École Polytechnique of Montréal. Abtin was on the 2013-2015 term and will be serving ZAQ on the 2015 to 2017. “I am highly motivated to offer my skills and expertise to work in the community and I hope that we, as a team, are able to organize some fun events and make it a memorable term for everyone”

**Mitra Bahrami** Came to Canada in 1990 and is a registered dietitian nutritionist at Charles Le Moyne Hospital and community center on the south shore of Montreal. She was on the committee from 2009 to 2011.” It is a great opportunity for me to be a part of this young team and I hope to serve our committee the best way I can.

## California Zoroastrian Centre - LA

CZC-LA is housed in the Abadian cultural building located at 6515 De Soto Ave., Canoga Park, CA 91303.

From Left : Ms Mitra Zartoshty (co-VP )Ms Sima patel (co-secretary), Ms Fahimbanoo Shamloo (Alternate member), Prof. Shahram Ghandeharizadeh (President),Ms. Katayoon Farshidi, Ms. Goly Jamshidi Forooghi (Treasurer), Ms. Parvin Marzban (Co-Secretary), Dr. Shahram Gharibshahi (Co-Vice President), Ms. Susan Farin Parvaresh

On Sunday, July 26th, the California Zoroastrian Center Los Angeles (CZC-LA) held



its election. The elected members of this fourth term held their first meeting a week later on Sunday, August 2nd, to elect its officers.

President Prof Shahram Ghandeharizadeh, [shahram@usc.edu](mailto:shahram@usc.edu) writes "As a group, we intend to increase both the number of quality cultural and educational programs at the CZC-LA Abadian Cultural Building and the participation of our youth."

## *Zoroastrian Society of Ontario - ZSO*



***Board of Directors of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) from L to R: Cyrus Zandian, Mashya Amroliwalla, Percy Surti, Mitra Jam, Dara Panthakee, Russi Surti, Vispi Patel (not in the picture – Anahita Ogra).***

ZSO President Russi Surti (elected in July 2015) writes that the Darbe Mehr premises in Toronto have undergone extensive renovations over the past several months, and the hall has been beautified with the installation of 4 large artefacts depicting scenes from Persepolis.

Board members have been busy interacting with one or more of the 22 Committees (all run by dedicated volunteers) that keep ZSO members active throughout the year: Children's Religion Classes, Youth & Sports, Iranian Cultural Kanoun, Lectures, Muktd, Newsletter, Scout Group, etc, etc. During August, members observed the 5 Muktd Days, and celebrated the ***Shahenshahi Nowroz and Khordadsal***, with our volunteer Super Chefs cooking up a storm - over 12 delicious lunches and dinners during that short period. On 22<sup>nd</sup> August we also held a joint Dinner-Dance with our sister organization, the ***Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation (OZCF)***, that was enjoyed by all. And the current Board has as its mandate to serve our community to the best of our abilities – just as the Boards and Committees of yore have been doing over the past 40 years.



*The 2015 SUMMER Issue of the Fezana Journal was a collaborative issue with Chehrenama, the publications of California Zoroastrian Association. In that Journal issue we had two articles in Farsi by Mobed Kourosh Niknam and Mobed Pedram Soroushpour (pages 38-44). In the FALL issue we are publishing the summarized translation of those two articles by Fariba Pirghaibi, the editor of Chehrenama Editor FJ.*

## **UPS AND DOWNS OF PRESERVING ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION IN THE DIASPORA**

### **ASHKAN KHOSROPOUR INTERVIEWS MOBED KOUROSH NIKNAM**

*Summarized Translation by Fariba Pirghaibi*

*Excerpts from the interview:*

**Q: What is Zoroastrian culture and tradition of which there is so much talk and how did it reach us?**

A: Z. culture has been a collection of traditions that has reached us from thousands of years of history. Some of these traditions are pre-Zoroastrian such as Mehregan and Sadeh but Z's as a group have done a fantastic job preserving it. Gahanbars began as celebrating harvest and cattle but has some history of suffering along with it. During the Sassanian time gahanbars became tax giving as Zoroastrian belongings were being confiscated. So Zoroastrians gave their land to gahanbar to save it from being taken. This has evolved to a wonderful tradition of sharing in its current state.

**Q: Is it possible to save this culture in diaspora?**

A: Some of the traditional celebrations can be done anywhere in the world. When Iranians celebrate Nowruz by the Eiffel tower Zoroastrians can definitely celebrate Mehregan and Esfandgan there for example. Other traditions such as the massive fire lit at sadeh can of course only be done in Iran on that magnitude or going to the Pir-e-Sabz and other places of worship.

**Q: In your view what other avenues can be used to preserve the ancient traditions?**

A: I believe we must nurture our youth. The time has passed for some of the ancient traditions which had a time and place for their era. Today we are dealing with an educated younger population who is more familiar with the Zoroastrian philosophy and questions traditions that don't make sense or are in conflict with our scripture. For example when a youth while attending a porseh ceremony and hears a mobed talk about physical heaven and hell he will wonder where this is sourced since this is not stated in Z's words. We must grow educated young hirbods and mobeds to promote Zarathushtra's mantra's to our youth in their own language.

Zoroastrian reporter [Ashkan Khosropour](#) began his journalistic work in 2005. He has been a reporter for various Iranian newspapers and magazines and is currently working with "Hamshahree" online as well as newspaper and several others. .

***Dr Kourosh Niknam** has a Ph D in Zoroastrian philosophy. He grew up in Yazd and moved to Tehran to educate the younger generation in the Zoroastrian tradition. He was the Zoroastrian representative for one term in the Iranian congress. He currently lives in Paris, France where he continues his work in educating the next generation of Zoroastrian leaders.*

## **ZOROASTRIAN IMMIGRATION: A THREAT THAT MUST BE CONVERTED TO AN OPPORTUNITY**

### **MOBED PEDRAM SOROUSHPOUR**

*Summarized Translation by Fariba Pirghaibi*

During the last two decades, the Zoroastrian community in Iran faced the biggest exodus of its members in history. The most significant feature of this departure was its lack of objective.

Historically, there were two major emigrations of Iranian Zoroastrians to India. The impetus for each was to ensure the survival of the Z community and culture. However, the immigration that has taken place during the past two decades lacks a fundamental objective—it has been more for personal convenience than survival. Relaxed travel restrictions has facilitated many with an easy opportunity to travel to the Western Hemisphere nations.

Iran has always had a nuclear role in Zoroastrian existence and culture and it is almost impossible to imagine being able to form a new central nucleus for Zoroastrians elsewhere in this modern world.

The emigration of Iranian Zs to the west began over two decades ago with the initial departure of well-to-do Zoroastrian families leaving immediately following the Iranian Revolution. This group was not large in numbers, however, due to their personal wealth, they were the backbone of the community. The second wave, which sought refugee visa status in the United States, was assisted by the HIAS organization.

The second group encompassed the young and active part of the Z community; they left Iran in vast numbers, bringing their extended families.

The principle disadvantages of Iranian Zoroastrian emigration are: weakening of the nuclear Zoroastrian center in Iran and diminishing the Z identity as our expatriates are absorbed in the Western culture

Advantages of Iranian Zoroastrian immigration are: the young majority of Z immigrants have a much higher opportunity for higher education, better jobs and overall superior life style to what they may have experienced had they remained in Iran. Given that these youngsters remain active in their respective Z communities, they will become better members of Zoroastrian society and synergistically contribute to advances of Zs throughout the world.

To realize these opportunities, we will require strategic planning and joint efforts by Z organizations in Iran and abroad. With proper structure and guidance, mass immigration of Zoroastrians can lead to higher recognition, better success, and growth for the entire Zoroastrian community

**Mobed Pedram Soroushpour** *is the President of Iranian Mobed Council in Tehran and Editor of Fravahar magazine*



# NAZC2014 INTERFAITH SESSION

**Maneck Bhujwala**

At the 2014 North American Zoroastrian Congress the session *Interfaith—Our Presence on the World Stage* was organized and presented by Maneck Bhujwala.

As a tiny minority, and mostly unknown religion, the session afforded an excellent opportunity to share our heritage, culture, and beliefs with representatives of other religions and our own community.

Among the attendees were guests from other religious communities: Fr. Alexei Smith (Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles), Don Garrick and Bishop Tom Thorkelson (Mormon), Dorota (Jewish Faith), Jim Barrett (Bahai faith), Ibraheem Naeem (Muslim religion), and Kay Lindhahl (North American Interfaith Network). Zarathushti activists attending were Behram Pastakia, Sam Vesuna, Firdosh



Mehta, Dolly Malva, Homi Gandhi, Roshan and Rohinton Rivetna, Arman Ariane. FEZANA president, Katayun Kapadia, Shehnaz Bhujwala, and other Parsi and Iranian Zarathushtis were also present.

Chairperson, Rohinton Rivetna started the session by observing that only a few individuals are active in interfaith work and the majority of community members have not shown any interest in interfaith projects. To illustrate his point, Rohinton showed a picture of Maneck Bhujwala, the only Zarathushti to ride on the float of a local interfaith organization at the Fourth of July parade in Huntington Beach, California, where he held

a handwritten sign saying, **“ZOROASTRIANS WISH YOU HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY.”** Rohinton then introduced the speaker, Maneck, citing him as one of the active volunteers who felt interfaith was a calling.

Maneck started by recognizing the invited guests and the Zarathushti interfaith activists, requesting them to say a few words about their involvement in interfaith work.

After the introductions, Maneck gave a short talk about the importance of interfaith activism for world peace, stressing that numerous threats are being made by those who misinterpret, misuse, and hijack religions. To underscore his concerns with real world examples, he pointed to the atrocities perpetrated on civilians in the name of religion by the militant Islamic group ISIS in Syria and Iraq, Boko Haram in Africa, and by Sunni and Shia Muslims throughout the Middle East. He raised the specter of fanatical terrorists getting their hands on nuclear weapons from sympathizers in the Pakistan army.

He also discussed interfaith successes throughout history: Zoroastrian Persian emperor Cyrus the Great who, after conquering Babylon, allowed the people to follow their own religion—even bowing before a statue of their God to show respect. He highlighted the efforts of the Christian priest, St. Francis, who appealed to Kamil Sultan of Egypt for peace during the Fifth Crusade. Maneck recounted the famous story of the Muslim emperor of India, Akbar the Great, who invited leaders of Hindu, Christian, and Zoroastrian religions to his court for discussions.

With the upcoming Parliament of World's Religions in October at Salt Lake City, Utah, Maneck reflected on the first parliament of world religions held in Chicago in 1893 in which two Zarathushtis from India participated—Dastur Jamasji Minocherji Jamasp Asa, as a member of the working committee of the World's Parliament of Religions (1893), and Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, a priest, scholar, public servant, and community activist. Sir Jivanji, as the Zoroastrian representative, presented the paper *Belief and Ceremonies of the Followers of Zoroaster*. Maneck also quoted a passage from Swami Vivekananda, who had enthralled the parliament's audience with his speech emphasizing universal brotherhood and the necessity of cooperation among all religions, as “. . . holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character . . .”

To allay the fears of some Zarathushtis, Maneck pointed out that the constitutions of most interfaith organizations specifically prohibit proselytizing. Rather, he asked them to focus on the opportunity afforded of bringing awareness of the Zoroastrian religion to a larger global audience.

Rivetna presented a token of appreciation to Maneck, followed by an engaging question and answer session. The distribution of a list of websites of interfaith organizations concluded the session. Before adjourning, Katayun Kapadia discussed with Fr Smith the possibility of meeting Pope Francis during his visit to Philadelphia

Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBoQZEqSDko> to view a video of the interfaith session

**Maneck Bhujwala co-chair of FEZANA Interfaith Committee can be contacted at [mbhujwala@socal.rr.com](mailto:mbhujwala@socal.rr.com)**

***"In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom...  
or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality,  
it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices  
in calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the dignity and rights of others***

***Pope Francis***





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## POETRY ABOUT YALDA NIGHT

TRANSLATED BY MASSOUME PRICE

POETS HAVE BEEN WRITING POETRY  
ABOUT YALDA NIGHT FOR CENTURIES.

**MOHAMAD HOSSEIN SHAHRIAR**  
(1906–1988) *TABRIZ, IRAN*

### *The Night of Yalda*

*The time when grandma tells stories at night  
The time when snow and blizzards rise  
and smash into the walls  
I wish I could have gone back to that night  
and become a child again  
I would blossom like a flower and then wither*

**MOHAMAD KAZEM KAZEMI**  
(CONTEMPORARY) *AFGHANISTAN*

*Can Yalda overcome all the hardships?  
The apple you eat, will it become a tree?*

*I have come to bring you songs  
Bring you mixed nuts and watermelons*

*Wish that your days be like a sweet treat  
And your nights forever be a Yalda*

**SA'DI (CA. 1210–1291 OR 1292)**  
*SHIRAZ, IRAN*

*With all the pains,  
I know there is relief*

*As there is an end,  
to the end of Yalda*



*Yalda ceremonial spread. Copyright and  
photo credit, courtesy of Homa Davarkia.*

**HAFEZ CA. 715 OR 792/1315 OR 1390)**  
*SHIRAZ, IRAN*

*I am determined, if I could  
do something to end sorrow  
The solitude of the heart,  
is not a place to talk of the opposites*

*Once the demon is gone,  
the angel comes*

*The talk of the brute rulers,  
is the same as the darkness of Yalda*

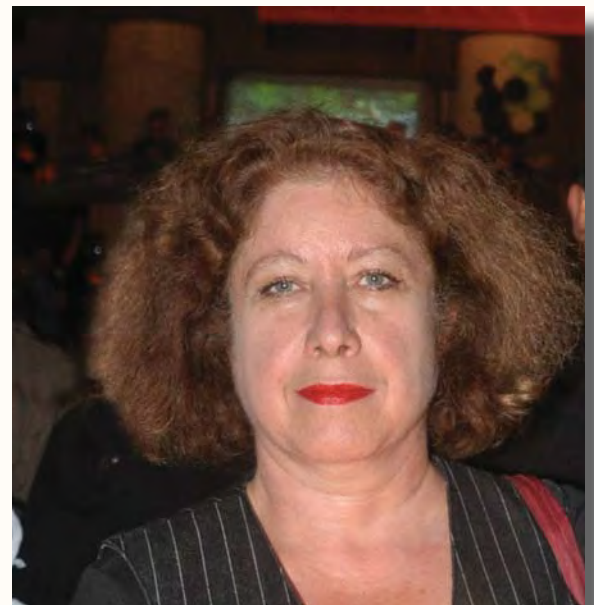
*Ask for light from the Sun,  
if you wish for it*



## YALDA WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATIONS FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

MASSOUME PRICE, GUEST EDITOR

Celebrations of winter solstice have a long history in many cultures and have been observed and celebrated for thousands of years. Their primary function in ancient times might have originated out of need and fear of natural elements, cold, darkness, insufficient crops and foods, leading to hunger and starvation. Food and warmth were absolutely vital for survival, and our ancestors observed nature, discovered its routines, theorized about the elements, the sky, the stars and the Sun, and the celestial universe to know and understand the puzzles of the cosmos. They discovered early in human history that when the winter solstice happens, the night before this natural phenomenon is the longest night of the year. Which means from the next day, the days become longer and the nights shorter. This was particularly significant in the vast territories of the northern hemisphere where the dark and the cold became demonized and strategies were designed to fight back. The celebrations of winter solstice in all ancient cultures were entwined with religious beliefs in the possibility of help from a supportive divinity that supported light, warmth and benefited humankind.



In Iran and some neighboring countries the celebration of winter solstice is still keenly observed today. While the divine nature of struggles between good and evil, light and darkness have lost their meanings and religious significance for most of the general population, the joy, comfort and sense of security that accompanies such events continues. For many there is a sense that in the turbulent world of today, such events help participants to feel secure, experience communal joy, and most important of all enable us to pay respect to nature. Paying a tribute to nature is particularly significant, since it is apparent to many that nature and its elements are battling a losing war in the modern world. Contemporary societies might not believe they need the gods and divine forces to regulate cold and harness darkness and famine, but they do need togetherness in the face of adversity, and can benefit from the joy resulting from being and celebrating together. With so many people from the Middle East dispersed all around the globe, praising and adhering to ancient practices that promote togetherness provides an added bonus of feeling safe. Knowing that we have come from a world with an historical identity based on Zoroastrian principles that cherished respect for nature, brings us together with festivities and merriment that regard joy as a sacred entity.

The articles in this edition of **FEZANA JOURNAL** discuss the winter solstice as it is celebrated around the globe. Commentaries by authors cover a number of subjects. Fariborz Rahnmoon, Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, and Neville Gustad Panthaki discuss why and how to revive this ancient tradition. The master chefs Najmieh Batmanglij, Niloufer's Kitchen, Rita Kapadia and Perzen Patel share recipes for the whole family. Kaveh Farrokh, Khosro Esfandiar Mehrfar and Ervad Teheimon F Mirza deliberate on theories about the origins of the celebration of winter solstice. A brief history of the winter solstice festival, its ancient practices and how

# Yalda

it is celebrated in various countries and regions today, as well as a look at immense monuments built to commemorate the winter solstice in ancient times are provided by Massoume Price. In the last section K. E. Eduljee reviews festivals of light in various countries.

Zoroastrianism, as a belief system, concentrates on core human values that see the struggle between good and evil as necessary, and as an obligation for better and righteous living. Such struggles are symbolized by light and darkness. The celebration of light, understanding its importance, and the defeat of the forces of darkness is a way to strive for a better life, not just for individuals, but also for our communities as a whole. Being a joyful and festive occasion with family and friends, there are many reasons why people from all cultures and origins might choose to share such a beautiful tradition. Yalda observances honor and cherish the struggle against destructive forces of evil inside and outside of our existence, while at the same time remembering and appreciating nature.

**Massoume Price** An active member of Canadian and Iranian communities in Vancouver, Massoume Price is a social anthropologist educated in Iran and England. She has been writing on Iranian culture for many years. Her books include *Iran's Diverse Peoples* published by ABC CLIO in 2005, and *Culture of Iran Youth Series* that in 5 books covers the history of Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran, in addition to a book on Cyrus the Great and another on History of Clothing and Jewelry in Iran. Massoume has been extensively involved in organizing lectures, concerts, exhibitions and facilitating exchange and interaction between the Iranians and the Canadian community at large. She was a commissioner on the Board of Vancouver Museum until 2006 and an advisor for the North Shore Arts Council in North Vancouver until 2008.

And while I am sleeping,  
You silently carry off  
All my suffering and sordid past  
In Your beautiful Hands."

(Hafez)

"The company of rulers is the darkness of Yalda Eve  
Look at the sun in quest of light, you may find it."

(Hafez)





# Yalda

## SHAB-E CHELLA OR YALDA FESTIVAL

For thousands of years the winter solstice has been celebrated around the world by many cultures, and has a very special place amongst the Iranians.

MASSOUME PRICE

In Iran, and several neighboring Asian countries, the winter solstice celebrations are called **Shab-e chella**, also often known as **Yalda (birth)**. *Shab* means night and *chella* refers to a forty day time span. The pre-Islamic Iranian calendars had three *chella* periods, one in summer and two in winter. The two in winter were known as major and minor *chella* (*bozorg* and *koochak*) starting with the *chella bozorg* on the first day of the 10th month named Dey and continuing for 40 days, then followed by *chella koochak* that continued for only 20 days, hence the term minor. In Iran and the neighboring countries, like many other major celebrations, Yalda is deeply rooted in Zoroastrianism, the pre-Islamic religion of Iran.

Ancient Iranians celebrated seven obligatory feasts. Six of the feasts were known as *gahanbar*, meaning appointed time, and together with the last major festival, Nowruz, which celebrates the Zoroastrian New Year and the spring equinox, they formed the seven most important annual festivals in Iran. The first, the third, and the fourth feasts celebrate times important for pastoralists and farmers. The second and the fifth marked natural phenomena and celebrated the summer and winter solstices<sup>1</sup>. It is the winter solstice that nowadays is celebrated as Shab-e chella on the longest night of the year.

The winter solstice was celebrated to mark the victory of light over darkness and renewal of the sun. The longest night of the year is also the last day of the Persian month Azar, meaning “fire”, when Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, meaning “hostile spirit” or “evil” was assumed by ancient Iranians to be at peak strength. The next day, the first day of the month *Dey* (*dadar/god*), also known as *Khoram Ruz* or *Khoreh Ruz* (the day of sun), is named after the creator Ahura Mazda, the Zoroastrian name for sovereign God or Lord of Wisdom. Since from the first of Dey the days are getting longer and the nights shorter, this day marks the victory of sun and light over darkness, representing evil. The celebrations started the night before and continued the next day with the Deygan Festival dedicated to Ahura Mazda. On the first day of the midwinter month Dey the creator’s power and the worship and joyfulness of divinities were especially needed to combat the evils of cold and darkness. In the modern Iranian calendar the celebrations occur around the 21st of December.

In ancient Iran fires were burnt all night during Shab-e chella to facilitate the victory of light over darkness. There were religious rituals, feasts with prayers, wine, fruits, nuts and grains, communal meals, games, music, visits to the sick and the elderly and special acts of charity. People believed Ahura Mazda would grant their wishes on this night. They made wishes and prayed to have children. Prayers and rituals were performed to ensure the total victory of the sun that was so essential for the protection of winter crops. Deities including Mithra, the protector of the early morning light, were honored. Mithra was an ancient Indo-Iranian deity that gained a significant place in Zoroastrian cosmology.

The 10th century scholar **Abu Rayhan Biruni** mentions that the *Sogdians*, people from an ancient kingdom now in modern Uzbekistan, held fairs as part of the celebrations. Sogdians were of Iranian origin and spoke an Iranian related language. Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Nestorian Christianity influenced their religion in the pre-Islamic period.

# Yalda

One of the themes of the festival was the temporary subversion of order. Masters and servants reversed roles. The king, dressed in white, changed places with an ordinary citizen. A mock king was crowned and masquerades spilled into the streets. This tradition survived into the early Islamic period and is mentioned by Biruni in his book *Monuments of Past Generations* (*Asar al-baqya*). The origin of this tradition goes back to the ancient Babylonian New Year celebrations and was very popular in many ancient cultures.

The ancient Babylonians believed the first creation was order that came out of chaos. To appreciate and celebrate the first creation they had a festival and all roles were reversed. Cross-dressing with merriment, feasts, dance, and music continued for a few days. Even the king reversed his role, and a bogus king was crowned. Disorder and chaos ruled for a few days. Eventually order was restored and triumphed at the end of the festival. This fiesta became wildly popular throughout the region, and was adopted by many including the ancient Persians, Egyptians and the Romans.

Today Shab-e chella has lost its religious significance for the Muslim population in the area and is celebrated as a social occasion, when family and friends get together for feasts, fun, music, dance, and merriment. Modern Zoroastrians celebrate this night and the next day as a religious feast in the Dadvah Festival dedicated to Ahura Mazda. Although, the Iranian Zoroastrians also celebrate Yalda as most Iranians do. The Zoroastrian groups in India, the Parsi and the Irani who fled persecutions in Iran after the Arab invasions—do not celebrate this night as Shab-e chella or Yalda, but do rejoice in devotion to Ahura Mazda on the first day of the month that is named after Ahura Mazda, and pay respect on the 8th, 15th, and 23rd of the month Dey all named Dadvah day, meaning creator, also referring to Ahura Mazda.



***Sasanian gilded plate depicting a celebration scene probably related to spring and Nowruz. National Museum of Iran, 5th century CE. Photo credit: Davood Sadeghsa.***

(Endnotes)

1 Mary Boyce. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Rutledge, London, 2002. p. 33.



## YALDA: AN ENDURING LEGACY FROM ANCIENT PERSIA

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The annual Iranian festival of the birth of the unconquerable Sun (In Roman Mithraism: *Sol Invictus*), Mithras, is known as “Yalda” or more commonly as “*Shab-e Yalda*” (Night of Yalda) as well as “*Shab-e Chelley-e Bozorg*” (Night of the Great Forty). This is the longest night of the winter solstice of the northern hemisphere, corresponding to December 20-21 on the Gregorian calendar. On the Iranian calendar, Yalda corresponds to the evening situated between last day of the 9th month of *Azar* and the first day of the 10th month of *Day* or *Dae*, the Iranic equivalent of the Roman *Saturn*. Yalda is a festive occasion during which family members celebrate by consuming fruits and nuts, with “red” fruits, such

as pomegranates, being especially popular as their color symbolizes the colors representing the genesis (or rebirth) of the life force, as figure1 shows.

A Middle Iranian term (in Parthian and Sassanian Pahlavi) for Yalda is “*Zayishn Mihr*” or “*Zayishn Mithr*,” the term in its New Persian form is “*Zayeshmehr*.” Interestingly, numbers of contemporary scholars attribute the origins of the term “Yalda” to the Syriac language. It is often proposed that the term was adopted by the Zoroastrians during the early days of the Sassanian dynasty. This thesis however may be questioned in three ways.

The first lies in the field of linguistics, especially in the attribution of a Syriac origin for the meaning of “birth” in the term Yalda. The term /da/ in Yalda is not of the Hamito-Semitic linguistic family, but instead belongs to the wider Indo-European language families. In Avestan, the term /Daēva/ is broadly defined as “divine being” (Herrenschmidt & Kellens, 1993, pp. 599-602) (in Old Iranian: /Daiva/), which is derived from older Indo-Iranian /Daivá/ (God), which in turn is traced to (undifferentiated) Proto Indo-European (PIE) /Deiúó/ (God). According to Pokorny’s Master PIE lexicon the /Da/ or /Daē/ affix in /Daēva/ is defined as: “day, sun, glitter, to shine, deity, god” (Pokorny, 1959-1969 & 1989, pp.183-187). The legacy of Yalda is in essence a legacy rooted in the ancient Indo-European mythological tradition.

Second, there are linguistic (semantic and phonological) cognates to the term /Yalda/ in northern Europe. In Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish (derived from Germanic Old Norse) Christmas is known as Jól and/or Jule (Swedish: Jul). In the Old Norse language spoken by the Vikings the term /Yule/ (from the original root term /jólum/) designated the mid-winter feast festival



Figure 1: An Iranian lady recites poetry with the Book of Hafez during the night of Yalda; note the pomegranate and melon on the table spread (Source: Public Domain).

# Yalda

much like the Zoroastrian Yalda, which was later applied to Christmas in the Nordic countries. The term Joulou in reference for Christmas Day is also used in Finnish, a non Indo-European Uralic based language. The Old Norse term for day is /Dag/ and/or /Dagr/. Thus in modern Norwegian and Danish, the term for Christmas day is Jule-Dag (Swedish: Jul-Dag). It is thus clear that the European cognates of Iranian Yalda have no connection to the Syriac language.

The third manner in which the Syrian origin thesis (for the term Yalda) may be questioned has to do with the nature of Iranian and Syriac contacts during the Sassanian era. The Persian Zoroastrian calendar was known to the Semitic-speaking peoples of the Near East, especially the Syrian Christians of the Sassanian Empire who were independent of the Western (Roman) churches. More specifically, while the Syrians used the lunar-solar year (probably Babylon-based) up to the 5th century, they were “. . . well acquainted with the Persian system of time reckoning . . . they used certainly Persian eras and dates often in their civil life and in their writings, and sometimes even in their religious records” (cited from Taqizadeh, 1940, pp.633). The Nestorian Christians, for example, named the ecclesiastical divisions of their year by the name of *Nausard-el*. Nöldeke explained this as a compound term composed of the Middle Iranian *Nausard* (New Year) and the Semetic *El* (God, New year of God, New Religious Year) (Nöldeke, 1997, p.408). While a full tabulation of Nestorian-Persian cultural parallels are too numerous to discuss here, another example is the ancient Persian practice of pouring water on each other on the sixth day of the month of Fravardin, with the Nestorians doing so on their Nausard-el day. Thus, in lieu of the discussed linguistic factors, as well as the deep-rooted Syriac-Iranian cultural relations during the Sassanian era, the notion that the term Yalda was simply borrowed by the Zoroastrians may be seriously questioned.

An important legacy of the Yalda ceremony of Mithras is the close proximity of this date (December 21) with that of the Christmas celebration (December 25). Unfortunately the primary Christian document, the New Testament, has provided no actual dates for the birth of Jesus. However, the Gospel of Luke provides some possible hints by noting of shepherds keeping watch over their fields in the evening (Luke 2:8). If the report can be deemed as partly historical, then this scenario appears to preclude a winter solstice birth for the Christian prophet. In fact, the actual date of Jesus' birth continues to be celebrated on January 6 by the eastern branches of Christianity, notably by the Armenian and the Greek (Orthodox) Churches.

Perhaps most interesting is the continuing legacy of Yalda and Mithras in Rome and greater Europe, even after the official adoption of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine the Great in 312 CE (r. 306-337 CE) followed by the legalization of Christian worship in 313 (Edict of Milan), and the formulation of the Nicene creed of Christianity in 325 CE (First Council of Nicea) which became the official state religion of Rome in 380 CE (Edict of Thessalonika). Mithraism however, could not be so easily displaced. This had been a powerful spiritual

movement in the Roman Empire, notably among the professional soldiery. Temples dedicated to Mithras were spread throughout the empire, from the Roman borderlands in Syria facing Persia to Carrawburgh in ancient Britain along Hadrian's Wall. In fact, the coins minted by Constantine I in 320 CE bore Mithraic symbols and the Latin *Sol Invictus* (Unconquered Sun) designation for Mithras as figure 2 shows, a full eight years after his adoption of Christianity! Note that *Sol Invictus* was an important element of the Mithraic mysteries in Rome. It was during the reign of Emperor Aurelian (r. 270-275 CE) when the *Natalis Invicitus* (Birth of the Unconquered [Soli=Sun]) had been established as having occurred on December 25. Evidently,



**Figure 2: Coin minted by Emperor Constantine I (r. 306-337 CE) in 315; note the Latin inscription of “Soli Invicto Comiti” [Unconquered Sun Companion] (Source: Public Domain). The appearance of Mithraic imagery on the coin is notable, as Constantine had converted to Christianity just 3 years earlier.**



the astrologers in the Roman Empire had calculated the winter solstice just four days later from that of the Persian Yalda (December 20-21).

Like Yalda in Persia, the Roman Mithras, the *Sol Invictus*, was believed to have occurred on the winter solstice, when daytime was at its shortest. As noted by Vermaseren: “One should bear in mind that the Mithraic New Year began on Natalis Invicti, the birthday of their invincible god, i.e., December 25th, when the new light . . . appears from the vault of heaven” (1965, p.238). While not all Western researchers agree with Vermaseren (notably Beck, 1987), the *Sol Invictus* celebration, like Yalda, symbolized the “rebirth” of the light of the sun. For Christianity to prevail in the West, however, Mithrasism had to be eradicated throughout the Roman Empire and Europe. After a relentless campaign against Mithraism culminating in the capture of the Mithraic Temple on Vatican Hill in 376 CE, the Papacy also apparently “borrowed” the “pagan” date of December 25th by declaring (or re-branding) this as the birthday of Jesus Christ (see discussion by Reyes, 2010, p.140-141). In a sense, Christmas was simply a new version or replacement for the ancient celebration of the *Sol Invictus* (See Taqizadeh, 1940, p.653; Hanaway, 1988, p.69). Note that in the First Council of Nicea Jesus had been declared to be divine, as being specifically “Light from the Light” (see discussion by Loyn, 1991, p.240), again reminiscent of the attributes of the Persian God Mithras celebrated during Yalda in Persia. Like Christ, Mithra was the light of the world and the sole mediator between mortals and the celestial father; note the Gospel of John in which Christ is quoted as having stated “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 4:16). Just as Jesus was to be known as the Christ, so was Mithras identified with “*Chrestos*” as seen in an inscription (Vatican Museum ID: CIMRM 554-555) located behind the large Mithras-Tauroctony scene in the Vatican museum. The term “*Christian*” is derived from Greek “*Kristos*” (Χριστός) which means “*The Anointed One*”; a term that existed prior to the historical Jesus or Jeshuah.

There are at least three other legacies from Yalda and the Persian Mithras in Christianity, European civilizations and the Christmas celebrations. The first is the Persian “Tree of Life” and the Christmas Tree. The Cypress tree remains very sacred in Iran and was known in ancient times as the “Tree of Immortality,” note also the deep symbolism in Christianity in Isaiah: “*Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow*” (Isaiah, 55:13). The Cypress tree was decorated in ancient Persia for the birthday of Mithras—remarkably parallel to the decorated Christmas tree. The ancient Iranians viewed the Cypress tree as a source of beneficence that held steadfast against the bitter cold of winter and kept the evil Ahriman at bay during the night of Mithras’ birth.

Interestingly, Pope Benedict XVI’s invocation of the Christian Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) during midnight Christmas Mass at the Vatican Basilica on Saturday, December 24, 2005, has its parallels in ancient Persia where the Achaemenid king, Artaxerxes II (r. 404-358 BCE) invoked in his inscription the “Trinity” of Ahura-Mazda, Mithra, and Anahita. Few are aware however, that the very concept of a “Pope” is also Mithraic in origin. There are, in fact, numerous devotionals by Roman senators who cited their religious titles in 305-390 CE, with the title of *Pater* (Father) of the Mithraic cult prominently inscribed (note that Constantine had converted to Christianity in 312 CE). At least nine of the Roman Senators cited on the foundation of the Basilica held the title of *Papa* which is the abbreviation for *Pater Patrum* (Chief/Father of the Fathers) (Barbiero, 2010, p.238). There is also a marble altar



**Figure 3: Mosaic of Christ as Sol in Mausoleum M in the pre-4th-century necropolis located below the Vatican’s St. Peter’s Basilica. While commonly interpreted as representing Christ, the figure is virtually identical to the pre-Christian representations of Mithra (note fluttering Iranian-style cloak on the mosaic figure).**



dedicated to Mithras on July 19, 374 CE, (discovered in 1949) in Saint Peter's square dedicated to the *Pater Patrum* (Father of Fathers), the Roman Senator Alfenius Caeionius Julius Camenius (Barbiero, 2010, p.238). This confirms that the "Pope" of the Mithraic cult was centered in the Vatican. Mithra's Cave temple on Vatican Hill however was to be seized just two years later by the Christians in 376 CE (Leeming, 1990, pp.197-199). Fig 3 shows the mosaic at the Basilica Museum. It is thus ironic that the original structure of St. Peter's Basilica had been built upon a Mithraic site in 319-333 CE (Barbiero, 2010, p.238). Thus, while the Western world and the papacy celebrate Christmas at the annual winter solstice, ancient Persia's silent legacy of Yalda continues to endure.



Figure 4: Mithras' Enduring Legacy? (Left) Mithras at Taghe Bostan, Western Iran; (Middle) Deo Sol Invictus, Italy; (Right) The Statue of Liberty, Staten Island, New York (Source: Kavehfarrokh.com).

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## DEYGAN or YALDA?

FARIBORZ RAHNAMOON



Yalda is the only other festival, apart from Now Rooz, that is celebrated by modern day Zarathushtis at its proper time<sup>1</sup>. All ancient Zarathushti festivals were the celebration of the landmarks in the journey of the earth around the sun and the seasonal events in nature. It shows that they had precise knowledge about the earth and its movement around the sun, thousands of years before Galileo and the western world accepted the truth.

Deygan or Yalda, is the celebration of the winter Solstice and its highlight is the longest night. It is the start of the winter season, which lasts for 88.9 days and is the shortest season. In Mithraism, this day was celebrated as the birth of the Sun because from the next day, the days get longer and according to them, the sun is growing. They called this day “Zayesh e Mehr” - Birth of Mehr. The name Yalda is Syrianic translation of the same, coined by the Assyrian Christians who replaced the Sun God with the Son of God.

With the genocide of the Zarathushtis<sup>2</sup> to the point of annihilation and the persecution of the remaining few by Islam, there was neither the disposition nor possibility for festivity and so the significance of most of the ancient festivals was lost. Yalda lost even its original name and when revived, they adopted the Syrianic name. Those who are not happy with the name call it “Shab e Chella”, because 40 (Chel) days later is the festival of Sadeh. Logically just as “Tirgan” is the name of the summer Solstice, Deygan must have been the name of the winter Solstice, as both happen on the first day of their respective month, in this case “Dey”. <sup>3</sup> (According to the ancient Masdaysni Calendar)

Scholars, under the influence of documents compiled during the Islamic period, that strive to depict Zarathushtis as dualist and superstitious worshipers of Izad's, have connected the Zarathushti festivals to the celebration of Izad's and replaced the science with superstition, which in turn has been believed by modern day Zarathushtis for lack of better information. Just like in the case of the “Now Rooz Table”<sup>4</sup> that used to represent the “Seven Eternal Laws” given in the Gathas, has been manipulated to focus on, seven items starting with the letter “S” (of no significance and with superficial philosophy). Ironically, the Persian name of some of these items does not start with “S” and so their Arabic name is used instead. For that matter even, the Amesha Spenta have been diluted to represent the attributes of a human like God, the “Anthropomorphic God” that Herodotus rightly says the Persians did not believe in.

Zarathushtra, who has so accurately calculated the natural meridian (Mehr Yasht Ha103-104) and named it “Nim Rooz”<sup>5</sup> could not have subsisted with any of the three modern Zarathushti calendars. The festivals vouch for the accuracy of the ancient Mazdayasni calendar, which divides the year into four unequal but natural parts based on the revolution of the earth around the sun.

According to the ancient Mazdayasni calendar<sup>6</sup>, the year starts with the Vernal Equinox - Now Rooz, followed

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by *Tirgan* the summer Solstices on the 92.8<sup>th</sup> day, *Mehregan* the Autumn Equinox on the 186.4<sup>th</sup> day and *Deygan* (Yalda) the winter Solstice on the 276.3<sup>rd</sup> day. Each of these unequal periods<sup>7</sup> individually divided gives us 31 days each for the first 6 months and 30 days for the next five months, with the balance of days before the Vernal Equinox constituting the last month, which could be 29 or 30,<sup>8</sup> whereby the leap year is automatically taken care of with no need for intercalation.<sup>9</sup>

The celebration of Deygan's long winter night involved the recitation and discussion of the Gathas, which on revival of the festival by the Iranians, was replaced by the recitation of the 14-century poems of Hafez; today Zarathushtis do the same.

It is time for all Zarathushtis, to let Mazda (Wisdom) rule, adopt the ancient Mazdayasni calendar, and celebrate the festivals when it happens in nature and let go of the superstitions that have been forced upon them. Let the world know that thousands of years before Galileo our ancestors knew of the real relation between the Sun and the Earth. They studied nature, learned from it, celebrated it, respected it and took care of the environment.

## MAY MAZDA PREVAIL

### (Endnotes)

<sup>i</sup> Modern day Zarathushtis wrongly celebrate *Tirgan* 10 days after the summer solstice and *Mehregan* 16 days after the Autumnal Equinox. Simply because the name of the month and day happen to coincide, here is where superstition has replace science.

<sup>ii</sup> [http://ahura.homestead.com/files/GENOCIDEofZarathushtiesWEBJULY07\\_2\\_.pdf](http://ahura.homestead.com/files/GENOCIDEofZarathushtiesWEBJULY07_2_.pdf)

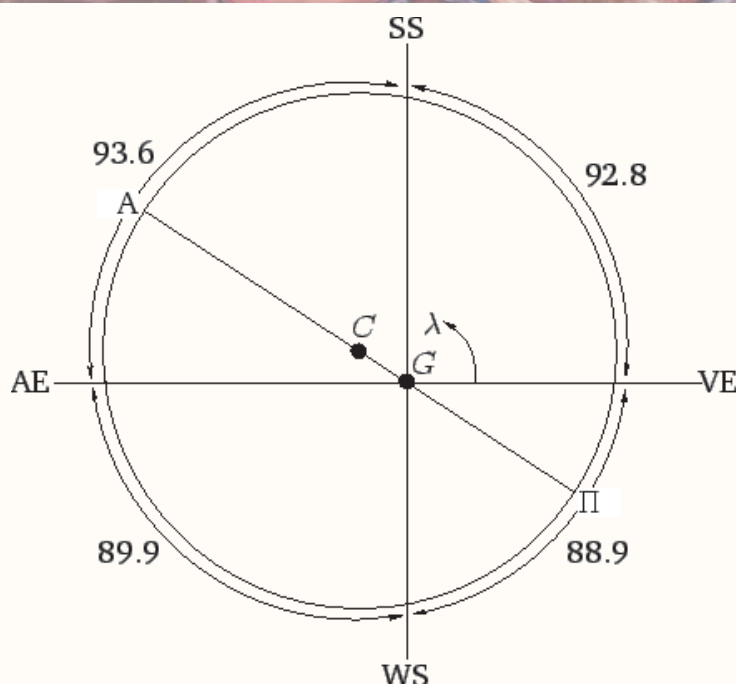
<sup>iii</sup> According to the ancient Mazdayasni Calendar

<sup>iv</sup> <http://ahura.homestead.com/NOW-ROOZ-3751.html>

<sup>v</sup> "*Nim Rooz*" – Mid Day- is on 63 degrees longitude, where when the sun is in the mid-day position there is sunshine all over the hemisphere from Australia and Japan to Africa and Europe. In Afghanistan at the location to this day is a province call *Nim Rooz*.

<sup>vi</sup> For The Mazdayasni calendar, please visit [www.zarathushticalendar.com](http://www.zarathushticalendar.com)

<sup>vii</sup> The sun's apparent orbit around the earth, *G*, showing the vernal equinox (*VE*), summer solstice (*SS*), autumnal equinox (*AE*), and winter solstice (*WS*). Here,  $\lambda$ ,  $\Pi$ , *A*, and *C* are the ecliptic longitude, perigee, apogee, and geometric center of the orbit, respectively. The lengths of the seasons (in days) are indicated.<sup>viii</sup>  
<http://farside.ph.utexas.edu/Books/Syntaxis/Almagest/node36.html>



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# Yalda

## yalda

: REVIVING A LOST FESTIVAL

**FARISHTA MURZBAN DINSHAW**

In the first exodus of Zarathushtis in the eighth century to India, they lost their Persian identity – language, dress, cuisine, festivals, the whole caboodle. Legend has it that they gave it up as a result of their promise to Jadav Rana to assimilate into the local society in return for refuge in Gujrat. Whether adhering to the conditions put forward by Jadav Rana is based on creative memory or historic fact, in essence, the Zarathushtis transformed into Parsis, like sugar in milk, dissolved and homogenized, and forgot their Persian roots. Some of the traditions, like gahambars, morphed into a Parsi version of the original. Others, like the Yalda celebrations, were lost. This might have been because balmy temperatures in December did not delineate winter into the defined season that it had been in the old country.

In the second exodus of Zarathushtis in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to North America, Parsis were once again encouraged to assimilate into the broader culture. Having westernized under the British influence during the Raj, this time the process has been relatively seamless. However, this time around, there are many Zarathushtis who are asking questions around issues of assimilation that may not have been discussed 1,300 years ago. The principle difference is that the first exodus was under the cloud of religious persecution so the Zarathushtis who came to India would have been grateful for a safe haven and fearful of challenging authority. This time around, Zarathushtis have migrated primarily for economic reasons and to countries where multiculturalism is a norm. Thus, they are not afraid to ask, “How do we, as a minority community, maintain our identity within a majority culture?” One of the answers is to educate ourselves about our heritage and reclaim it. Celebrating Christmas is a case in point. In the West, it has increasingly become a secular holiday with toy wish lists, cookies, decorated trees, and popstars singing holiday songs, overshadowing the birth of Jesus as the focus of the celebration, and Parsis have willingly adopted it as one of their own holidays. Yet there is a Zarathushti festival, Yalda, which falls in the same season, and is, very likely, a precursor of Christmas, that is disregarded. Zarathushti families can assert





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their own cultural identity by focusing on Yalda traditions similarly to the way Jewish families celebrate Hanukah at the same time. This is not about resisting Christmas but about embracing our own heritage. Fortunately for those families who cannot completely fend off the Christmas juggernaut, Yalda falls on 21 December so it can be celebrated first.

In order to revive Yalda as a Parsi holiday (since Zarathushtis of Persian origin continue to celebrate it), we have to know the reason for the celebration. Most families know the reason for celebrating Christmas – the birth of Jesus. Yalda, too, is a celebration of a birth; not the birth of the Son of God, but the birth of the sun. (In fact, the word “yalda” is a Syriac word imported into the Persian language, meaning “birth”). It is celebrated on the day of the winter solstice (December 20/21 in the Gregorian calendar) which is the longest night of the year. The day after winter solstice, the days start becoming longer, literally depicting the victory of light over darkness. That day is known as Navad Rooz (or ninety days to NoRooz) and is the day of celebration. Thus, Yalda corresponds with Christmas Eve and Navad Rooz to Christmas.



Yalda is celebrated by families and friends getting together and staying up all night eating fruits and nuts, singing, telling stories and reading aloud. In ancient times, the idea stemmed from the superstition that on this darkest and longest of nights, *devs* (demons) might be tempted to attack so people stayed awake in groups to ward off the confrontation. Staying awake all night may not be ideal for families with young children, but the tradition may be adapted to organize a sleepover with friends and let them stay up a little past bedtime as a treat or to wake them up in time to see the sunrise together.

In recent times in Iran, people take turns to read the poetry of Hafiz, the celebrated 14th century Iranian poet. For Zarathushti families, reading aloud stories from the *Shahnameh* may be more culturally relevant. **One children's version that is easily available in North America is *Shahnameh* (Frances Lincoln Children's Bks, 2014) by Elizabeth Laird with illustrations by Shirin Adl, but local libraries or bookshops may have other age-appropriate versions as well.**

Fire and light are important aspects of Yalda. In the olden days before electricity, people would light candles and bonfires to spread light while they waited for the sun to rise and chase away the darkness. Families in North America can continue this tradition by decorating the house with candles. This would be different from neighboring homes decorated with Christmas lights. Of course, all safety rules should be followed (available on



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<http://candles.org/fire-safety-candles/candle-safety-rules>) and if there are small children or pets in the house it may be preferable to use battery operated candles or hurricane lamps. In many Zarathusti festivals, sharing food is a means of offering thanksgiving for bounties received. Yalda marks the end of harvesting and sharing dried fruits and nuts was a way of giving gratitude to Ahura Mazda that families had stocked larders for the winter. When family members and friends were leaving after the celebration, prettily wrapped packages of dried fruits and nuts were given out. Children can be involved in the preparation of these favors as a part of the preparations for Yalda.

The two fruits that are particularly significant to the Yalda celebration are watermelons and pomegranates. These two fruits would be given a pride of place in the centre of the table around which people gathered. Tradition says that the red color of these fruits symbolizes the colors of a sun rise. They also represent the two iconic seasonal fruits abundant in Iran; watermelon in the summer and pomegranates in the winter. Having watermelon as part of the Yalda feast was a way of offering thanks for what had been available and would be available again after winter was over. Eating these fruits is also linked to good health and well-being. Some people believed that eating watermelon in winter would protect them from falling ill for the rest of the year. In Persian mythology, Asfandiyar became invincible after eating a pomegranate. Other fruits and vegetables like pears, carrots, and green olives were also served. Another Yalda treat in some parts of central Asia such as Tajikistan are sweet breads and cookies shaped like animals and people. Baking and decorating these cookies is an activity that can be done with children leading up to Yalda. The Betty Crocker website ([bettycrocker.com](http://bettycrocker.com)) has many simple recipes that children can follow, including one for "Bear Cookie Pops".

One of the themes of the festival was the temporary subversion of order. In this tradition that continued till Sassanian times, masters and servants reversed roles so that the slaves feasted first and the masters served the food. People would disguise themselves and often these "masquerades" spilled into the streets. In those days, when women did not move around freely, this was an occasion where they could mingle in the public without censure. Even the king got into the spirit of things; he would dress in white and trade places with another man picked by lottery. The mock king would be crowned and could give orders that would be taken in the spirit of fun. Of course, no one really forgot who the real king was so there was little meaningful social change as a result of the switch. Unfortunately, rampant drinking and disrespect for laws often led to mayhem so this way of celebrating subsided after the Sassanian reign. The principle underlining this tradition could be revived, for instance, children could prepare a meal for their parents or parents could be assigned chores. At the very least, families could have an open conversation about what they would do if roles were reversed.

Sima Sahar Zerehi wrote, "Culture is preserved through rituals, traditions, celebrations, and festivals, above all culture is kept alive by the simple act of deciding not to forget, or forgo. Every time someone makes a conscious effort to try to keep a tradition alive by breathing new significance and meaning into it, by making it relevant in a new setting, or by introducing it to new groups of people, culture is preserved and renewed." Hopefully, Zarathushti families will make a conscious effort to keep Yalda alive.

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## THE TRADITION OF YALDA



### Khosro Esfandiar Mehrfar

One wonders how our ancestors looked at their world: their view of nature, their vantage point of life, and the universe. You don't have to be a scientist to deduce that joy, happiness, positive-thinking, harmony with nature, and successful coexistence with their physical world were the pillars of their world view—among other Good Things. They may have found the secret to not only their survival, but the benefits of living in harmony with Mother Nature, summarized with one word: adaptation.

Our ancestral calendar of events is full of seasonal ceremonies linked directly to natural phenomena and is devoid of meta-physical superstitions. How they knew that the re-birth of Mother Nature (*Nowruz* or "New Day") occurs precisely on the Vernal Equinox, around March 21st, and how they observed that the longest night (*Yalda* or "Birth") falls on the Winter Equinox is a mystery; as is their development of a solar calendar.

I am not a linguist, but have read that the word *Yalda* is from the Syriac language which has been *Persianized* into the Parsi language and means birth. It is the birth of new light symbolized by Mithra the Goddess of light, marking the triumph of Light over darkness, for *Yalda* ushers in shorter nights and longer

days. *Yalda* also coincides with the end of the crop season, providing Zarathushtis with another opportunity to celebrate Mother Nature's abundant blessings.

This discussion of *Yalda* brings to mind what the famous German poet and author, Hermann Hesse, who said, "The love of your mother land is actually the blood that is running through your veins." And that love is for our birth country, whether it was Persia, India, the U.S., Canada, or elsewhere. And, what nourishes that love is partially linked to the celebration of our traditions. *Yalda* is a Persian tradition deeply rooted in the annals of ancient Persian history. It is during *Yalda* that the entire family will gather in an elder's house, by tradition, eat a variety





# Yalda



of fruit—mostly pomegranates, watermelons, apples, and any other fall or winter fruits.

During the early evening, family members eat fruit and make wishes; one of the elders will randomly open a page from the book of poems by one of the greatest Persian poets, Hafiz of Shiraz (1326-1390) and recite a poem. His interpretation of the poem related to a family member's wish will decide the fate of the wish. The reading and interpretation of randomly selected poems continues until all family members have learned the fate of their respective wishes.

I clearly remember that a few days prior to Yalda, my parents would buy fresh fruits to be put on the Yalda spread. On Yalda night, after Mom and Dad had

recited the Avesta, we would perform the millennia-old, beautiful ceremonies—it was a particular joy to us when the travels of my grandparents from Yazd to Tehran coincided with Yalda.

Historically, Orthodox Christianity and early converts to the religion linked the birth of Mithra (goddess of light) with Yalda and to the birth of the prophet Jesus. Perhaps, followers of Mithraism made this linkage to keep and preserve their ancient religion.

What keeps us alive and thriving is our preservation and promotion of our millennia-old, cherished traditions. Our traditions are the pillars of our Identity in the vastness of the new world where fusion is the norm. Let us do our part to keep our beautiful traditions—that are linked directly to the everlasting cycle of life in the cradle of our Mother Nature—alive and well by teaching them to our children and grandchildren with simple explanations to stimulate their interest in their hearts and minds during the early, formative stages of their lives.

**HAPPY YALDA TO YOU AND TO YOUR LOVED ONES!**

*Dr. Khosro E. Mehrfar was born in Tehran, Iran. He moved to the U.S. in 1979 to pursue his higher education. Dr. Mehrfar has served the Zarathushti community in many capacities. He lives in Southern California with his wife and two children*

## SHAB-E CHELLA/YALDA CELEBRATIONS IN IRAN

*Shab-e chella, the longest night of the year is one of the few pre-Islamic celebrations that remained very popular throughout the last millennium and never lost its appeal with Iranians of all faiths.*

MASSOUME PRICE

Many still remember the pre-oil-heater and central heating era in Iran when families got together often at their grandparents' or the most senior member of the family's home. Family members warmed up under the *korsi*, a square shaped table covered with very large quilts and blankets with a charcoal tray underneath, to keep warm and cozy. Candles were lit and if people could, they would stay awake for the rest of the night until sunrise. The top of the table was covered with sliced watermelons, pomegranates and winter fruits, with mixed nuts and seeds, dried fruits, baked sweets and delicious food.

The chronicles of 19th century Tehran describe how people tried to stay awake by reciting prayers, poems and storytelling (1). Clergymen and very religious people recited prayers all night, and all who stayed awake shared a sumptuous breakfast in the morning. Such breakfasts included black and cinnamon teas, milk and buttermilk, cooked lentil, beetroot and its juice, sheep's head and *halim* a very tasty thick porridge made with meat or turkey and wheat, spiced with onion and salt served with cinnamon and sugar. Many also believed that if 40 days after *Shab-e chella* they sweep up and spread water in front of their homes, they could meet the Prophet Khezr (mentioned in the Islamic sources) and he will grant their wishes. Khezr means 'green' and one of his miracles was that wherever he went plants and greenery would grow. In Islamic sources Khezr is related to Noah and is one of the two people who managed to find the Fountain of Youth and therefore became immortal.

Prior to the advent of TV, grandparents and other self-proclaimed orators in the family told old stories, recited poetry and sought their fortune through the pages of the collected works of their beloved 14th century poet Hafez (1315–1390), who is the most popular poet in Iran and amongst other Persian speakers elsewhere. The poems of Hafez, particularly his love poetry, *ghazals*, are memorized, recited, and sung with music. There are also popular national and local Hafez reciting competitions. His mausoleum in Shiraz is a pilgrim site for poetry lovers, and the book of his collected works *Divan-e Hafez* is placed on the ceremonial table during the Nowruz celebrations. His *Divan* is widely used in fortune-telling and divination, when the wish-makers open a page randomly and look for his inspired predictions through the interpretation of his poems. Reading and reciting stories from *Shahnameh*, the national epic of Iran by the great Iranian poet Ferdowsi (410 or 416–1019 or 1025), is also very popular on this night. Poetry readings and fortune seeking continues to be among the most popular aspects of Shab-e Chella celebrations up to the present day.

Different kinds of fresh and dried fruits, mixed nuts and seeds are shared in abundance, and are reminiscence of the ancient harvest and crop festivals. Watermelons are a must for this night and are present at Shab-e chella in all countries that celebrate this night. Why watermelon is present and is significant is forgotten. It is not a winter fruit and would have to be preserved for the occasion. However, its presence along with pomegranate, which symbolically represented the ancient female deity **Armaiti**, indicates that watermelon may have been associated with another deity probably protecting fruits. Armaiti is one of the six great



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Amesha Spentas (2) in Zoroastrian cosmology and represents 'holy devotion'. She leads people to good life and salvation. Like most female divinities she is connected to earth and as its' guardian she is responsible for the nurturing of creatures.

Zoroastrianism has great respect for nature and its doctrines promote the sanctity of the planet earth and its natural elements. Divine forces were responsible for the protection of nature including waters, earth, plants and animals. Pomegranate is also present at Shab-e chella feasts. They were traditionally associated with goddesses and fertility throughout the ancient Middle East and India, including the ancient Iranian deity **Anahita**, in addition to Armaiti.

The theme of the night is universal and Iranians of all faiths celebrate this night more or less the same way, getting together to peacefully and joyfully pass the longest night of the year. Watermelon and other seasonal fruits, nuts, delicacies, special dishes, storytelling, poetry reading and fortune telling are universal practices, as are lit candles and incense burning, especially wild rue (*esfand*). This incense is also burnt at Nowruz and almost every other occasion including weddings and memorials, and is believed to ward off bad omens and purify the air. Different regions have their own special customs and foods as well, but the universal theme of the festival passing the longest night and the cold of winter with joy and merriment has remained and is shared by all.



*A modern Korsi prepared for Yalda night.  
Copyright and photo credit courtesy Pari Azarm Motamedi*

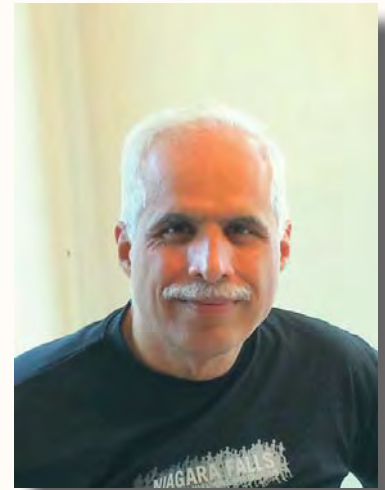
## End Notes

- (1) <http://daneshha.akairan.com/maghalat-persia/ainha-marasem-iran-word/5575.html>
- (2) <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/armaiti>

## MERRY YALDA

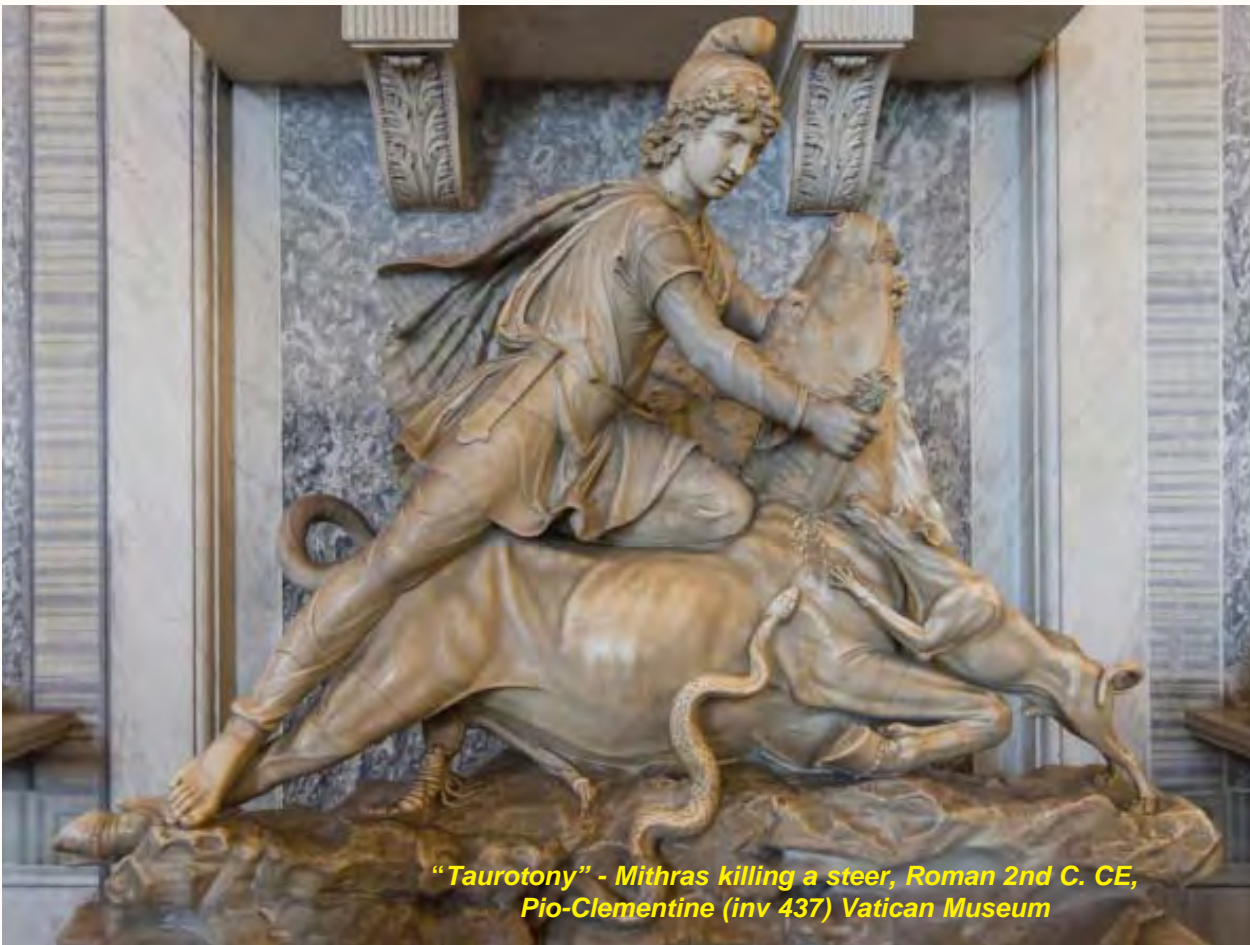
**S**hab-e-Yalda (Yalda night) marks the beginning of Shab-e Chella ye bozorg (night of the great forty). These forty days start (in the Fasli calendar) on first day (Hormazd roj) of the month of Dae (December 20/21 in the Gregorian calendar) and marks the night of the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere. The darkest and the longest night is celebrated in Iran today as a social event; feasting on pomegranates and watermelons with family and friends, and reading poetry (mainly Hafez) until past midnight.

Though the origin of this celebration is unknown, it is believed that it started in pre-Zoroastrian times and was known during Parthian and Sassanian times as “Zaveshmehr;” the birth of Mithra, the sun god that symbolizes light, goodness and strength on earth. Zaveshmehr was observed to celebrate victory of light over darkness and renewal of the sun. The forces of darkness (Ahriman) were assumed to be at their peak on the last day of the month of Azar (December 21), being the longest night of the year. The next day, the first day of the month of Dae (December 22) was known as “Khorram rouz” (day of the sun), to mark the victory of sun over darkness and of good over evil.



**Ervad Tehemton F. Mirza**

In spite of claims by some scholars of displacement of Mithra by the advent of Christianity, worship of Mithra is immortalized in Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. In Avesta, as in the Hindu Vedic Hymns, Mithra is invoked as the Lord of Heavenly Light. Sun (Khorshed) is his vehicle, and Mithra (Meher) is its light. In Zoroastrian ritual, the Khorshed Nyaayesh, Litany to Khorshed (Sun)



**“Tauroctony” - Mithras killing a steer, Roman 2nd C. CE, Pio-Clementine (inv 437) Vatican Museum**



# Yalda

is always followed by Meher Nyaayesh, a Litany to Mithra (light) in which Mithra is said to have *hazangra-gaoshahe baêvare- cashmanô* a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes. He is ever awake, watches over all creatures, hearing and seeing all. He is the Lord of truth, loyalty and contracts. Those who break their promise or bond are answerable to him. He represents heat and life and is known as the Lord of wide pastures. He rewards his worshipers with peace, wisdom, glory, great health, wealth, and offspring. Darkness, vice and impurity are his enemies.

Commerce, war and pirates brought Persians in contact with Romans and Mithraism spread to Europe in about the first century BCE. Roman soldiers accepted reverence for Mithra; and regarded the allegory of his slaying of a bull as sacrificing their animal instinct to find their path to the divine. With that, Mithraism spread all throughout Europe; from Rome to Scotland to Spain to the Black Sea. Sites of Mithraic worship are found in most European countries.



Christianity was Mithraism's most powerful rival up to about the middle of the third century CE. With Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the early years of the 4th century CE, Christianity gained royal favor and pagan religions, including Mithraism, came under attack. It was suppressed by Christianity in 376 CE. Sir Arthur Weigall, a renowned English Egyptologist and an author argues that "... its collapse seems to have been due rather to the fact that by that time many of its doctrines and ceremonies had been adopted by the Church, so that it was practically absorbed by its rival, Jesus Christ supplanting Mithra in men's worship without the need of any mental somersaults."

One of the significant doctrines adopted from Mithraism by Christianity is the "December 25th birthday." Sir Arthur Weigall notes "December 25th was really the date, not of the birth

of Jesus, but of the sun-god Mithra. Horus, son of Isis, however, was in very early times identified with Ra, the Egyptian sun-god, and hence with Mithra ..."

Mithra's birth date of December 25th has been so widely claimed that the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* entry for "Mithraism" states: "The 25 December was observed as his birthday, the *natalis invicti*, the rebirth of the winter-sun, unconquered by the rigours of the season." Special importance given to Sunday as "the Lord's Day" is believed to have its origin in Mithraism as Sunday was the sacred day of Mithra, as a solar festival and a day dedicated to the Sun.

Thankfully, the much hyped foretelling of end of the world on December 21, 2012 as per Mayan prophecy was a miscalculation or a myth, but it did draw world attention to the Mayan calendar and the importance it placed on the winter solstice. The ancient Mayan civilization that once thrived throughout Mexico and Central America celebrated the winter solstice with various rituals. John Major Jenkins, an authority on astronomical

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and esoteric connections of calendar systems used by the Mayan civilization, observes that the winter solstice meant more than the birth of a new solar year to Mayans. It meant the beginning of a new Great Cycle of time, the resetting of the great celestial star-clock of precession and, perhaps, an unprecedented shift in the nature of human consciousness and civilization. The modern day Mayans commemorate this important day by various celebrations from Mexican priests offering incense, chants and prayers to their divinity, to Guatemalans performing *polo voladore* or “flying pole dance”.

Since ancient times, humanity has marked the winter solstice and celebrated it with different religious and cultural practices. Dongzhi festival is celebrated in China and East Asia to celebrate winter solstice with traditional feasts and dances. As we celebrate Yalda, Christmas, Mayan *polo voladore* or Dongzhi, let us remember these celebrations are rooted in the winter solstice; a natural astronomical phenomenon that affects us all.

Let these celebrations bind us as humans and keep us in tune with nature.

Let us be thankful for the slow but steady return of the sun.

Let us celebrate victory of light over darkness and good over evil.

**MERRY YALDA**

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و آنچه خود داشت ز بیگانه تمنا می کرد  
طلب از گمشدگان لب دریا می کرد

سال ها دل طلب جام جم از ما می کرد  
گوهری کز صدف کان و مکان بیرونست

For years my heart inquired of me  
Where Jamshid's sacred cup might be,  
And what was in its own possession  
It asked from strangers, constantly;  
Begging the pearl that's slipped its shell  
From lost souls wandering by the sea.

TRANSLATED BY DICK DAVIS

Link: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/181369>



## WINTER SOLSTICE IN CHINA

Traditionally, winter solstice, also known as Winter Festival has been regarded as an important festival in China.

**MASSOUME PRICE**

From the time of the Zhou and Qin dynasties (1046–207 BCE), winter solstice was regarded as the start of the New Year. For centuries people called it Small New Year, and it was a time when ancestors were worshipped and the families got together and reunited. During the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220CE) the occasion became a public holiday. The rulers and officials organized ceremonies and feasts and gifts were exchanged. Through the Tang and Song Dynasties (618–1279) when ancestor worship was a major cult amongst the royalty, the emperors prayed to heaven and asked their ancestors to help and plead for a good winter and harvest. People visited and paid respect to their parents and offered sacrifices to their ancestors.

By the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911) heaven worship became a major cult. Many temples including the magnificent Temple of Heaven in Beijing were constructed to pay homage to the

heavens (1).

Today the night is celebrated, but there are no public holidays. Families get together with major feasts. The most popular food for the night in China is dumplings especially in northern China. In southern China the food of the night is sticky puddings (sweet dumplings), rice and rice cakes. The popularity of the dumpling is due to a legend about a renowned physician Zhang Zhongjing coming back on this night to his town and finding everyone ill with blisters in their ears caused by the severe cold. He prepared them dumplings with special herbs and medicines and fed everyone and they all recovered.

### End Note

(1) <http://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/holidays/winter-solstice.htm>

*Temple of Heaven, Beijing.  
Copyright and photo credit,  
courtesy Dolly Dastoor.*



## YALDA IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES IN ASIA

### MASSOUME PRICE

*The universal theme of the Yalda Festival has remained the same in different countries in the region with some local variations.*

### SHAB-E CHELLA IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

**A**zerbaijan, a province of Iran since ancient times, was known as Atropatene for more than a thousand years from the fourth century BCE until the Arab invasions when the name changed to Azerbaijan. About two hundred years ago, following the victory of Russia in the Russian-Iranian wars of 1804–1813, Azerbaijan was divided into Iranian Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The republic was part of the Soviet Union until 1991, when Azerbaijan became independent from Russia concurrent with the collapse of the Soviet Union.



In the Republic of Azerbaijan the winter solstice festival is called **Chella Gajehsi**. The celebrations are very elaborate and family members do their best to get together at this special night. In the villages modern electrical *korsi* tables have replaced the old charcoal burning ones. The solstice night is very popular for weddings and many young couples also get engaged that evening. Newly engaged girls receive *khoncheh* from their future husbands—a gift, which usually includes

*Ateshgah Fire Temple in Baku Azerbaijan. Located in the Surakhany suburb and fueled by natural gas, the site was a major Zoroastrian temple in the pre-Islamic times. After centuries of decline, the Hindu community in Baku rebuilt the site for their use. The present structure is from the 19th century. Copyright, Photo credit courtesy Minoo Gundevia.*



sweets, watermelons, oranges, pomegranates, apples, jewelry, mirror and textiles that are decorated with sequins and lace. New brides receive presents from their husband's family. This is called *sahm chella* or share of *chella*. These gifts are sent while there is still light before sunset and include watermelons, pomegranates, oranges, apples, sweets, mixed nuts, and local delicacies known as *halva*. The gifts also include a pair of shoes, materials for making a dress, and a *chador* the traditional female cover for the outdoors. The richer the people are, the more elaborate the presents.

In remoter parts of the country games such as shooting competitions and horseracing, popular in the past in Iran as well, are still enjoyed by the locals. Short puzzles (*topmajalar*) are told and participants must decipher the riddles. Popular two-line Azari short poems, couplet *du beyti* are recited. Local musicians known as *Ashiq* singing and playing centuries old local instruments are in great demand. Such *Ashiq* entertainers also recite poetry and narrate very old stories related to this night. Many of the stories have their origins in ancient and medieval Iranian tales that are both educational and entertaining. They promote old-fashioned morals and principles including chivalry and respect for the elderly. *Ashiq* means being in love.

Azari literature is full of poetry dedicated to Yalda including poems by the popular twentieth century Iranian Azari poet **Shahriyar** and major poets of the past like **Nezami Ganjavi**. Nezami from Ganjeh now in the Republic of Azerbaijan, was one of the most accomplished and celebrated poets in greater Iran, and his twelfth-century love poems are amongst the best-loved in Iran.

Unlike the physical work that must be done before the coming of the New Year, when the entire house is cleaned all over, women do not do serious house cleaning, *khaneh takani*, between the major and minor *chella*. They believe if they do, they might be cursed by the *chella*, and will have serious issues to deal with. Watermelons called *chella gharpizi* are kept for Yalda, and people believe that by eating the melon they become immune from the cold and the chill of the harsh winters. At the end of the feast, thanksgiving prayers are recited, verses from the Quran are read and praises are made. Participants are reminded that all natural phenomena including day and night are part of the creator's grand design, and that thanks and appreciation need to be given.

## SHAB-E CHELLA IN TAJIKISTAN

The peoples of Tajikistan, a landlocked country in Central Asia celebrated Nowruz, Shab-e chella and Sada, for many centuries. Sada is the most important winter festival for Zoroastrians. It is forty days from Shab-e chella and 100 days from the start of the winter in pre-Islamic Iranian calendar. Sada seems to be related to the number 100 *sad*.

During the Soviet period from 1920–1991, when the entire region was part of the Soviet Union, all the three festivals were officially banned. Following independence in 1991 many old cultural practices were revived and once again the Tajik nationals celebrate them. Nowruz is a national holiday and is regarded as the traditional New Year. The celebration of Yalda has made a major comeback. All the three festivals are deeply rooted in Zoroastrianism, the popular religion in the area before Islam and were essential aspects of their national celebrations.





The territory that now constitutes Tajikistan was previously home to several ancient cultures and religions including Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Nestorian Christianity. Tajikistan was dominated by dynasties from ancient and medieval Iran, the Mongol and Timurid dynasties and more recently the Russians. The Tajik language is Iranian in origin and is now very close to the Persian, spoken in Iran, and to Dari, spoken



*Takhti Sangin or Oxus Temple in Tajikistan is a Zoroastrian temple built during the Achaemenid Persian period. There is evidence of flames burning on both sides of the entrance to the temple. The magnificent gold objects and jewelry now in the British Museum and known as the Oxus Treasure discovered in 1877, were found close to this location. Copyright and photo credit, courtesy of Dr Dorothea Moody.*



in Afghanistan, and since ancient times the area has been dominated and was part of the Persian Empire for long periods of time. Following the Arab Muslim conquest of Iran in the seventh century Tajikistan emerged as the stronghold of the Samanid rulers of Iran. Iranian cultural practices and the Persian language were promoted.

The Samanids (r. 819–999) were the first independent Iranian dynasty after the Arab invasions in the seventh century. The Samanids came to power in eastern Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where the two cities of Samarkand and Bukhara emerged as very important centers of trade, art and culture. Even today, the Samanid era is seen as so important for the people of Tajikistan that in 1999, the government created Consolidation Day, celebrated on 17 June, honoring the Samanid era, with the idea of unifying the people and promoting the concept of statehood.

The Yalda celebrations in Tajikistan are similar to many practices among mainstream Iranians in Iran today. The occasion is celebrated as a seasonal feast with little religious significance. Although everyone is aware of the association with winter solstice, and the longest night of the year, the pre-Islamic religious significance is long forgotten. Family and friends get together with banquets, music and dancing. Delicacies include fruits like watermelon and pomegranate, mixed dried fruits and nuts and traditional baked goods. As in Iran, watermelons are particularly significant staple of the winter solstice feast. In the old days the melons were preserved in special cold houses after the summer for months and then consumed on the solstice night. The people of Tajikistan believe if they eat watermelon during Yalda, they will be protected against diseases for the rest of the winter.

Similarly, the tradition of baking cookies shaped like people and animals that once was popular in Iran for many festivals, has survived in Tajikistan. In addition, certain parts of the house are covered by solid cooking oil, while fur coats are hung from the windows, and wool from the ceilings. Ceremonial seeding in the yards and gardens accompanied by music are an important part of the celebrations and are reminiscent of ancient crop and agriculture celebrations. Fortune telling and communal singing is carried out with merriment. In villages fires are lit outside homes, reminiscence of the old times when fires were set to help defeat the forces of evil and assist in the victory of light and the forces of goodness always accompanying the light. Since the independence of Tajikistan from Russia, the Tajik government actively promotes this festival, and Nowruz, as part of their efforts to revive lost histories and cultural practices.

## SHAB-E CHELLA IN AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan the celebration continues to be a major event, particularly in the province of **Balkh** in northern Afghanistan and its capital **Mazar-e Sharif**, meaning Noble Shrine, this city is home to a major sanctuary believed by the Afghans to be the resting place of Imam Ali, the fourth Muslim Caliph and Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law. For centuries the area was part of the Greater Khorasan, a large province in Iran. Like **Herat**, Balkh was a thriving center influenced by Iranian cultural traditions including, Nowruz and Shab-e chella celebrations amongst others. The longest night of the year is celebrated with candle, fires (in villages), a variety of seasonal and dried fruits and mixed nuts and seeds with watermelons and pomegranates as the essential delicacies of the night.

Storytelling and poetry recitals are popular. Families gather in the home of the most senior or respected member of the family. People believe that by staying awake and celebrating the night they will help to ease the cold and hardships caused by winter. In earlier times the night was celebrated as the re-birth of sun, and ends with sun rising and victory of light over the forces of darkness and evil.



# Yalda

A favorite past time is poetry reading and there are many famous Afghani poets both past and present, who have written poems dedicated to this night. Yalda is a popular occasion for match making, engagement ceremonies and marriage proposals. In the past, staying awake all night (*shab zendeh dari*) was a feature of the celebrations to make sure people assisted in the victory of light and goodness against the darker forces of evil. The tradition continues to be a popular one amongst the affluent youth, who may spend the night with family and friends singing, dancing and reciting poetry with sumptuous feasts. The great national epic of Iran *Shahnameh* is one of the most popular literary works recited on this occasion, along with works by local poets and literary figures.



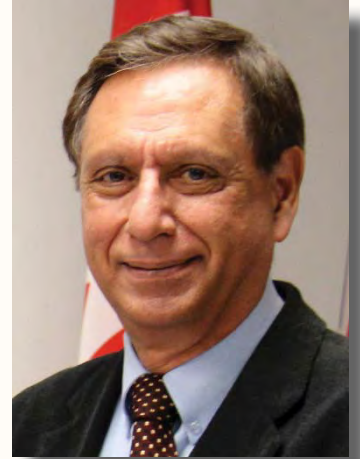
**Naubahar Temple / Mosque of Nine Domes, Balkh Afghanistan. The city of Balkh (Bactra) in the ancient province of Bactria has a major place in Zoroastrian tradition and literature. Zoroaster himself is believed to be from this city and is mentioned to have given protection to the powerful ruler of Bactra, his major supporter. This important temple was converted into a mosque in the 9th century. Copyright Horst P. Schastok, image courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.**



## CELEBRATING LIGHT & THE WINTER SOLSTICE THE WORLD OVER

### *Part I – Celebrating Light*

Festivals of light brighten and bring joy to the shortened days of late autumn and winter in the northern hemisphere. Light, one might say, is the connecting thread that weaves itself through these festivals – adding by human hand what nature seeks to hide. While some festivals of light celebrate the passing of the winter solstice – the shortest day and longest night of the year – this initial section describes those that celebrate other events with light.



**K. E. EDULJEE**

### **1. DIWALI**

The Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, celebrates the victory of Lord Ram over the demon Ravan, symbolically representing the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and wisdom over ignorance. These existential and moral dichotomies are, if we might be permitted to say so, very Zoroastrian. While the day on which Diwali falls (usually October-November of the Gregorian calendar) is determined by the Hindu lunar calendar, it stands between the two solar events celebrated by the Aryans – the autumnal equinox and winter solstice.

The Jain Dev-Diwali marks the end of the Diwali celebrations and the end of the rainy season as well.

### **2. BURMESE AND THAI FESTIVALS OF LIGHT**

In Myanmar, the festival of lights called Tazaungdaing is held on the full moon day of Tazaungmon, the eighth month of the luni-sidereal (moon and star-based) Burmese calendar. While Tazaungdaing also marks the end of the Buddhist Kathina (rainy) season, its celebration predates the introduction of Buddhism to a time when Myanmar followed a calendar based on a version of the Hindu calendar. This association automatically conjures shared roots with Diwali.

In Thailand, the festival of lights is called Loi Krathong or Yi Peng. As with Myanmar's Tazaungmon festival, the Thai festival is held on the night of the full moon – in this case the twelfth month of the Thai lunar calendar. Loi Krathong/Yi Peng similarly marks the end of the rainy season.



*1. Lamps of Diwali, a festival of lights. Image credit: 4to40.com*





2-4. Festival of lights as celebrated in Thailand & Myanmar. Both cultures are creative in the deployment of lights, using floats, rice paper hot air balloon-lanterns that rise in the sky and lotus-shaped candle holders. Image credits top to bottom: Nanut Bovorn at Flickr; washingtonpost.com & briff.me.

### 3. HANUKKAH

The Jewish faith uses a lunar calendar as well. Hanukkah (meaning dedication) celebrates an historical event – the 165 BCE success of the Jewish revolt against their Seleucid overlords and the rededication of the defiled Temple of Jerusalem. A ritual of the festival – also called the festival of lights – is the lighting of one additional candle or oil-based light over eight nights starting on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew calendar's month of Kislev. The festival had reached sufficient prominence by the time of Jesus for the Gospel of John (at 10.22-23) has Jesus in the Temple of Solomon during Hanukkah when a group of Jews confronted him demanding to know if he was the Christ.



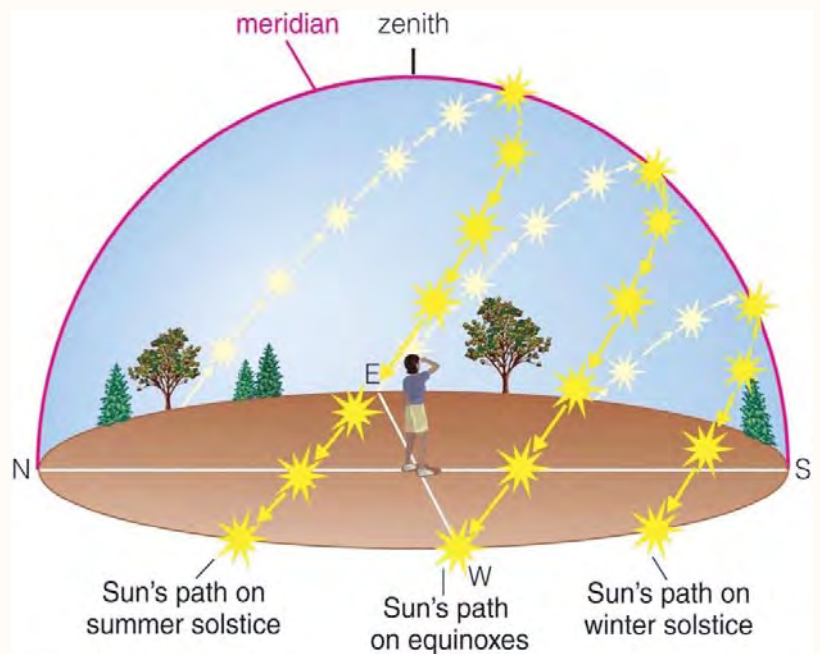
5. Candles ablaze on Hanukkah menorahs. Image credit: Time Square Chronicles.



## Part II – Celebrating the Passing of the Winter Solstice

For communities that experience the four seasons, a solar year's four solstices and equinoxes are primary markers of the passage of calendric time. Traditions that mark these events with festivals are traditions that use the Sun to mark the passage of calendric time.

Amongst the four solstices and equinoxes, our particular interest at this time is the winter solstice. A solstice is by meaning a solar event – it is the day the Sun 'stands still' in its annual path (so to speak) toward the southern horizon. On the first full day after the winter solstice, the Sun's daily path through the sky reverses and begins to move up towards the northern horizon. The following are some of the events from different traditions that mark the passing of the winter solstice.



6. Sun's daily path on solstices and equinoxes. Image credit: Pearson Education

### 1. WICCAN YULE (& STONEHENGE)

The Wiccan faith is a modern revival and synthesis of several pre-Christian 'pagan' faiths of Europe. Wiccan celebrations follow both the lunar cycle (the esbats associated with their Goddess) as well as the solar cycle (the sabbats and associated with their God). Yule, celebrated on December 21 or 22, celebrates the birth of their God as the winter-born king. Modern Wiccans and related groups in England celebrate the event at Stonehenge, which is thought to have served as a prehistoric solar observatory and gathering place to observe the solstices, equinoxes and other solar events from around 2000 BCE.

Yuletide was anciently celebrated by the pre-Christian Germanic and Scandinavian peoples.

### 2. DONGZHI/TOJI

Oriental calendars are based on both the solar and lunar solar cycles. Solar cycle Oriental calendars name the winter solstice (and its passing) as Dongzhi in Chinese, Dongji in Korean, Dong-chi in Vietnamese and Toji/Tohji/Toji-no-hi in Japanese.

We read that Koreans traditionally regarded Dongji as 'a small New Year's Day'. It is nevertheless one of the year's major festivals and is celebrated widely with the serving of special foods accompanied with rites to dispel bad spirits. New Year's Day for its part is determined by the lunar cycle – the second new moon after the winter solstice (the third if an intercalary month is employed) – and it is gen-



7. Sunset at Stonehenge, England. Photo credit: Simon Wakefield at Wikimedia & Flickr.





8. Top: Sun Yat-Sen Gardens, Vancouver, Canada, Dec. 21, 2010. Image credit: Julius Reque. 9. Bottom: Winter Solstice Lantern Festival labyrinth, Vancouver, Canada, Dec. 21, 2013. Image credit: Huffington Post.

erally observed on the same day throughout the Orient.

A website promoting the winter festival of lights in Vancouver, Canada, states, “For many cultures the Winter Solstice marks a very important day and in Chinese culture it is more important than the Lunar New Year. On this night *yin* reaches its darkest and coldest quality, and from this point on *yang* begins to restore balance with light and warmth. Cold hands, glowing light, warm hearts. (Credit: we paraphrased information from [vancouverchinesegarden.com](http://vancouverchinesegarden.com).)”

A Toji custom is to take a Yuzu bath called Yuzuyu. Here, several Yuzu (a lemon-like citrus fruit) are placed in a tub of hot water. A Yuzu bath is said to help prevent catching a cold in the ensuing winter months.

### 3. SHINTO TOJI/TOHJI-TAISAI. PARALLELS WITH MITHRAISM

The Shinto faith of Japan marks the winter solstice with Toji/Tohji-Taisai, the grand ceremony of the winter solstice that celebrates the end of the yin period of the Sun’s decline in strength and the beginning of the yang period of the Sun’s growth in strength. Toji/Tohji means winter’s reach.

The Sun features prominently in Japan’s national identity, its stories and customs as it does in Mithraism. For the Japanese Shinto, Toji/Tohji-Taisai also marks the re-emergence of Amaterasu<sup>1</sup> Omikami, the female Kami (deity/Goddess – we note that Mithra is the name of a woman in Iran) of the Sun and Cosmos. (What we see as similarities or parallels between Amaterasu Omikami and Mithra, others see as a direct connection.) Amaterasu who is represented as the rising Sun in the Japanese flag, is given dominion over the sky and other deities as well.

The myth concerning Amaterasu Omikami’s re-emergence is retold during the winter solstice as part of the orthodox ritual. In the myth, Amaterasu Omikami’s brother the Storm God (cf. Indra in Aryan mythology) and God of the sea, Susano-o Mikoto, went on a thunderous rampage across the earth (another story has him throwing a flayed horse skin among the divine) causing Amaterasu to retreat into a cave, the Ama-no-Iwato meaning heavenly rock cave.

Amaterasu’s retreat brought darkness to the earth and life forms began to wilt and die. The pleas of the other gods for Amaterasu to come out of her cave went unheeded. Then Uzume, the Goddess of Happiness and Joy began to





dance in a manner so comical that the laughter of the other gods grew to raucous roar. A curious Amaterasu emerged from her cave (cf. the cave of Mithra) bringing sunshine and life back to the earth. Uzume for her part became the goddess of the dawn.

The myth can be used as a meditation tool. According to Rev. Koichi Barrish of the Tsubaki American Shinto assembly, Toji/Tohji-Taisai is a day for a type of Chinkon, Shinto meditation, dedicated to the rejuvenation of Taiyo the Sun and Solar Progenitor. The meditation gives rise to the feeling of a special connection to Taiyo in one's hara, the second chakra. For those familiar with the discipline called furube-no-kamu-waza of Chinkon Saho, the day of Toji/Tohji-Taisai is a special day for its practice. The uninitiated can face the Sun and invite chi (life force or beneficial spirit) to come into their minds and bodies.



10. Lighting candles on Tohji-Taisai. Image credit: wildernesscommittee.com

## 4. Closing Thoughts

While the breath of distance or the depth of time may separate us human beings, part of our collective consciousness is the innate desire to celebrate light – be it existential or spiritual. There is perhaps no time more apt to celebrate this wonder of creation than on the first morning after the passing of the winter solstice with its promise of the coming spring.



11. Amaterasu's re-emergence and Uzume's dance. 1887 Painting by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi.

**KHOJESTE BAAD! BEST WISHES TO ALL!**

(Endnotes)

1 According to Akira Matsumura ed. of *Daijirin* (online, 1995), the name Amaterasu is derived from *Amateru* meaning 'shining in heaven'. Amaterasu-Omikami, means 'the great august *kami* (god) who shines in the heaven'. 'Ama' means 'heaven'; *tera* is an inflectional form of *teru*, 'to shine'; *su* is an honorific auxiliary verb which shows respect for the actor. Thus, *amaterasu* means 'to shine in the heaven'. Further, *ō* means 'great' and *mi* is a prefix for noble and august .

**Eduljee** is a past director of the Zoroastrian Society of BC and a founding trustee of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr trust for BC. His efforts in maintaining the Zoroastrian Heritage site are directed towards providing objective information on the Zarathushti religion and its heritage, promoting the good name of the community, and honouring the memory of Zarathushtis who through the ages have performed great sacrifice in order to faithfully preserve Zarathushti heritage and its core values.



## YALDA, MEHERGAN & THE WINTER SOLSTICE

K. E. EDULJEE

This article is part of a larger article that seeks to understand the festival Yalda otherwise called Zayesh-e Meher (meaning Birth of Mithra) and determines if Zoroastrians or other Iranians in pre-Islamic Iran celebrated Yalda or a similar festival. Mithra is the older form of the name Meher via the Middle Persian form Mihr.

The first part of the larger article seeks to examine an associated assertion made by some, that around two-thousand years ago, Romans celebrated the birth of the deity Mithra on December 25, then the date of the winter solstice.

### 1. BACKGROUND

#### A. DID ROMANS CELEBRATE DECEMBER 25 AS THE BIRTH OF MITHRA?

Upto this point, we have not found any direct evidence that Mithraism was practiced by the general Roman



*Fig. 1. 2nd-3rd cent. CE Roman Mithraic altar scene. The personified Sun, Sol (almost nude) is at the top-centre with Mithra in the top right-hand corner & Roman goddess Luna at the top-left. This panel was discovered near Fiano Romano, near Rome, Italy in 1926 & is currently in the Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Image credit: Wikipedia.*



population, or that December 25 was celebrated by the general Roman population as the birth of Mithra – say as a festival called ‘*Natalis Mithras Invicti*’. Instead, what we have found is the possibility that December 25 may have been celebrated as the birth of a Roman deity called Sol (the Sun). Some authors equate Sol with Mithra.

## B. DID MITHRA MEAN THE SUN AMONGST THE ANCIENT ROMANS?

While some Roman Mithraic inscriptions list Mithra and Sol side-by-side, the extant iconography portray Mithra and Sol separately (see figure 1). We have not found any evidence that other than perhaps within the Mithraic cult, the general population equated Mithra and Sol, the Sun.

The evidence points to Mithraists being a secretive group limited to some government officials and military soldiers within the Roman Empire and open only to initiates in a manner similar to Masonry today. Indeed, several Masons make the claim that Masonry may have had links to Roman Mithraism.<sup>2</sup>

## C. DID MITHRA MEAN THE SUN AMONGST THE ANCIENT (IRANO-INDIAN) ARYANS?

In Zoroastrian sources, the Khorsheed (radiant Sun) Yasht makes an insightful statement in verse five on the role of Mithra (Meher) as the bond of companionship between the Sun (Khvar i.e. Khor) and the Moon (Mah). The Khorsheed and Meher Yashts are separate chapters indicating the concepts behind them are different. The words used to describe the two entities are also different.

James Darmesteter in his translation of the Meher Yasht notes that in the *Avesta*, “Mithra is closely connected with the Sun, but not yet identical with it, as Mithra became in later times.”<sup>3</sup> What we see is that while in early times Mithra was mentioned separately from the Sun, Khvar, by medieval times Mithra was often conflated with the Sun.

If we were to look for signs of a conflation between Mithra and the Sun in ancient Aryan theology, a good place to look would be the oldest sacred Hindu text, the *Rig Veda*. The *Rig Veda* mentions Mitra (Mithra) at least 412 times – but only in a couple or so occasions in the same verse as the Sun, Surya. In a chapter dedicated to the Sun, Surya (chapter 50), we find no mention of Mitra at all. Importantly, the *Rig Veda* states, “Indra raised the Sun on high in heavens that he may see afar”. Similarly, “In the sky’s lap the Sun assumed this form that Varuna and Mitra may behold it (the work of the godhead).”<sup>4</sup>

As such, we have found no reference in the ancient Aryan texts, the *Avesta* and *Rig Veda*, that equates Mithra/Mitra with the Sun, Khvar/Surya. This understanding is essential as a background to our understanding of the festivals Yalda as well as another Zoroastrian festival dedicated to Mithra, Mehrgan.



PERSIAN SCHOLAR AL-BIRUNI

## 2. YALDA & MEHERGAN

The Iranian festival celebrating the passing of the winter solstice is now widely known as Yalda. An alternative name being offered is 'Zayesh-e Meher' meaning 'Birth of Mithra'.

There is a traditional Zoroastrian festival dedicated to Mithra called Mehergan. This festival is a name-day feast that falls on Meher day on Meher month. The orthodox Zoroastrian calendar based on the *Bundahishn* and *Dinkard*<sup>5</sup> via the Fasli calendar synchronized with the Gregorian calendar (adopted and called the Bastani calendar by Kai Khosrow Shahrokh of Iran)<sup>6</sup> places Mehergan on October 2. It is important to note that the calendar seeks to align the seasons (*fasl*) with the solar year. Other than Nowruz's alignment to the spring equinox, the orthodox Zoroastrian calendar does not seek to align the solstices and winter equinox with the beginning of a solar quarter or an associated name-day feast.

Biruni (973-1048 CE), (photo page 58) an eastern Iranian historian from Khwarezm (Uzbekistan today) who wrote in Arabic, provides us with some useful insights in understanding Zoroastrian-Persian festivals as they were celebrated during the tenth and eleventh centuries CE – about the same time that Ferdowsi lived. Sachau's translation of Biruni's book *Athar* (in a chapter titled 'On the Festivals in the Months of the Persians') has, "Mihr is the name of the Sun who is said to have appeared to the world on this day. Therefore this day was called Mihr." Biruni continues, "On the same day, God is said to have illuminated [the Moon] with light, for previously God had created the Moon as a black ball without any light. Therefore, they say on Mihragan (earlier form of Mehergan), the Moon stands higher than the Sun.... Eranshahri says: God made a treaty between light and darkness on Nowruz and Mihragan." <sup>7</sup> Further on, Biruni adds that Persians (Zoroastrians) detest the Full Moon because it draws on the light of the Sun leaving them spiritually vulnerable.<sup>8</sup>

Biruni adds a kicker when he states, "This [Mihragan] used in former times to coincide with the beginning of winter. Afterwards it advanced when people began to neglect intercalation." Biruni then states that in ancient times, Nowruz, the start of the New Year, was celebrated on the summer solstice (presently around June 21) while Mehergan fell on the winter solstice (presently around December 21).

If we were to give credence to this assertion, it would demolish the body of symbolism constructed around Nowruz and spring. In addition, what is being promoted now as Yalda was according to Biruni, the original Mehergan. To add to our woes, according to Prof. Boyce, in 150 BCE, the Parthians promulgated that Mehergan (then celebrated at the autumnal equinox) be the start of the New Year.<sup>9</sup>

[There is an additional problem. The Zoroastrian religious calendar employs 30-day months. As such, after Nowruz, the months of the religious calendar step out of phase with a strictly solar calendar. In a strictly solar calendar, the first month of each solar quarter would start on an equinox or solstice, shifting Mehergan to the first day of Meher month. The religious calendar employs instead, name day celebrations and Mehergan is celebrated on Meher day, the 16<sup>th</sup> day, of Meher month. This results in a difference of nearly ten days between the autumnal equinox (say September 22) and Mehergan according to the Fasli/Bastani religious calendar.]

Other than his deductions, Biruni does not mention any celebration held during his time that marked the passage of the winter solstice either in his chapter on Persian (Zoroastrian) festivals or in his chapters on the festivals of (Zoroastrian) Sogdians (Bukhara-Sugd) and (Zoroastrian) Khwarezmians. However, we do find mention of the marking of the winter solstice in his chapter 'On the Days of the Greek Calendar'.<sup>10</sup>



### 3. ASSYRIAN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP DURING THE WINTER SOLSTICE

Biruni's chapter 'On the Days of the Greek Calendar' notes that the Greeks call the winter solstice the "Great Birth". Contrary to the early admonitions of Pope Leo I (c.400-461 CE), Biruni notes that a (Nestorian?) Christian writer from Anbar (previously Assyria, present-day Iraq?) stated that the rising-place of the Sun at the time of the winter solstice is the true east and the very midst of paradise. Further, (religious) 'law' ordered (Syrian Orthodox/Nestorian?) Christians to turn in praying towards the east (i.e. the rising place of the Sun). It would seem these eastern Christians were under a religious edict to conduct a special worship on the winter solstice. Given that this practice had earlier been particularly condemned by one of the first Christian popes, Pope Leo I, one possibility is that these eastern/Syriac Christians were originally Sun-worshippers (but not necessarily Mithraists).

Anna Krasnowolska in her *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article 'Sada Festival' notes, "In Islamic Persia, the night of the winter solstice (the last night of autumn) was known under its Syriac name of Shab-e Yalda (the night of nativity), or as Shab-e Chella (the night opening the initial forty-day period of the three-month winter)." Mas-soume Price in an article at CAIS also states, "Yalda is a Syriac word meaning birth.... It is not clear when and how the word 'Yalda' entered to the Persian language." She further states that the Christians who settled in Iran during the Sasanid era "reintroduced" the festival. Krasnowolska continues, "Being the longest and the darkest night of the year, additionally connected with Christianity, Shab-e Yalda usually has negative connotations in Persian poetry."

We can understand the negative connotations since in Zoroastrianism, it would be an anathema to celebrate the longest night. Rather it is its passing, i.e. the next morning – the first or 'new' morning after the longest night – that would be the occasion for celebration.

### 4. THE SHAMSI – PEOPLE OF THE SUN ZOROASTRIAN SECT?

Biruni provides us with a possible clue on another Syriac connection in his chapter titled '*On the Feasts of The Ancient Magians and on the Fast and Feast Days of the Sabians*'. He opens the chapter with a statement all Magi practiced the religion of Zoroaster and that "they belong now either to the Zoroastrian or to the Shamsiyya sect. Still, they have some ancient traditions and institutes, which they trace back to their original [pre-Zoroastrian] creed; but in reality those things have been derived from the laws of the Sun-worshippers and the ancient people of Harran [in northern Syria]."<sup>11</sup> One possibility is that the Harran year began with the winter solstice (or the day after).

Biruni implies that the Zoroastrians (Magians) of his day belonged to two sects, mainline Zoroastrians and the Shamsiyya. '*Shamsiyya*' is an Arabic word for '*People of the Sun*'. Further, the Magi officiated over both sects. The Shamsiyya lived in the same northern Tigris-Euphrates region as Yazidis and Kurds and there are various reports of celebrations of the Sun involving the Yazidis and Kurds as well. Researcher R. Donef states that the Shamsiyya "seemed to have been absorbed by the Syriac [Christian] Orthodox Assyrians in Mardin [now in southern Turkey]."<sup>12</sup> This is one possible way that a sect (or sub-sect) of Syrian Christians adopted the practice of celebrating the winter solstice. Biruni also informs us that while the branch of the Magi who were the priests of the Shamsi claimed ancient roots for this practice, the Sun-focused worship practices had in fact "been derived from the laws of the Sun-worshippers and the ancient people of Harran [in northern Syria]" who it seems were not Zoroastrians. This passage invites all manner of arguments prone to the bias or proclivity of the writer.

From the preceding paragraphs, we can see the possibility of a non-Zoroastrian, Syriac-Christian, source of the festival called 'Yalda'. However, if we go back far enough – before the advent of Christianity – there are several possibilities that would be difficult, if impossible, to prove with the information we currently possess (or lack thereof).

## 5. MODERN IRANIAN REPORTS ON YALDA

Turning to present-day reports, the unreferenced claim made online at Farsinet & at Pars Times is that on the night of Jashne Yalda/Zayesh-e Meher, ancient Aryans would gather in Alborz mountain caves. These celebrants called ‘*yar-e ghar*’, meaning friends of the cave, gathered and maintained a vigil to bear witness to the first rays of the rising Sun at daybreak the next morning (the start of the Zoroastrian Havan Gah). We also read that during the previous night, communal fires were kept burning throughout the night. Unfortunately, neither publication cites a source for their information.

Despite our best efforts, other than these obscure observations, we have not been able to find mention of an old traditional mainline Zoroastrian festival named ‘Yalda’ or ‘Zayesh-e Mehr’ that marked the passing of the winter solstice.

## 6. CONUNDRUM & SUGGESTION

While we have not been able to find mention of a Zoroastrian festival celebrating the passing of the winter solstice in Zoroastrian or Middle Persian texts, we can understand the desire amongst some Zoroastrian families to have a celebration of their own at a time when families of other traditions are joyously celebrating the season.

In doing so, we need to take care that we do not inadvertently undermine fundamental Zoroastrian values. Unintended as it might be, naming the event as a celebration of the ‘birth of Mithra’ (Zayesh-e Meher) may infer an association between the festival and Mithraism with its attendant belief in the birth of an anthropomorphic god from a rock – a belief antithetical to orthodox Zoroastrianism.

Our suggestion is that the name be simply ‘Jashne Meher’. Rather than celebrating the birth of a ‘god’, it can celebrate the triumph of light over darkness and a renewed avowal to abide by the values of which Meher Izad is a guardian – values of true friendship and being Meheraban: kindness, love, peace, the keeping of one’s word and honesty.

### (Endnotes)

- 1 At <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/reference/December 25 and Yalda-Eduljee.pdf>.
- 2 See ‘Mithraism: Freemasonry and the Ancient Mysteries’ by Bro. Haywood at [www.mastermason.com](http://www.mastermason.com). “mithraism masonry” had nearly 10,000 results on Google.
- 3 J. Darmesteter in SBE’s *The Zend-Avesta* Pt. II (Oxford, 1883) p. 122.
- 4 *Rig Veda* at 1.7.3 and 1.115.5 respectively.
- 5 *Greater Bundahishn* at 25 and *Dinkard* at 3.419.
- 6 See <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/calendar/index.htm#differences>.
- 7 Biruni’s *Athar-ul-Bakiya* tr. by E. Sachau in *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (London, 1879) pp. 207-9 (adapted for spelling and syntax).
- 8 *ibid.* p. 219
- 9 Mary Boyce in ‘Mihragan among the Irani Zoroastrians’ at *Mithraic Studies* ed. John Hinnells (Manchester, 1975) p. 107 citing G. Le Rider’s *Susse sous les Seleucides* etc. (Paris, 1962) pp. 3 ff.
- 10 Biruni tr. Sachau (as above) p. 238.
- 11 *ibid.* p. 314.
- 12 R. Donef in *The Shemsi and the Assyrians* (Sydney, 2010).



## SOME UNIQUE PRACTICES DURING YALDA (SHAB-E CHELLA) IN IRAN

MASSOUME PRICE



*Incense burners, such as these carved on the walls of Persepolis palaces near Shiraz in Iran, were used during royal and religious ceremonies and celebrations to purify space and warn off bad omens, as they do today. Copyright and photo credit Joachim Waibel*



*Mausoleum of Abu'l Qasem Ferdowsi one of the greatest epic poets and author of the Shahnameh, the national epic of Iran. Khorasan, Iran*

The people of **Fars**, home to the ancient Persians and site of **Persepolis** the magnificent ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid, celebrate this night with sumptuous feasts, music, poetry and fortune telling. The capital of the province, **Shiraz** is home to the mausoleums of two great poets, Sa'di and Hafez. Thousands of poetry lovers gather at the two mausoleums on Yalda night, particularly at Hafezieh, to celebrate the night next to their beloved poets. Elaborate spreads at the home of the senior members of the family also include cold water, tulips, and narcissus flowers, a spring perennial plant and a mirror. The traditional medical texts of the medieval period distinguished between two qualities in the body known as heat and coldness (*garmi* and *sardi*). Food was accordingly categorized to be appropriate for these two qualities. People in Shiraz, still believe that on this night people with hot qualities should eat food with cold qualities and vice versa.

People of **Khorasan** have the tradition of sending gifts for new brides on this night. The gifts include fabrics and textiles, jewelry, mixed nuts and dried fruits and sweets. The special feature is a large decorated fruit tray filled with seven different colorful fruits like grapes, apples, pomegranate, watermelon, pears, oranges and recently Kiwi, since Iran has become a major producer of Kiwi in the area. The fruits are arranged beautifully and are presented as a *khoncheh*, a universal ceremonial tray used by all Iranians, filled with gifts that are taken to the bride's house before

marriage. Another tradition in Khorasan now mostly practiced in the villages is the practice of throwing watermelon skins to the rooftop of the seven neighboring houses.

In **southern Khorasan** part of the celebrations involve preparing a sweet delicacy, *bodyoun*, from scratch. Some guests participate in making the dessert. The root of the licorice plant (*shirin bayan*) is boiled several times, and then sugar is added to the liquid, which is beaten with some branches in a ceramic bowl. This continues till the mixture turns into a whitish mix, similar to beaten egg-white. It is poured onto plates and decorated with crushed almonds and pistachios and crushed herbs like fennel. Offerings are sent to the elderly and friends, relatives or neighbors. People believe that by eating the dessert on this night they will be blessed and protected.

In many places in **Kurdistan**, three months before the arrival of Yalda, grapes are hung from ceilings and doors, and melons are pickled. After three months the grapes have dried and turned into currants, which are eaten at the celebrations. Pickled melons are normally eaten after the elaborate meal prepared for the night, as people believe that pickled melons are good for digestion after eating a lot of food. Traditionally, like the Nowruz festival, people wear new clothes, spread an elaborate feast, light candles and burn incense.

In **Hamadan** in west-central Iran all people present at the celebration will put a small personal item in a clay jug, and then mix and place the jug at the center of the room. A young pre-puberty girl wears a red lace scarf and picks items out of the jug. The person owning the object announces his ownership, then his fortune is told through the readings of Hafez poetry. This will continue until all fortunes are told. This is called *mohreh reezi*.

Another unique custom popular in many places including **Luristan** in western Iran involves the youth. The old houses had an open chimney on the top to let the smoke from cooking or burning charcoals from the heaters to go up the chimney. The young males got together in groups of two or four and went on the roofs, and sent a cloth bag or container down the chimney and the owners of the homes filled them with treats. Those open chimneys do not exist anymore, however young men will go on the rooftops and will send down a cloth container parallel to windows and expect treats. A popular Yalda meal for this night in Luristan is lamb or turkey with mixed nuts, seeds, fruits and sweets.

In **Mazandaran** in northern Iran, the preparations start two nights before the occasion. Fish is served for dinner, along with mixed nuts, a variety of fruits and yogurt. They believe that by eating watermelon and yogurt on this night they will never be cold for the rest of the winter. Girls reaching marriage age cover their faces and go to seven houses in their neighborhood. They knock on the doors, bang two spoons together and ask for treats. If they are not recognized, they believe their wishes will come through. At the end of the fiesta, every person randomly picks up a few whole walnuts with closed eyes. They place the nuts under their mattresses and the next day the hard skins are cracked and if the walnut inside is white their wishes will come through.

In **Gilan** adjacent to **Mazandaran** many villagers believe that 40 different foods and treats should be prepared for the night. Telling stories from *Shahnameh* is popular, and fortune telling from the poetry of Hafez has its own rituals. Using four pieces of watermelon skin is another kind of fortune telling. The person making a wish keeps the four pieces of watermelon in their hand, with the green skin facing the person, and then throws them upward like tossing a coin. Once the skins hit the ground if three pieces have the green skin visible and one the inside, or two have the green skin visible and two the inside, then they believe their wishes will come through.

Traditionally, Shab-e chella celebrations in **Sistan & Baluchistan** province in eastern Iran lasted for three nights. Most families now celebrate it for two nights instead of three. Sistan & Baluchistan are very windy in many places and seasonal winds can sometimes be devastating. The locals believe that on this night the seasonal wind *gooreej*, which often blows at this time, will be fighting the cold and winter hardships, and its victory is crucial for a good winter. The night is a favorite one for getting engaged and for proposing marriage.





*Fruit market in Rasht, Gilan*

In **Khuzestan** and **Kerman** in southern and central Iran people believe that the legendary rich patriarch Gharoon a relative of Moses, mentioned as a cruel rich man in Quran, will appear in shape of a wood cutter bringing firewood to the homes. By the morning the woods will turn into gold and will make the family rich. In many places in villages, lanterns are kept lit all night or fires are made around the houses for protection and blessing.

In the town of **Masouleh** in Gilan eavesdropping on what people say is a way to tell fortunes. People will make a wish and then go to a crowded public place to listen to people's conversations randomly. If they are talking about something good and positive this is an indication that their wishes will come through. This is called *sham shami*, and is similar to *fal ghosh* that is done the exact same way on *Chaharshanbeh Suri* in many places in Iran. *Fal* means fortune telling and *ghosh* means ear, practically meaning eavesdropping.

The persistence of the nights' celebrations is a reminder of the loyalty of Iranians to their millennia old traditions and insistence in maintaining ancient customs. These pre-Islamic practices are visible in many other rituals from weddings and mourning rituals to the celebrations of the New Year at the time of the spring equinox.



*The ancient village of Masouleh in northern Iran. In this unique village the roofs of houses on lower tiers are used as courtyards or passageways for houses on the tiers above them.*

## WINTER SOLSTICE: CELEBRATE THE EVENT, NOT ITS ORIGINS

NEVILLE GUSTAD PANTHAKI

There is a tale which is recounted to explain the origins of the Bene Israeli Jews in India. It is said that their emigration from the region of the Kingdom of Judah, to Maharashtra, occurred prior to 168 BCE. This origins story makes use of history to explain why the Bene Israeli community did not celebrate Hanukkah prior to their contact with the more populous and communally cohesive Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Hanukkah, presently thought of as the 'main' or 'most important' Jewish celebration, was a regional commemoration of the anniversary of the Revolt of the Maccabees against the Greek Emperor who seized and defiled the Jewish Temple. The Jews successfully (re-) dedicated (*Hanukkah*, Hebrew) their temple through a 'jashan', for which one component was the burning of oil as a ritual cleanse for eight days via a menorah. When Hanukkah, as normative practise, was introduced to the Bene Israeli who as a diasporic community had no awareness or historic connection to it, the Bene Israeli accepted it as part of their ritual calendar. This reaffirmed the spiritual cohesiveness of global Zionism while in no way detracting from the 'authenticity' and 'distinct group identity' of the Bene Israeli.

I believe that the aforementioned episode contains many inherent lessons of history as it pertains to the function and determinants of 'ethnicity' and 'religion'. In particular, how Parsees as an 'ethnicity' should relate to Iranis and other Persian peoples (or South Asian communities for that matter) within the wider scope of faith based practises. The celebration of Yalda presents just such an opportunity.

The articles within this journal notwithstanding, rigorous academic inquiries regarding the origins of Yalda are often pedantic without leading to either insight or resolution for those asking such questions. Debates that I've read or witnessed revolve around the 'origins' of Yalda to either justify or deny its commemoration. Argument revolves around: the 'way' Yalda is commemorated, supposed irreverence

toward (bon)fire, 'pagan' celebrations of contrived 'dualism', the 'lessening' or 'sacrilege' towards Ahura Mazda, that Muslim Persians and Turkic peoples mark the occasion, or simply the Parsee unfamiliarity with the rituals and their meaning. The usual refrain of 'we do not do this' or 'this is not our tradition', is heard, as if such statements denote closure and finality.

However, justification for the continuance or adoption of faith based practises enters a slippery slope with the attempt to utilize the primacy of history. By that measure, the 'origins' of Yalda as 'authentically' Zoroastrian are as up for debate as the Sanjan landing story, the authorship of the Gathas, or the religion of Khorosh I (Cyrus I, the Great). Moreover, if Yalda is disregarded as 'inauthentic', then one should follow through with a thorough 'cleansing' of all 'non-Zoroastrian' customs that have pervaded Parsi religiosity. Indeed, it has also been suggested that Gujarati should be replaced with a thorough grounding in Farsi.

Such views represent the hegemonic immutable version of religion as an archaic museum piece whose value resides in its detachment, and like any relic, it is feared that any tampering by un-academic/clerical hands shall tarnish, pollute or destroy. However what these opinions do not take into account, ironically, are the very origins (plural!) of religion and faith, which are composite structures that are fabricated through continuous lived experiences. A cursory glance and understanding of our own liturgical canon will illustrate that multiple authors, multiple languages, multiple subject matter, and in many times conflicting views or interpretations. Yet no one questions either the value or synchronicity of its combined form, or more importantly why it should be combined (or that it should be combined) in the pattern that we have inherited. Evidently thinking, righteousness, studiousness, injunction, development, transformation and decision making were all characteristics that could only be found during the Achaemenian, Parthian and



# Yalda

Sassanian eras. Moreover, that all of those decisions were made by non-prophetical beings with no authority besides power and edict, seems to be forgotten.

It is an insult to divinity when faith is an obeyed, feared or distal thing, rather than the sensual, intimate and proximal relationship-of-feeling that connects humanity to its environment via a cosmic 'knowledge of love'. In this way, each person and every generation 'owns' their faith and religion. Hence, what they do with it, can only, always be, 'authentic'. Mortals, unlike Dr. Who with his space and time altering machine, cannot 'correct' history, mortals can only impact the present. Religion and faith, like any relationship or marriage, are continuously re-interpreted, re-emoted, and most crucially for the healthy and strong existence of any relationship, rededicated and renewed. Hence it is nonsensical to cite history as a pretext for either the continuation or disuse of a faith practise. Time doesn't make decisions, believers (people) do.

With an estimated loss of two-thirds of our canon and accompanying historical record, due to its destruction during the early-Greek, Arab, and Mongol periods in Persia, it would be unfortunate if a xenophobic fortress mentality continued to characterize the relationship which we have with our faith and each other. The excellent synopses of Yalda (its history, its relevance, its meaning) within the current journal, provide more

than enough of the 'academic' justification for Yalda's celebration among Parsees. Perhaps more poignantly, with the (re)-adoption of Yalda, Parsees have the opportunity to (re)-connect with Iranis. Yalda is like the Gambhars, festivals which represent ontological remembrance. Both are essential to Zoroastrianism in that they are the performative aspect of the tenants of faith, love, hope and praise.

Yalda attests to what we have forgotten about winter, that it is NOT a time of death, but the dawn of renewal. Celebrating the winter solstice makes one aware of the patience and nurturing that is required for hope, faith and love to flourish. Further academic discussion regarding the origins and 'worthiness' of Yalda seem pointless, because in the face of what Yalda commemorates, even if it were not a Zoroastrian festival....it would have no difficulty being included as 'authentically Zoroastrian' from a ritual and fellowship perspective.

And for those of you who can only be convinced by liturgical sources, the one line introduction of the Mithra Yasht should suffice, because we are told (read), that *Ahura Mazda spake to Zarathushtra that Mithra is worthy of worship.*

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*Meher Yasht 1:1 (<http://www.avesta.org/ka/yt10.htm>)*

*mraot ahurô mazdâ spitamâi zarathushtrâi, âat yat mithrem ýim vouru-gaoyaoitîm  
frâdadhâm azem spitama âat dim dadhâm avâñtem ýesnyata avâñtem vahmyata ýatha  
mâmcit ýim ahurem mazdâm.*

*Ahura Mazda spake unto Spitama Zarathushtra, saying: 'Verily, when I created Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, O Spitama! I created him as worthy of sacrifice, as worthy of prayer as myself, Ahura Mazda.*

## IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES YOU WILL FIND YALDA RECIPES FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

### Winter Festival Yalda

Sight of you each morning is a new year  
Any night of your departure is the night of yalda.

Sa'di

ظہر روی و صبح بخیر و نوروی  
شب فراق تو هر شب که هست یزدانی است

In the East more than in the West, lifestyles have often remained more in tune with nature. Therefore, natural rhythms change from morning to evening, from month to month, and finally from season to season. This integration of nature into life cycles is especially true in Iran. The winter solstice, December 21 or 22, is the longest night of the year. In Iran this night is called **Shab-e yalda**, which refers to the birthday or rebirth of the sun. The ceremony is traced to the primal concept of Light and Good against Darkness and Evil in the ancient Iranian religion. This night with Evil at its zenith is considered unlucky. From this day forward, Light triumphs as the days grow longer and give more light. *Shab-e yalda* is in the Persian month of *Dey*, which was also the name of the pre-Zoroastrian creator god (deity). Later he became known as the God of Creation and Light.



Najmieh Batmanglij

In the evening of *Shab-e yalda* fire torches are lit outside, while inside family and friends gather in a night-long vigil around the *korsi*, a low, square table covered with a thick cloth overhanging on all sides. A brazier with hot coals (or an electric one these days) is placed under the table. All night family and friends sit on large cushions around the *korsi* with the cloth over their laps. In ancient times fruit and vegetables were only available in season and the host, usually the oldest in the family, would carefully save grapes, honeydew melons, watermelons, pears, oranges, tangerines, pomegranate, apples, and cucumbers. These were then enjoyed by everyone gathered around the *korsi*, or a fireplace.

On this winter night, in our family my Aqa-jan (how we called our father) would ask us to hold hands around the *korsi* and say the following prayer of thanks to God for the previous year's bounty, and for the prosperity of the coming year.

خدا را شکر و تمجید و بزرگداشت می‌کنم. بهر آنکه در پیش و در پس و در میان و در کنار پرورگشت. درختان بارور و میوه‌ها را بزرگداشت می‌کنم. بهر آنکه در این شب بزرگداشت می‌کنم. و در آن سال آید که در این شب بزرگداشت می‌کنم. و در آن سال آید که در این شب بزرگداشت می‌کنم.

Then with a sharp knife, he would cut the watermelon and honey dew melon as well as thick, drained yogurt in a bowl, and he would give everyone a small share. On *Shab-e yalda* the cutting symbolizes the removal of sickness and pain from the family. Snacks are passed around throughout the night: pomegranates with ground *golpar* (persian hogweed seeds) and *Ajil-e shab-e yalda*, a combination of nuts and dried fruits, particularly pumpkin and watermelon seeds and raisins. The name of this mixture of nuts, *Ajil-e shabchareh*, literally means "night-grazing," and eating nuts is said to lead to prosperity in days to come. More substantial fare for the night's feast



# Yalda

includes eggplant *khoresh* with saffron-flavored rice, baked rice with chicken, thick drained and cold yogurt, and carrot halva.

In the autumn during the grape harvest, the people of the grape growing regions of Iran select the best black and white grapes in order to make pickles. This symbolic delicacy of light and dark grapes, which represent good and evil, is then served at this festival. The foods themselves symbolize the balance of the seasons: watermelons and yogurt are eaten as a remedy for the heat of the summer, since these fruits are considered “cold,” or *sardi*; and the saffron and carrot halva, is eaten to overcome the cold temperatures of winter, since they are considered “hot,” or *garmi*. On into the night of festivities the family keeps the fires burning and the lights glowing to help the sun in its battle against darkness. They recite poetry and play music, tell jokes and stories, talk and eat and eat and talk until the sun, triumphantly, reappears in the morning.

Early Christians took this very ancient Persian celebration of **Mitra, God of Light**, and linked it to Christ's birthday. Today the dates for Christmas are slightly changed, but there are many similarities: lighting candles, decorating trees with lights, staying up all night, singing and dancing, eating special foods, paying visits, and, finally, celebrating this longest night of the year with family and friends.







## CARROT HALVA

*Makes 12 servings*

*Preparation time: 15 minutes*

*Cooking time: 60 minutes*

*This sweet, nutritional, and comforting dish is associated with the Winter Festival, **Shab-e Yalda**.*

**2 pounds carrots**

**2 cups sugar or grape molasses**

**1 cup canola oil or unsalted butter**

**2 cups sifted rice flour**

**1/2 teaspoon ground saffron dissolved in 1/2 cup rose water**

**1 tablespoon ground cardamom**

**garnish**

**2 tablespoons ground pistachios**

**2 tablespoons ground walnuts**

**2 tablespoons dried rose petals, crushed**

**1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon**



1. Wash, peel, and grate the carrots. Place in a medium saucepan and add 2 cups water and the sugar. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly until the sugar completely dissolves. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes.
2. In a large Dutch oven, heat the oil over high heat and gradually add the rice flour while stirring constantly with a long wooden spoon. Cook for 5 to 8 minutes or until the mixture turns lightly golden.
3. Reduce heat to low. Wear oven mitts and carefully add the cooked carrot to the hot rice flour (step back to avoid getting splashed). Add saffron-rose water and cardamom, and cook over low heat for another 15 to 20 minutes, stirring quickly and constantly to make a thick, smooth *halva*.
4. Place an 8 to 10-inch ring on a flat serving platter and spoon the *halva* into it; pack firmly with a spoon. Garnish with ground pistachios, walnuts, rose petals, and cinnamon. Allow to cool, lift up the ring, then cover and chill in the refrigerator. Serve either as a main dish with *lavash* bread or alone as a dessert. *Nush-e Jan!*



## BAKED SAFFRON YOGURT RICE WITH CHICKEN

### TAHCHIN-E BARREH

Makes 6 servings

Preparation time: 1 hour plus 10 minutes of marinating

Cooking time: 2 1/4 hours

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#### CHICKEN

2 pounds boned chicken thighs, cut into 3-inch cubes

2 onions, peeled and thinly sliced

2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced

1 teaspoon sea salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

1/2 teaspoon turmeric

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

#### YOGURT MARINATION

2 1/2 cups plain, thick yogurt, beaten

1 teaspoon ground saffron dissolved in 4 tablespoons orange blossom water

1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

1 tablespoon ground cumin

1 tablespoon ground cardamom

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

Zest of 3 oranges

#### RICE

3 cups long-grain basmati rice

1 cup and 2 tablespoons oil, melted butter, or ghee\*

4 onions, peeled and thinly sliced

1 cup seedless golden (green) raisins

4 egg yolks, lightly beaten

1. Place the chicken, onion, garlic, salt, pepper, turmeric, cinnamon, in a Dutch oven **(do not add water)**. Cover, and cook over low heat for 1/2 hour. Uncover, raise heat to medium and continue to cook until all the juices have been absorbed. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

2. **For the yogurt marination:** In a container, combine all the ingredients for the yogurt marination. Add the cooked chicken. Toss, cover, and marinate for at least 10 minutes (and up to 24 hours in the fridge).

3. **To cook the rice:** Bring 8 cups water and 2 tablespoons salt to a boil in a large pot. Add the rice to the pot. Boil briskly for 6 minutes. Drain in a fine-mesh colander and rinse with 2 cups water. Set aside.

4. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a wide skillet and sauté the onions until golden brown. Remove from the heat. Add the raisins, stir gently, and set aside.

5. Place the oven rack in the middle and preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Place 1/2 cup oil in a 4.8-quart Pyrex baking dish and heat it in the oven.

6. Remove the chicken from the marinade and set aside. Add the beaten egg yolks, 1/2 cup oil, and the rice to the yogurt marinade and fold until evenly mixed thoroughly.

7. Remove the hot baking dish from the oven and place it on the counter. Use a brush to paint all sides of the baking dish with oil. Add half the rice mixture, spreading it, evenly, across the bottom and up the sides of the



baking dish.

8. Arrange the chicken pieces on top, sprinkle with sautéed onion and raisin mixture, and spread with the remaining rice on top
9. Cover the entire baking dish with a sheet of oiled parchment paper and a layer of aluminum foil over it. Use the palms of both hands to firmly **press the rice down**, compacting it evenly throughout (this helps the unmolding later on). Seal thoroughly.
10. Bake for 2 to 2 1/4 hours or until the crust is golden brown (look through the Pyrex glass to check color).
11. Spread a wet towel on the counter. Remove baking dish from oven. Allow to cool on the wet towel for **15** minutes (**do not uncover**). Then loosen the rice around the edges of the baking dish with a spatula. Place a large serving dish over the baking dish. Hold both dishes firmly together with two hands and turn them upside down. Allow to rest for 5 minutes. Tap the mold and gently unmold the rice by lifting up the Pyrex dish.
12. Serve hot with, yogurt, and pickles .

***Nush-e Jan! : Bon appetit, to your health.***

## VEGETARIAN VARIATION

Remove the meat from the ingredients, eliminate step 1 totally, and eliminate the chicken and the marination time from step 2. Add 1 cup toasted almonds and 1 cup pistachio kernels instead of the chicken in step 7.



## STOVETOP VARIATION

Everything remains the same, except, in step 5, use a 5-quart non-stick pot. In step 8 instead of cooking in the oven, cook on the stove for 20 minutes over medium heat and then for 70 minutes over low heat. Otherwise, the recipe remains the same for unmolding the rice.

## BLACK AND WHITE GRAPE PICKLE

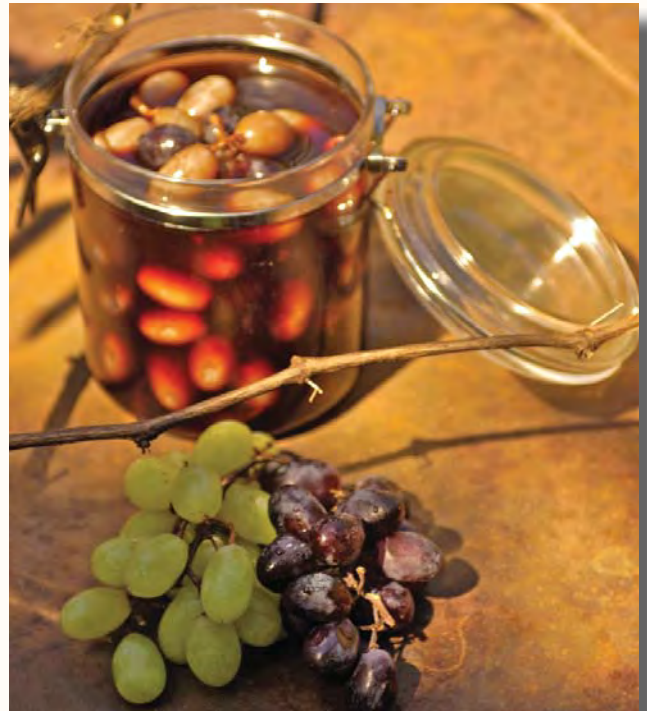
Makes 2 jars (1 pint each)  
Preparation time: 20 minutes  
plus time to allow grapes to  
dry completely  
Storage: 40 days before using

### INGREDIENTS

2 pounds black grapes (large, thickskinned,  
and seedless)  
2 pounds white grapes (large, thickskinned and seedless)

### BRINE

2 quarts (8 cups) wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons pickling salt (or sea salt)  
(1 tablespoon salt for every  
4 cups wine vinegar)  
1/2 cup grape molasses  
(shireh-ye angur)

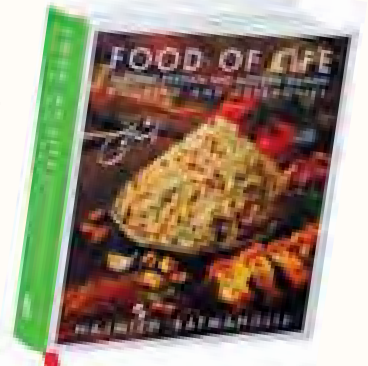


1. Sterilize canning jars in boiling water. Drain and allow to dry thoroughly.
2. Clip the grapes into small clusters. Fill a large container with cold water and add the grapes. Allow to soak for 5 minutes, then drain and spread on a sheet pan lined with towels for several hours or until all the clusters are completely dry.
3. Pack the jar almost to the top with black and white grapes, arranging them in alternating layers. In a medium-sized laminated saucepan bring vinegar, salt and grape molasses to a boil over medium heat, reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool.
4. Fill the jar to within 1/2 inch of the top with the vinegar mixture. Seal immediately. Store for at least 40 days in a cool, dark place before using. Nush-e Jan!

### Najmieh Batmanglij:

**Cookbook Author & Culinary Educator** [www.najmieh.com](http://www.najmieh.com)

Text and photos by Najmieh Batmanglij from *Food of Life: Ancient Persian and Modern Iranian Cooking and Ceremonies* © 1986, 2015, courtesy of Mage Publishers, [www.mage.com](http://www.mage.com)



**Najmieh Batmanglij**, hailed as “the guru of Persian cuisine” by *The Washington Post*, has spent the past 35 years cooking, traveling, and adapting authentic Persian recipes to tastes and techniques in the West. Her award winning book **Food of Life: Ancient Persian and Modern Iranian Ceremonies** was called the definitive book on Iranian cooking by the *Los Angeles Times*. Her *Silk Road Cooking: A Vegetarian Journey* was selected as “**One of the 10 best vegetarian cookbooks of the year**” by *The New York Times*; and her **From Persia to Napa: Wine at the Persian Table** won the Gourmand Cookbook Award for the world’s best wine history book of 2007. She is a member of Les Dames d’Escoffier and lives in Washington, DC, where she teaches Persian and Silk Road cooking, and consults with restaurants around the world. Her most recent book is *Happy Nowruz: Cooking with Children to Celebrate the Persian New Year*.



## Shirni panir

This dish has been sent in from Niloufer's Kitchen especially created for this issue of the Fezana Journal celebrating the Yalda festivities.

Persians were predominantly farmers and the local families tended to prepare their own cheese besides other foods. This recipe has been created as a tribute to our ancestors who enjoyed their fruits of labour with simplicity and elegance. Nooshe-Jaan!!

### Ingredients

500gms/1 lb farmer's cottage cheese/panir/ricotta

1 cup sugar

1/2 tsp saffron\_threads

Juice from 1/2 lemon

1 cup ground almonds

1/2 tsp salt

1/2 cup pistachios chopped or slivered

choice of fresh fruit, one peach,  
one nectarine, 6 figs

In a food processor whizz together the farmer's cottage cheese, sugar, saffron, lemon juice almonds and salt. remove in a bowl and keep aside for an hour or two. Keep mixing as the saffron gets a chance to blossom.

Once it is ready to be set, place in a flatter serving dish and cover with sliced fresh fruit of your choice. Cover with pistachios and serve.

### Tips

It is best to start with warm cottage cheese. If it is not fresh and from the fridge, bring it to room temperature or put the bowl of cheese in warm water for a few minutes to get it warm. This will



help the cheese to beat to better smoothness.

If you wish to avoid waiting for the saffron to blossom, you can prepare the saffron in the following way.

Dry heat the saffron on a low flame, it can burn very easily. Remove from the fire and let it dry for a minute. Crush it with the back of the spoon. Add 2 tbsp water and bring it to a boil. Now add the whole thing with the water into the running food processor and the warm saffron will infuse and combine faster.

The ground almonds can be found in many stores. If you are making them at home you will need to blanch, peel and then grind.

This dessert is not very sweet. If you wish to add more sugar taste before removing it from the food processor.

### FARSI CHOLE

This dish is a creation from Niloufer's Kitchen. A version of our chola that the people of the sub-continent continue to enjoy worldwide in most Indian restaurants. This recipe has been created with the subtle flavours of Persian Cuisine. Best eaten as a side dish on its own or served as a dip with crisp mini savoury puris. Hope you and your family can enjoy it for your Yalda festivity table.



## Tips

Add 1 tbsp [zereshk](#) berries for colour.  
Use your favourite fresh herb, coriander, oregano, thyme, basil or mint.

To roast the eggplant, wash and halve into two. Apply a little oil and a sprinkle of salt. Leave the cut side downward and roast in a 350F/180C hot oven for 45 minutes. Turn the oven off and leave to cool for another 30 minutes or until soft. Scoop it out and roughly chop.

Optionally, serve nice crisp puris.

**Nush-e-Jaan!**

Bon appetit; To your health.

## Ingredients

1 tbsp oil  
12oz/ 350ml chickpeas, drained and washed from a can  
1/2 cup crushed onion  
1 cup crushed fresh tomatoes  
1 tbsp brown sugar  
1 1/2 tsp [advieh](#) spices  
4 crushed garlic cloves  
1 tsp salt  
2 cups roasted chopped eggplant, can be from a bottle or deli  
2 tbsp fresh mixed herbs, finely chopped  
1 tsp dried mint

In a pan heat the oil and saute the crushed garlic and onion until it gets a slight pinkish hue. Add the chickpeas. Now toss in the [advieh](#), salt, tomatoes and eggplant. Mix well. Cover and lower the heat. Cook for 30 minutes or until all the liquid has almost evaporated. It should be moist. Add the fresh herbs. Mix and serve. Sprinkle with crushed dried mint and serve.

**Niloufer Mavalvala**



**Author & Founder - Niloufer's Kitchen**

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# Yalda

## YALDA FESTIVAL TABLE (Shab e Cheleh)

SHAB-E YALDA: WHEN LIGHT SHINES AND  
GOODNESS PREVAILS

RITA J. KAPADIA



Everywhere in the world, people observe various seasonal days of celebration during the month of December. Most are religious holy days and are linked in some way to the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere. Yalda, an ancient Iranian Festival, is celebrated on the eve of the winter solstice and goes several thousand years back in the country's history. The tradition originated from the Mithraism religion. "Yalda" is a Syriac word meaning birth, and it was believed that Mithra, the Persian angel of light, was born during that night, which was then called Yalda.

Yalda is a Syriac word imported into the Persian language by the Syriac Christians. Early Christians linked this very ancient Persian celebration to Mithra, goddess of light, and to the birth anniversary of Prophet Jesus. Ancient Iranian Zoroastrians believed that on December 21 darkness is defeated by light. On this night, family and friends get together. Dried nuts, watermelon and pomegranate juices and delicious snacks are served. Classic poetry and old mythologies are read aloud.

As the longest night of the year, the Eve of Yalda (Shab-e Yalda) on December 21 is also a turning point, after which the days grow longer. It symbolizes the triumph of Light and Goodness over the powers of Darkness. During this night, Iranian Americans, along with Iranians around the globe, hold gatherings and stay up late, eating pomegranate, watermelon and a variety of nuts. They also read poetry, especially by the poet Hafez, who is a highly respected and adored 14th-century Persian mystic poet. Hafez's poetry books have been gaining a foothold in American classrooms and popularity among Americans. Here is a line in the poetry of Hafez that I found interesting – "Look at the sun in quest of light, you may find it."

Many varieties of fruits and sweetmeats are specially prepared for this festival. In some areas it is believed that forty varieties of edibles should be served during the ceremony of the night of Chelleh. The most typical is watermelon especially kept from summer for this ceremony. It is believed that consuming watermelons on

# Yalda

the night of Chelleh will ensure the health and well-being of the individual during the months of summer by protecting him/her from falling victim to excessive heat or disease produced by hot summers. Another common practice on the night of Chelleh involves young engaged men. The bachelors send a platter containing seven kinds of fruits to their fiancées on this night. The girl and her family can return the favor by sending gifts back for the young man.

The Parsi community has been celebrating with a “Haft-seen Table” at Navroze (Nawruz) events, why not celebrate with a “Yalda Table” in the December Holiday season as well ?

Here are 4 recipes created for your Yalda Table.

## **SWEET & SOUR YALDA DRINK**

*A Nutritious Fresh Drink to energize you!*

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 cup Pomegranate juice
- 1 Cup Watermelon pieces (without seeds)
- ¼ Sugar
- ½ Salt
- ¼ black pepper
- Crushed ice
- Watermelon cut into cubes or round balls.
- 1 drop of edible red color combined with ¼ cup of water
- 1 drop of Rose essence

### **METHOD**

1. Blend the pomegranate juice, watermelon pieces, sugar, salt and black pepper in a blender.
2. In a small container, soak the watermelon cubes/balls in the red colored water
3. Add a drop of rose essence very carefully.
4. In your serving glass combine all of the above and add ice if desired.
5. Garnish with a piece of flavored watermelon on rim of glass.

- Pomegranates are reminders of the cycle of life.
- The purple outer covering of a pomegranate symbolizes birth or dawn, and their bright red seeds the glow of life.



## **NUTTY FETA CHEESE SPREAD**

*Sweet and Salty Spread to go with your favorite crackers !*

### **INGREDIENTS**

- ½ cup crushed walnuts
- 1 cup Feta Cheese
- ¼ cup Raisins
- 1/2 tsp salt or to taste
- Your favorite crackers (I used Tostitos Scoops)

### **METHOD**

1. Combine all of above in a food processor till blended and smooth.
2. Taste for salt and serve on your favorite crackers.







## **ROASTED PUMPKIN SEEDS**

Pumpkin seeds are also called “Magaj” or “Magaz” in India and are highly nutritious.

These seeds are one of the ingredients in the parsi favorite “Vasanu”.

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 cup roasted pumpkin seeds
- 1/4 tsp Salt
- 1/4 tsp Turmeric powder
- 1/4 tsp Paprika
- 1 Lemon

### **METHOD**

1. Mix the pumpkin seeds with paprika, turmeric powder and salt.
2. Taste and serve with lemon juice squeezed on top.

## **FRUIT KEBABS**

Simple watermelon and feta cheese kebabs.

The flavor of watermelon and feta cheese explodes in your mouth. Try it sometime.

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 cup cubed watermelon pieces
- 1 cup cubed feta cheese
- 4 skewers

### **METHOD**

Skewer watermelon cubes and feta cheese cubes alternatively.

Enjoy!



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Since 1999, Rita Kapadia, founder of [ParsiCuisine.com](http://ParsiCuisine.com), has provided recipes, food news, health tips and articles on this website. Recently, Rita has published several Parsi Cuisine cookbooks which are sold on Amazon.com worldwide. Our Parsi Cuisine cookbooks are a labor of love. The cookbooks began in an effort to maintain and preserve our recipes and traditions for the next generation, many of whom have been raised in USA, UK, Australia, France, Germany, Canada and other countries outside of India.



## PERZEN PATEL (Bawi Bride)

### Yalda

I'll be honest. I had never heard of Yalda until I was asked to write this article.

The only lead that I got about the festival was from the editor who mentioned that pomegranates form an important part of the festivities. I was surely intrigued and went to my trusty encyclopaedia, Google to learn more.

What I learnt surprised me. Yes, Yalda – which falls on December 21 – is the celebration of the winter solstice but it is also the oldest Persian festival. Yes, like most Parsi festivals it involves copious amounts of food but it is also celebrated as the victory of light over darkness since daylight hours get longer than the dark past the solstice.

But what does the pomegranate have to do with any of this? I already knew part of the answer to this puzzle. The pomegranate holds a sacred position in Zoroastrianism and you will find it as part of the offerings on a Nowruz table, at a Jashan and also during prayers for the departed souls.

This is because the purple outer covering of a pomegranate symbolizes birth or dawn, and their bright red seeds the glow of life. However, the fruit is closely linked to Yalda also because our ancestors believed that by eating summer fruits like pomegranate and watermelon on this day, they wouldn't fall ill during the winter. I'll remember to eat a pomegranate this winter I think instead of taking the dreaded flu shot!





# Yalda

One of the ancient traditions with the Yalda festival is to exchange gift baskets of summer fruits with your loved ones as it is also an occasion that marks the end of the crop season. I don't think BawaGroom would take kindly to me gifting him a basket of watermelons and pomegranates so I decided to improvise and combine the pomegranates with his favourite ingredient – chocolate – to make a Dark Chocolate Pomegranate Bark. The recipe is really simple so I hope you enjoy making it for Yalda this year.

## DARK CHOCOLATE POMEGRANATE BARK

Makes about 300gm

### INGREDIENTS:

Good quality Dark Chocolate 250gm  
Fresh Pomegranates 500gm

### METHOD:

- Deseed the pomegranates making sure all the white skin is completely removed. Wash them and then lay flat between two paper towels to dry completely. This step is crucial as moisture from the pomegranates could ruin your bark
- Once the seeds are dry, melt the chocolate by breaking it into smaller pieces and putting it in the microwave 30 seconds at a time. You can also use the double boiler method but I find this to be faster
- Line a metal baking tray with baking paper and pour the melted chocolate onto the tray forming a longish rectangle. Don't make the chocolate layer too thick!
- Sprinkle generous amounts of the pomegranate seeds across the chocolate until you have a beautiful brown and red collage
- Cover with foil and refrigerate the baking tray for at least 2 – 3 hours until completely set
- Break the bark into uneven pieces and gift wrap it in a small goody bag. Keep chilled until its time to celebrate Yalda
- You can also use this combination to make chocolates if you have chocolate moulds at home.



*On a mission to spread happiness through Dhansak, Perzen is Mumbai's Bawi Bride. She is the Founder and Chief Tasting Officer at Bawi Bride Kitchen, a food services company specializing in Parsi Food. When she is not dishing out Parsi food for parties or hosting Parsi pop-ups, Perzen also writes about food and travel. Since 2013, the Bawi Bride Kitchen has fed over 4000+ happy tummies.*

| [twitter.com/BawiBride](https://twitter.com/BawiBride) | [www.bawibride.com](http://www.bawibride.com) | [facebook.com/BawiBride](https://facebook.com/BawiBride)

# In The News

## BHANDARKAR ORIENTAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF PUNE STARTS A FREE 10-DAY COURSE IN AVESTAN

In a bid to boost understanding of the Indo-Iranian heritage, Pune based **Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI)**, in a joint initiative with a private donor, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and UNESCO Parzor (Parsi Zoroastrian) Project, introduced a 10-day long formal course in Avestan, an Indo-Iranian language that has its roots in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

The course, which ran from July 6--16, was conducted by Prof Almut Hintze, Zartoshty Brothers Professor of Zoroastrianism in the Department of Religions and Philosophies, SOAS, University of London. Her field of work is Indo- Iranian studies with special emphasis on Avestan language, Zoroastrian literature, beliefs and religious practice. *(Photo Prof Hintze at the podium)*

"In autumn 2014", Professor Hintze reports, "a lady from France attended my Avestan classes at SOAS. She suggested that we should conduct the course in Pune and offered to bear all the expenses." After working out the necessary details, a formal course was advertised in collaboration with Professor Shrikant Bahulkar, Honorary Secretary in-charge at BORI and Dr Shernaz Cama of PARZOR. The response to the course with in excess of 100 applications surpassed all expectations, of which 90 students attended, and among them 18 were Parsis of which 8 were senior citizens & 10 were younger people. "The presence of young adults gladdened my heart and kindled a ray of hope" said Farida Antia, a Parsi attendee. Other participants included Sanskrit scholars and students pursuing M.A. or PhD.

The programme was inaugurated on 6 July with a ceremony at BORI during which Ervad Dr. Peshotan Peer, priest and religious scholar from Mumbai, recited an Avestan prayer. Also present was a ninety year old Maharashtrian Sanskrit scholar and author of a book on Gathas and Yasna. During the two-weeks course, the morning sessions from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. were devoted to grammar and exercises. After a communal lunch in the Firodia Hostel, during afternoon sessions from 2 p.m. to 4 pm an Avestan text, the Yasna Haptanghaiti (Yasna 35–41) was read, explained and translated. According to one of the participants, Ms Farida Antia, "the material was well



prepared with home-work exercises given at the end of each chapter. We had to do the home-work which was discussed in the next day class. Our teacher Dr. Almut Hintze was dedicated, patient and won over our hearts. The grammar portion had to be hurried through, but on the whole the course succeeded in delivering what it had promised; i.e. we could understand the basics and translate simple Avestan text". A special highlight was when Ervad Noshirwan Pirojshah Dastoor from the Kadmi and Shahenshahi Anjuman Darehmeher, at Khorshed Wadi, Pune came one morning to recite the Yasna Haptanghaiti to the class.

Avestan, which was previously known as Zend-Avestan, is the language of the Zoroastrian sacred texts which are recited in prayers and rituals. Generally, Iranian languages are divided into two groups, eastern and western. Avestan belongs to the eastern branch and is related to Sanskrit, with which it shares a common, Indo-Iranian heritage. Like the Vedic texts of the Indo-Aryan tradition, the transmission of the Avestan texts was entirely oral until a special script for writing Avestan was developed around 500CE. The course was designed to benefit scholars and students of various disciplines as well as the general public, especially from the Parsi community. It contributed to Oriental Studies, Vedic studies and Indian culture by teaching the Avestan language in a comparative perspective that considers the common Indo-Iranian heritage shared by Vedic and Avestan. The aim of the course was to provide participants with a clear understanding of the basics of the Avestan language in order to enable them to translate simple Avestan texts. The huge success of the course inspired Prof.



# In The News

Bahulkar to start a study group on Avestan. The group met on August 22nd and is scheduled to meet again on September 12. to revise what was learnt on a regular basis and plan to call Dr. Hintze back for advanced studies.

*"The course not only gave us insight into our scriptural language but gave us a great opportunity to interact with like-minded fellow Zoroastrians who irrespective of their age forged a strong bond which continues on WhatsApp as Ext Avesta Group."* Farida K Antia.

Alongside the course, the institute held an exhibition to showcase their collections of books and manuscripts written in Avestan.

The Indian Express, Pune Edition of 08-July-2015.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/avestan-an-ancient-indo-iranian-language-travels-to-pune/99/>

With contributions from Mrs Farida K Antia, a participant from Hyderabad

**Photo credit Prof Almut Hintze**

## REFLECTIONS OF YASMIN IRANI , PUNE, INDIA .

For a 71 years old, Parsi lady, residing in Pune, the introductory Avestan language course was a god-send. With no background in Sanskrit or in any Indo-Iranian language, but just a deep curiosity and enthusiasm to explore the language of my prayers, I decided to enrol for the course and I am glad I did. Looking back on it, I can say that it was **"Exotic, Elegant and Exciting"**. Prof. Hintze, with her immense scholarship and a palpable love of her subject, was ideally suited to conduct this course on an **'exotic'** topic- the ancient Avestan language.

The ten-day course content was **'elegantly'** compiled to give the participant just the right tools with which to navigate the complicated grammatical constructions. It was an **'exciting'** experience to quote Dr. Hintze **"we were able to see through the lens of the language"** the ethos of that pre-historic past. The choice of the Yasna Haptanhaiti extract for translation, exposed us to the exalted thoughts and sentiments expressed, way back in the history of mankind! It was indeed a magical fortnight. My gratitude to SOAS, BORI, and to the anonymous donor whose wonderful gesture made it all so worthwhile for us.

*"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style."*

Maya Angelou (1928-2014)  
Poet, Dancer, Producer, Playwright,  
Director, Author

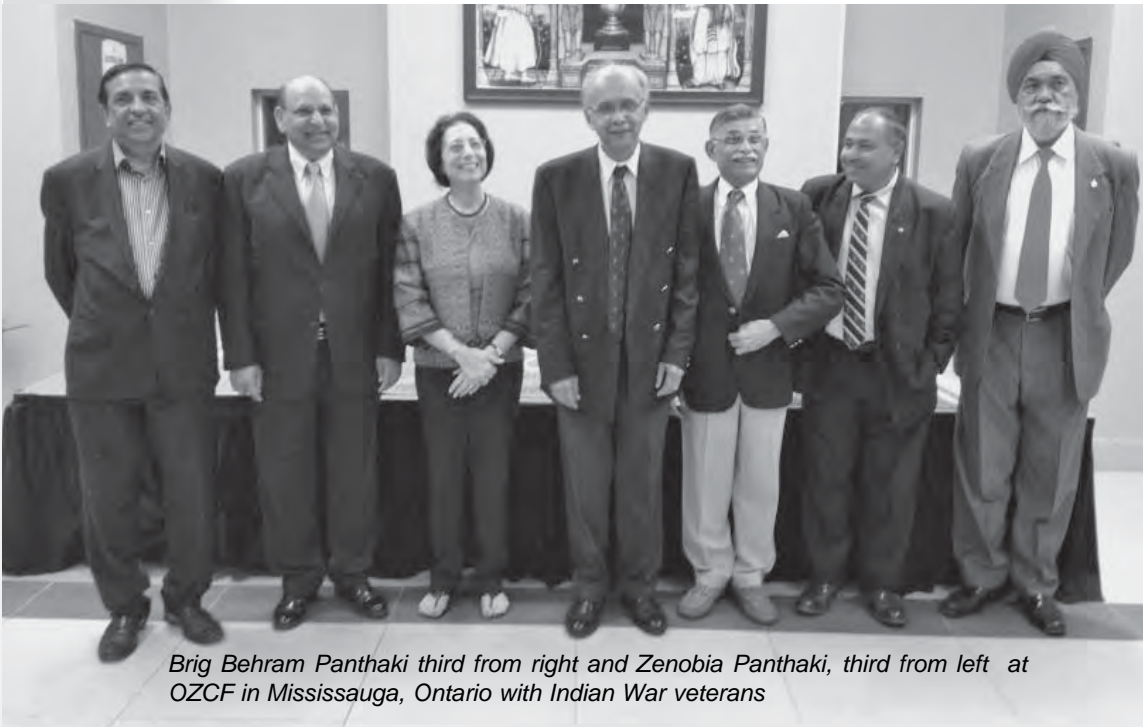
# In The News

## A JEWEL IN INDIA'S CROWN FIELD MARSHAL SAM MANEKSHAW

True to style, Brig Behram Panthaki soldiers on, along with his wife and co-author, Zenobia, promoting their book on Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. The message rings out loud and clear; if there was a soldier who served India with unstinted loyalty, integrity and honesty it was Sam.

In November, while visiting their daughter in Hong Kong, the Panthakis did a similar presentation at the Zoroastrian Center. It was an entertaining evening with a liberal dose of humour and narrations of Sam's parleys and confrontations with the powers that be, washed down with Parsi pegs and fare. Later

that week they addressed young professionals at a Book Club, hosted by the Indian Consulate. At this event, all of the participants were born after the 1971 war and were very interested to know first-hand from Brigadier Panthaki, about the planning, preparation and execution of a war which culminated in a resounding victory.



*Brig Behram Panthaki third from right and Zenobia Panthaki, third from left at OZCF in Mississauga, Ontario with Indian War veterans*

In October 2014 the Panthakis were invited to the Kushwant Singh Literary Festival in Kasauli where their book won a Rs.50,000 prize. The cheque was handed over to the War Wounded Association, the cause they are supporting through the royalty they earn.

Last August the Panthakis addressed a rapt audience at Toronto's OZCF about Sam, his military prowess, his cryptic communications with bureaucrats and politicians whom he had 'on the hook' and his unique sense of humour. A narration of anecdotes by other Indian veterans who had been invited to the event made the evening a memorable one.

In Pune, an artistically restored building that is home to an eclectic collection of young entrepreneurs, artists, architects who sat on 'chattais', drinking in stories of Sam from the horse's mouth. In the audience was a retired Military Nursing Service officer whose personal experience with Sam endorsed his larger than life image. Their next session was at a place diametrically the opposite of The Loft – the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla. 500 young cadets smartly turned out, trooped into the auditorium. You could have heard a needle fall as they sat in perfect silence without as much as even flinching! There was not a whimper from the audience as the Panthakis held the young men in thrall for the next hour. They

In December the Panthakis were hosted at 'The Loft'



# In The News

now had before them an iconoclastic figure whom they could strive to emulate. Would they ever match up to the stature of this great man – only time will tell. The crowning glory came on December 16, Vijay Diwas (Victory Day), the day on which India secured the surrender of the Pakistan Army's Eastern Command and took 92,000 POWs. 200 veterans and their families attended the event, held at Salunke Vihar, an army housing complex. Many of them had fought in the campaign and had stories of their own to relate.

To celebrate the Field Marshal's 101<sup>st</sup> birth centenary in April, the Panthakis were invited by the Florida associations of Orlando, Miami and Tampa Bay. July took them to Houston and Dallas. The event hosted by ZAH was well attended, and included Indian veterans in the diaspora. Kind courtesy of ZAH the Panthakis were live on HumTumRadio – a Houston 'desi' talk show. Their talk had to be extended by an hour as questions kept pouring in. Public outrage at the government's treatment of this great soldier in life as in death continues to rankle and outrage the public. In August the Panthakis were hosted by ZAGNY at their Navroze function.

In September the Panthakis promoted their book on home territory, in Washington DC in their spanking new



Zenobia Panthaki addressing a rapt audience in Houston , TX

Kamran Dar e Meher. The Washington community also hosted a group of veterans on this occasion and were both informed and entertained as they tuned in to hear the stories first-hand from their very own members.

Book sales have been brisk; the local US Distributor ran out of stock and an additional shipment had to be rushed from India. The book is about to go into third print.

In December the Panthakis hope to do a presentation and set up a stall at the Iranshah Udvada Utsav. January will see Brigadier limbering up to run the Bombay marathon along with the team of disabled veterans. At the finish line they will present a cheque of Rs.100,000 to the War Wounded Association. But this is not the last lap. 2016 will see the couple continue to reach out and spread the word about the greatest Zoroastrian soldier of our times.

**Brig. Behram Panthaki** was ADC (or Aide) to Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw from 1965 to 1973. But twice during this period he reverted to regimental duties. 1968-69 he was deployed in NEFA (Indo -China border) and during the 1971 war he opted to leave the 'old man' to join his battalion on the western front in the Rajasthan Sector.

**Zenobia Panthaki** began her career with IBM India. She joined the World Bank's Delhi office in 1984, transferred to their HQ in Washington DC in 1994 and retired in 2012. She continues to consult for the Bank.

# In The News

## YOUTH IN Philanthropy PROGRAM (YIP)

FRIYANA KAYOMARZ SIDHWA,

SUGAR LAND, TX

I was hugely honored and privileged to be selected from my Harmony School of Science – High for the Youth in Philanthropy Leadership program fully funded by the famous Mamie and Albert George Foundation. This Youth in Philanthropy Program (YIP) is a community partnership with the Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce, Fort Bend County school districts, local businesses and the community-at-large. YIP cultivates student leadership by using an application process to recruit 150 juniors and seniors, representing schools throughout Fort Bend County (23 High Schools with thousands of students), to develop and test different skill sets while making a difference in their community.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM

The objectives of this program are to share the impact Philanthropy has on the community, to expose students to meaningful work provided by the Nonprofit Sector in their community, to give students opportunities to experience what it means to give back and to offer students opportunities to build Leadership skills through experiences providing insight into the needs of their community.

Being an avid volunteer in our Zoroastrian community and the community at large in Houston, I was really intrigued when I was introduced to the Youth in Philanthropy program. Held by the Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce, the YIP program helps small non-profit businesses in the Fort Bend

area. The YIP groups are formed, offering a unique opportunity to experience how volunteerism and philanthropy coexist to serve their community. Throughout this experience one important thing I have learnt is there are a lot of other hole-in-the-wall nonprofits that need serious financial and emotional assistance and help from the community.

I started the program in October, 2014 with an orientation and then had to be part of a team and volunteer for four months at different projects given to us every month. My team was allotted to **Rosenberg-Richmond Helping Hands** (Food and Clothing for in crisis families), **Parks Youth Ranch** (at risk and homeless youth), **Texana** (disabled adults) and **Boys & Girls Club** (Youth empowerment). This was a lot of real insightful fun.

One particular program/charity which really struck my heart was the **Parks Youth Ranch (PYR)**, where they serve, at risk and homeless youth by sheltering them in a safe environment. I was so enamored by this particular group that as Vice-President of the National Honor Society chapter of my school, I decided to take all my NHS colleagues to the Ranch and volunteer for a day to share this experience. At the end of the day, we were all so touched by the children there, that we organized an end of the year celebration with the PYR children.

Once we were done with our



volunteering activities around March 2015, we conducted our volunteer evaluations of all charities we worked at and in April 2015, the program concluded with a celebration luncheon called the **Investment in Youth**. The luncheon provided a venue for YIP students to highlight their volunteer experiences to their peers, business representatives and the community-at-large which included the honorable Mayor. With the support of foundations and the community, scholarships are awarded to YIP students in recognition of their volunteer spirit. I was fortunate to be one of the select few recipients of the George Foundation YIP Scholarship in the "Community Service" category.

I am very thankful to have been selected for this program as I have gained so much appreciation and respect for people who help others in need. I got to make so many different friends from various backgrounds and religions that I can't wait to carry this on whenever an opportunity exists. I would really encourage each and every junior/senior to apply for this or other similar programs as it really opens your eyes to the needs of your community and allows you to experience true VOLUNTEERING and LEADERSHIP.



# In The News

11 year old *Isabelle Irani*, of Woodlands, Texas wins gold at the State Games of America.

In August 2015, 11 year old Isabelle Irani, represented Texas in swimming at the State Games of America in Nebraska where amateur athletes from across the USA compete in all genres of sports. Isabelle had qualified for this event by winning medals in Texas' state amateur swimming competitions, in January 2014 and in January 2015.

In Nebraska, Isabelle won gold medals in the 50 yard butterfly and in the 100 yard individual medley and silver medals in the 50 meter back stroke and 200 yard freestyle relay. Isabelle has been swimming since the age of 7 and loves competitive swimming. Her favorite events are butterfly and the individual medley.

Isabelle lives in the Woodlands, TX with her parents Drs Natasha and Adel Irani and her sisters Roxanna and Josephine and brother Dinsha. Well Done Isabelle !!



*"Success doesn't come to you;  
you go to it."*

T. Scott McLeod

# In The News

## 6<sup>th</sup> WORLD ZOROASTRIAN YOUTH CONGRESS DECEMBER 28, 2015- January 2, 2016

### SPECIAL GUEST & KEY NOTE SPEAKERS OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED



Time flies and now with just four months to go for the most awaited event on the Zoroastrian youth calendar, finally the well kept secret is out. The Organizing Committee of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress – which is being held at Kings College, Auckland, New Zealand, between 28<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2016 – is excited to unveil the Special Guest & Key Note Speakers, who will inspire and educate young Zoroastrians arriving from different corners of the world.

Who could it be than the feisty human rights campaigner and founder of the most unique leadership Centre in the Forest of Dean in England?

For those who haven't met the passionate **Zerbanoo Gifford**, the **Special Guest Speaker** of the event, you are in for a treat. She has led her life at a sprinter's pace moving from one winning post to another despite the many roadblocks along the way.

As one of the first non-white women who made political history in Britain, Ms. Gifford is now leaving behind a legacy of leadership and empowerment at the ASHA Centre she founded. The ASHA Centre is recognized internationally as a hub of activity for people from all over the world to experience each other's cultures, faiths and shared humanity. Zerbanoo has also been the director of **Anti-Slavery International**, London Organizer for **SHELTER**, and helped set up **Charities Aid Foundation** in India.

The author of seven books, she also holds numerous international awards for her humanitarian work, which spans over forty years of grassroots and global activism. These include the **Nehru Centenary Award** for her work championing the rights of women, children and minorities, **International Woman of the Year in 2006** and **Splendour Award** in Hollywood in 2007, for her lifetime achievements in the field of equality and human rights.

Turning to our **Keynote Speakers**, **Jimmy Antia** and **Jimmy Madon**, who hail from equally interesting and impressive backgrounds.

**Jimmy Antia** is an International Security and Development Analyst with experience in Latin America and Southeast Asia. His work experience includes working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, where he focuses on working with other components of the U.S. government to promote resilient and sustainable use of water resources.

Prior to this, Jimmy consulted with the Department of Defense where he investigated programs, objectives, and strategic goals to create solutions that enhanced strategic planning process. He also worked with the Environmental





# In The News

Protection Agency to create new programs to increase resource conservation. Jimmy has extensive experience in politics having worked for the 2012 re-election campaign for Barack Obama, and with the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure committee as well as working on transportation issues post-9/11.



Another speaker in love with possibility is **Ervad Jimmy Madon** who moved from Mumbai, India to the United Kingdom five years ago where he procured a First Class Honours degree in Computer Science from the University of East London. He is currently employed as a Software Systems Development Engineer at GENE Software Ltd., a Warwickshire based company that specializes in the field of Lean Engineering and Consultancy. As the youth coordinator of the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) and the Social Secretary for the Young Zoroastrians of the UK (the youth wing of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe - ZTFE), he actively helps in organizing community events and also volunteers to teach at the '**Young Flames**' religious educational class in London for kids and parents alike

Globally, over 250 delegates have already registered to attend the Congress. All Zoroastrians between the ages of 15 and 35 are invited to attend. If you're still thinking about it, go on and register! Do not miss out on this opportunity of a lifetime, after all, where else will you get the chance to meet so many young Zoroastrians in one of the most beautiful places in the world?

**For more information and to register visit:** <http://www.6wzyc.co.nz>

## **PARSI SILK AND MUSLIN FROM IRAN, INDIA AND CHINA, AN EXCITING EXHIBITION IN HONOLULU, HAWAII, October 11, 2015 to January 24, 2016**

This unique exhibition co-curated by *Pheroza J Godrej and Firoza Punthakey Mistree*, of *Ever Lasting Flame* and *Across the Oceans and Flowing Silks* exhibitions fame is sponsored by the East West Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, as part of their Arts Program, of promoting minority cultures and supported by grants from Richard Cox: Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute: The Hawaii Pacific Rim Society and Aston Hotels and resorts

The exhibition will focus on the textile traditions of the Parsi and Iranian community including secular as well as ritual clothing used by Zoroastrian priests, the Zoroastrian Iranian Costumes of Yazd, highlighting the continuity of our culture and its unique place in modern day life in Iran and India. Viewers will gain insight into the history of the community, its rich and complex culture, the Zoroastrian religion, and the contributions of the Parsi and Iranian community to South Asia. Textiles as well as artifacts, like porcelain and furniture pieces and photographs will be used to provide context for the textiles displayed.

The co-curators see this as a compact travelling exhibition of 65 objects which they hope to show in many parts of the Diaspora. If visiting Hawaii for your Christmas Holidays a visit to this very exciting exhibition is a must.

**Admission free, gallery open daily. Before visiting call +1 808-944-7177**  
**[rts@EastWestCenter.org](mailto:rts@EastWestCenter.org) <http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>**

# In The News

## THE PRAYER HALL—NOW A REALITY

DINSHAW K. TAMBOLY

*Chairman, The Prayer Hall Trust and the Prayer Hall Services and Maintenance Trust*

The Prayer Hall, situated at Vaikunth Dham, E. Moses Road, Opposite the Four Seasons Hotel, Worli, Mumbai 400 018, has been completed and is now functional. The Deed of Modification was executed with the municipal corporation on August 26. A well attended Jashan was performed at the site on Monday, August

As a makeshift accommodation, the crematorium at Dadar was tidied. When Jamsheed went to console JRD, JRD informed Jamsheed that Mumbai deserved better facilities.

From amongst the many crematoriums at Mumbai, Jamsheed decided the one at Worli had



3, 2015, at 4 p.m. by Ervards Khushroo Madon, Framroze Mirza, Fali Madon, and Jal Balsara aka Tilak.

The new Prayer Hall, 3,700 sq ft (above) has been constructed to meet the growing needs of Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians that wish to opt for alternate modes of disposal—cremation or burial—but had difficulty to find a convenient location where the first four days obsequies could be performed. The new Prayer Hall permits this as the Prayer Hall adjoins the crematorium.

Actually, the first seeds for a Prayer Hall—where Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians could opt for alternative modes of disposal, as well as, being assured that obsequies could be performed—were planted during the 1980s when Jamsheed Kanga, then Municipal Commissioner of Mumbai, was approached by the late J. R. D. Tata who enquired as to which Mumbai crematorium would be appropriate for his deceased brother, D. R. D. Tata, considering the many dignitaries expected to attend. At that time, some of the crematoriums were closed as they were being upgraded, whilst others were very shabby.

adequate space and was conveniently located in South Bombay. As Municipal Commissioner, he planned to set up a prayer hall there but, before the necessary arrangements could be made, he was transferred and the project was shelved.

At the turn of the century (with the state of affairs within the Towers of Silence at Mumbai becoming public knowledge) many Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians began considering alternate modes of disposal but were deterred as only a few of those facilities could also accommodate the four day obsequies.

For more than a decade, during my tenure as a Trustee of BPP (Bombay Parsi Punchayet) (November 1996 to October 2008), we debated the need for allowing funerary prayers to be performed at Doongerwadi and permit family members to dispose of the corpse by cremation or burial. Although some Trustees were in favor of moving forward with non-traditional disposal, pressure from the clergy and vociferous segments from the traditional Parsi community kept the issue from moving forward.



# In The News

A majority of the BPP Trustees, and others professing the traditional mind set, maintained that those intending to consider alternate systems of disposal should not expect BPP to approve any proposal allowing any Doongerwadi bunglis to be made available—and, that those who chose non-traditional methods should proceed with their own arrangements. Thanks to this sagacious advice, the Prayer Hall is now a reality

Credit for the creation of the Prayer Hall belongs to a cohesive team of dedicated proponents, with special acknowledgement of our two mentors: **Jamsheed Kanga and Homi Khusrookhan**. These champions successfully took on the BPP in the “Ban on Mobeds” issue and took responsibility for communicating and collaborating with the Municipal Corporation and their various executives. Without their involvement, the Prayer Hall would not be a reality today. Ms. Silloo Billimoria, Ex Law Officer, Consultant Legal, of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai was also most helpful in drawing up the necessary documents.

My fellow Trustees for this project are : Messrs Fali Sarkari, Keki Elavia, Karl Tamboly, Sarosh Bharucha, Farzana Mojjani and Adil Wadia, all of who have been brilliant in their commitment and dedication.

We were fortunate to have Rustom Dadabhoj, the eminent engineer (who had worked in Tata Housing advising and supervising the project) and, of course, the involvement of the Godrej engineering team, which was led by Maneck Engineer. Our architectural firm, Epicons Consultants, and our building contractor Mr. Ashok Punjabi (of AP Enterprises, which is associated with the House of Godrej) have all worked as a well-knit, dedicated, and committed team that brought the project to fruition in very good time.

Project funding campaigns started with appeals to various individuals, some of us (Trustees) also dug into our own pockets. We discussed the proposal with the Trustees of A. H. Wadia Trust and requested their support, in response to which they sanctioned a munificent donation of Rs.15,000,000 (Rupees fifteen million). Without their generous donation it would not have been possible to complete the construction of the facility within sixteen months.

We were extremely fortunate to receive excellent cooperation from Executives and various depart-

ments of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, with two additional Municipal Commissioners taking active interest. Our mentor, Jamsheed Kanga, left behind a huge reservoir of goodwill following his tenure as Municipal Commissioner.

Thanks to the support of Mr. Jamshyd Godrej and his employees, a beautiful garden is being created at the site as well as providing the services of their professional staff to supervise construction. Mr. Maneck Engineer has kept a watchful eye on the work.

With two new halls now constructed and the existing small hall attached to the crematorium there will be adequate space for obsequies of Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians to be performed at all times.

All Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians who intend using the facilities should know: -

- 1) The Prayer Hall may be used solely for the last rites of persons of all communities; however, no non-funeral related activities are permitted.
- 2) The Parsi-Irani Zoroastrian community is permitted to use the Prayer Hall, in perpetuity, for prayers, rituals, and last rites as appropriate for their respective religious customs for four days following a funeral. They may also conduct prayers at certain times as is their custom over the three days following a funeral, even though the last rites were not performed at the facility.
- 3) Subject to availability, members of the Parsi-Irani Zoroastrian Community will be given priority use of the Prayer Hall during the following hours: 7:00 am to 9:00 am, 3:00 pm to 8:00 pm, and 4:00 am to 6:00 am (in perpetuity).

I personally feel blessed to have been provided the opportunity to be associated with what I believe is a historic movement forward in the right direction for the Parsi-Irani Zoroastrian community of Mumbai.

The words of Andrew Carnegie come to mind:

# In The News



Photo above from left Er Jal Balsara, Er Framroze Mirza, Er Khushroo Madon, Er Fali Madon

***"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."***

Two weeks after the inauguration of the Prayer Hall, the first prayer service was performed on Wednesday September 9, 2015, for 95 year old Nargis Fali Nariman.

**Photo credits:**

**Sarosh Daruwalla, Mazda Audio Video Labs.**

## THE PRAYER HALL SERVICES & MAINTENANCE TRUST

Have pleasure in informing members of  
PARSI - IRANI ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY that

## THE PRAYER HALL

at the Municipal Cemetery & Crematorium  
on E. Moses Road, (directly opposite the Four Seasons Hotel),  
Worli, Mumbai 400 018

is now available for Funeral & Four-Day prayers for  
Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians on priority basis, subject to availability,  
who will be given priority at the times at which these prayers are  
customarily performed, at the said Hall.

Families may use services of mobeds of their choice  
or may contact either of the two mobeds below:

**Er. Framroze Mirza**  
Tel Nos:

+91 98 21421593  
+91 22 23636524  
+91 98 21736948

**Er. Khushroo Madon**  
Tel Nos:

+91 98 20170794  
+91 22 23698207  
+91 22 22151909

Members of the families of the deceased can also contact  
Er. Framroze Mirza, our Coordinator on Tel: +91 86 91012488.

[The Coordinator will be contactable 24 X 7 for facilitation of all funeral  
arrangements, viz. arranging for hearse, preparations at Hall, documentation,  
death certificates, press announcements, etc.]

Trustees:  
**Prayer Hall Services & Maintenance Trust.**



# In The News

## ZOROASTRIAN ITEMS NOW ON EXHIBIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY, OSAKA, JAPAN.

During March 2015, the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, added a section on Zoroastrian Religious artifacts to the South Asia Section. This was done on the initiative of Noriko Katsuki. The museum is very unique and is staffed by professors and scholars. Approximately one thousand professors and scholars are helping organize the museum and its sessions or conferences using the services donated by the public, primary school students, and retired professors.

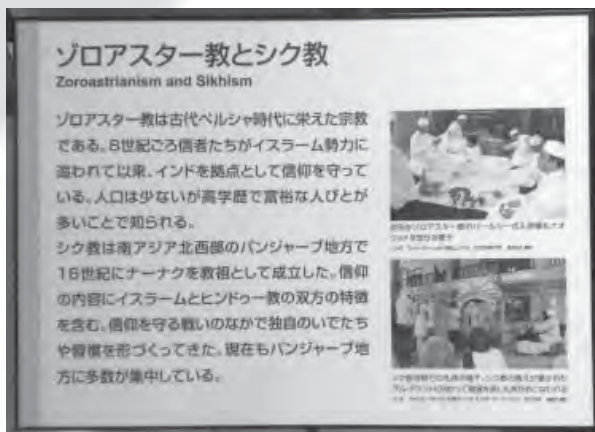


Noriko Katsuki

The museum has a vast collection of artifacts from around the world; all carefully researched and accurately presented to educate visitors about diverse cultures around the world. Zoroastrian items include: a "ses" set, red Zoroastrian topi, Zoroastrian Gara sari, sudre, and kusti. A companion video about Zoroastrianism will be available in English, Chinese, Korean and Japanese next year.

It has been my pleasure to initiate this exhibit as one part of the permanent exhibition; albeit, the space is small. I would like to thank Dr. Mio who had recommended the addition of Zoroastrian items to the South Asian exhibition area, and also to my Zoroastrian friends from Mumbai, who provided those items.

Please visit the museum whenever you come to Japan and also visit:



<http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/english>

<http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/english/museum/exhibition/main/southasia>

**Noriko Katsuki** has a doctorate in Policy Studies and is an Associate Fellow at the Institute of Policy and Cultural Studies, Chuo University, Japan. She specializes in contemporary Zoroastrian identity.

*Noriko Katsuki is long-standing, good friend of the Zarathushti community. Ed.*

# In The News

## THE HOUSE OF TATAS AND ITS ICONIC CHAIRMAN EMERITUS

## Ratan Tata

On July 23, 2015 Ratan Tata was inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame for his contribution to the automotive industry and also for turnaround of Jaguar Land Rover. The 77-year old founder of Tata Motors and Chairman Emeritus at Tata Sons was bestowed the honor at an awards ceremony held in Detroit

In an article in Autocar India, Nishant Parekh writes *Induction in the Automotive Hall of Fame is reserved for those who have had a "positive influence in the automotive industry" and "made a significant impact on the automotive industry"*.

Tata Motors, one of India's largest automobile companies, also owns Jaguar Land Rover which it acquired in 2008. Since then the carmaker was instrumental in turning around the fortunes, doubling sales, and employment, tripling its turnover, and has been responsible for generating more than ten million pounds in investment in new product development and capital expenditure.

The company employs over 16,000 people at its manufacturing facilities in the UK, including 3,500 engineers at its two product development centres. Around 78% of Land Rovers are exported to 169 countries while Jaguar exports 70% of its products to 63 countries around the world.

Tata Limited was established in London in 1907 to be Tata group's representative in Europe. Tata companies have operations and a 60,000-strong workforce spread across Europe.

Tata was inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame along with **Luca di Montezemolo**, former Ferrari chairman, **Elwood Haynes**, co-founder of Haynes-Apperson Automobile Co and **Roger Penske**,

Founder and chairman of Penske Corporation who also built the American professional racing team, Team Penske Racing. Since 1939 more than 250

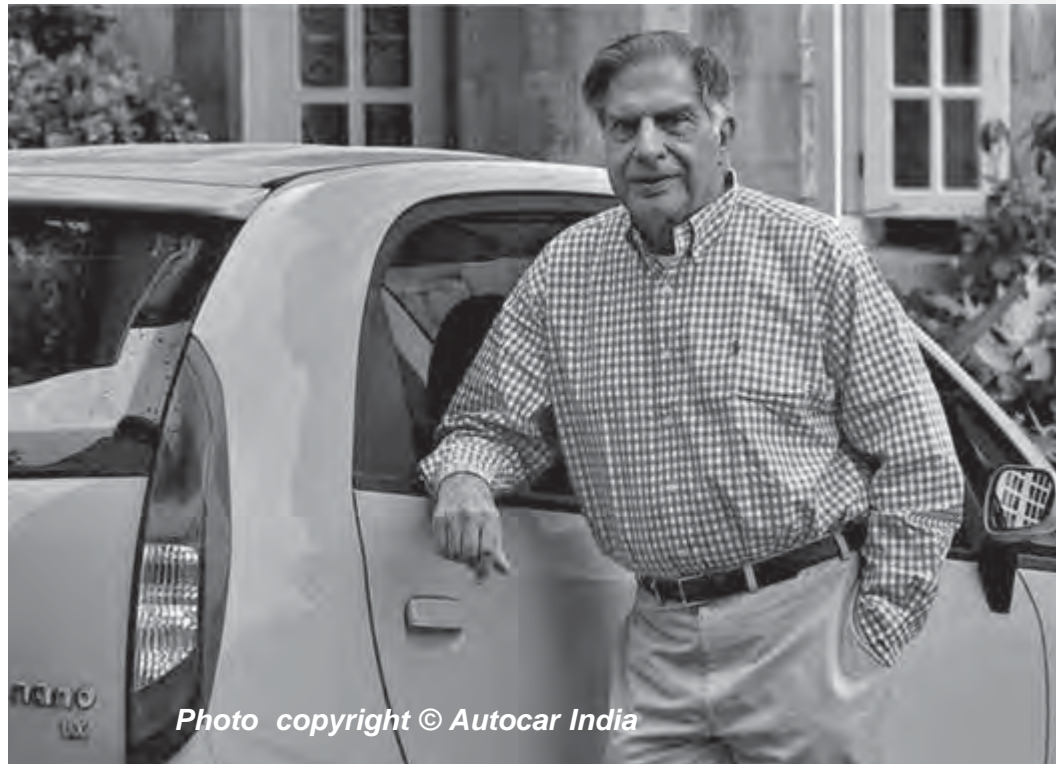


Photo copyright © Autocar India

people have been inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame.

The Chairman of the Automotive Hall of Fame, **Michael Martini** said: "The Automotive Hall of Fame also recognizes Mr. Tata's quest to give mobility to India by producing the country's first indigenous car, the Indica, in 1998, following it with the ground-breaking Nano in 2008, the world's cheapest car."

On April 10 2014 Queen Elizabeth II had conferred the rank of Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE) on Ratan Tata. This highest order conferred on civilians was given for his "services to UK-India relations, inward investment to the UK and philanthropy".



# In The News

## TATAS AND ACADEMIA

Tata's association with the UK academia also dates back to the establishment of the Sir Ratan J Tata Department at the London School of Economics. Subsequently called the Department of Social Sciences, it was set up to research the causes of poverty. ***Its first lecturer, Clement Attlee, went on to become the British prime minister who gave India its independence and also set up the British National Health Service.***

Tata has maintained close links with the London School of Economics through a research collaboration with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Chembur, India.

In 1920, the Department of Engineering at the University of Cambridge moved to its current Trumpington Street site thanks to a donation from Sir Dorabji Tata, an alumnus of the institution.

Tata International Social Entrepreneurship Scheme (ISES) began in 2008 as a two-month social internship programme for international students from the University of California, Berkeley, USA, and the University of Cambridge, UK. In 2010, the London School of Economics joined hands with Tata ISES to enable its students to be part of the programme. The students are selected for an eight-week summer internship at different Tata community initiatives in India.

## LEADING AUSTRALIAN ENGINEER AND SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR MARLENE RUSTOM KANGA



Marlene Kanga started life in a small village in old Portuguese Goa, on the west coast of India, where there were only 2 wells and no electricity but she was the daughter of an engineer from whom she developed her love for engineering. She came to Australia in the 1970s with a Masters degree in engineering from England, but was told by the immigration department that she would never get a job as an

engineer. But one year later she did and has never looked back

She is now elected President of **ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA.**, an apex national body of **more** than 100,000 engineers. She was on The National Council for 8 years (2007 -14) and is the second woman in 97 years to chair the organization. She was the first woman to be awarded in 2014 Professional Engineer of the year, by the Federation of Engineering Institutions in Asia and the Pacific. She was named as the top 100 engineers in Australia from 2013-2015 and the top 100 Westpac Women of influence in 2013. She was named to the member of the Order of Australia in 2014 in the Queen's birthday honors,

Marlene would like to see more gender and race diversity in Australian Engineering saying "engineers talk of nuts and bolts

of projects but do not talk about the impact on the heart and minds. Women tend to think more about the social impact of engineering on the community and are often attracted to the profession because of it. I have seen how engineering can fundamentally change the lives of people and give them hope "

Marlene is the mother of two sons, Zubin, a well-known contemporary Australian pianist, who shows the same love for innovation as his mother and Jehan who is completing his Ph.D in Chemistry and doing ground breaking research on new materials She is the daughter-in-law of Adi Kanga, the man referred to as the "father of Navi Mumbai".

*Interview with Marlene Kanga appeared in the September 2015 issue of the magazine COMPANY DIRECTOR.*

# In The News

## DINYAR PATEL, RECIPIENT OF THE KHERADI SCHOLARSHIP, THE FEZANA SCHOLAR, RECEIVES HIS DOCTORATE FROM HARVARD UNIVERSITY



In May 2015 Dinyar Patel received his PhD in history from Harvard University. Dinyar's dissertation analyzed the life and career of **Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917)**, the Parsi nationalist leader who helped found the Indian National Congress and became the first Indian elected to the British Parliament. Dinyar investigated how Naoroji formulated his "drain of wealth theory"--the idea that British colonialism was steadily impoverishing India--in order to justify *swaraj* or Indian self-government. In August 2015, Dinyar was appointed as an assistant professor of history at the University of South Carolina. He will teach courses on South Asian history and will also be working to turn his dissertation into a published biography of Naoroji.

*(Photo left, with wife Parinaz Madan)*

## Eric Billimoria NAMED TO TOP 40 UNDER 40 LIST

Eric Billimoria has been named to InvestmentNews' top 40 Under 40 list. More than 1,200 advisors and associated professionals from across the country were nominated for the honor, which recognizes individuals who throughout their careers have demonstrated tremendous passion, leadership and professional accomplishment in the financial services industry. Those on the list were nominated by their peers and chosen for inclusion by the editorial staff at InvestmentNews.

Eric Billimoria, CFP, CPA, CFE is a financial advisor at HealthCare Advisors and has more than nine years of experience in finance and accounting. At WealthCare Advisros, Eric offers comprehensive financial planning, wealth management and tax strategies for professionals, executives and dual income families. He earned his B.S in finance from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. At present Eric serves as a member of the Associate Board of Ambassadors for the American Cancer Society and he also volunteers as a tax preparer for Ladder Up, Advisory Services offered through CONCERT Wealth Management Inc, an SEC Registered Investment Advisor.

For full article read <http://www.investmentnews.com/section/40-under-40/2015/profile/3/Eric-Billimoria>



# In The News

## RIVETNA ARCHITECTS

### *Building Bold*



Rivetna Architects is pleased to announce that its principal Cyrus Rivetna, has accepted the invitation of Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business Program to join its Chicago 2015 Fall cohort.

The 10,000 Small Business program is offered in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses is a \$1500 million investment to help entrepreneurs create jobs and economic opportunity by providing them with greater access to education, financial capital and business support services.

According to Chicago Sun Times, Mayor Rahm Emanuel persuaded Goldman Sachs to bring the 10,000 Small Business Program to Chicago where the program will celebrate its fourth anniversary.

He addressed the thirteenth class at the Harold Washington College on Friday August 28, 2015, as they embarked on this unique opportunity for entrepreneurs. *(Photo above Cyrus Rivetna shaking hands with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel)*

Rivetna Architects is a full service architectural firm located in downtown Chicago, specializing in projects ranging

from small scale residential buildings to large scale commercial developments. Current projects include new construction of an 8,000sq ft contemporary residence on the Chicago River, and a ground breaking Zoroastrian Atash Kadeh (temple) in Houston, which will facilitate traditional practices of the Zoroastrian faith in North America.

Rivetna Architects is constantly evolving and using the latest technologies to create meaningful designs

[www.rivetna.com](http://www.rivetna.com)

# Personal Profiles

## A CHAT WITH A ZOROASTRIAN CHAPLAIN

WITH KESHVAR BUHARIWALLA

Daryush Mehta has many fascinating roles: research scientist, musician, and Zoroastrian Chaplain—and, most importantly, Dad. He earned Master's and PhD degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and currently works as a biomedical research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. As a member of the Zoroastrian Association of the Greater Boston Area (ZAGBA), he has not just participated, but led. As a student at MIT, he co-founded the Zoroastrian Students of Boston (ZSB), was the Youth Liaison to ZAGBA, and helped co-lead and organize a local Gatha Study Group.

Daryush serves as the Zoroastrian Chaplain at Harvard and MIT. In this capacity for the last five years, his primary goal is to promote religious education and interfaith dialog and to connect the Harvard and MIT campus communities on many levels. Daryush aims to help communicate an understanding about Zoroastrian theology in the context of academia, family, and social networks.

**Daryush, thank you for speaking with me. What does it mean to be the Zoroastrian Chaplain for Harvard and MIT?**

Many universities and colleges have a board or panel of interfaith leaders who provide spiritual leadership and guidance to students, faculty, and staff on campus. At MIT and Harvard, each campus has over



Daryush Mehta  
(Photo credit:  
MGH Photography)

30 such religious and non-religious chaplains who serve their respective campus communities. We meet once a month to coordinate and participate in service projects and interfaith dialogues that form bridges across communities, celebrate commonalities, and understand the real differences that exist among our various faith traditions.

My predecessor and close relative, Cyrus Mehta, was the first Zoroastrian Chaplain at Harvard and MIT; he held this role for over 15 years. Seeing my involvement in the Boston-area Zoroastrian community, he asked me to take on the Chaplain role upon my graduation from MIT. At first, I thought I was unqualified and inexperienced because I was neither ordained nor a long-time member of the community. However, I realized that the position was a unique opportunity, and I hope I can simply be a good steward of our faith.

**What do you do as Daryush Mehta, the PhD research scientist?**

My biomedical engineering background has led me to investigate human conditions related to voice and speech disorders (think back to a period where you might have felt some difficulty speaking due to a hoarse voice). I currently work as an Assistant Biomedical Engineer at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Voice Center, which is affiliated with the Department of Surgery at Harvard Medical School. I also hold an adjunct faculty appointment at the MGH Institute of Health Professions and am a speech science



# Personal Profiles

consultant at the MIT Lincoln Laboratory. My ultimate hope is to provide evidence-based research to aid voice surgeons and speech-language pathologists to better understand the mechanisms of normal and disordered voice production, helping enhance the precision of surgical procedures, and improving the management and treatment of voice disorders through innovative technology.

**You have a busy home life with two little ones and yet have found time for music, specifically performing with the Longwood Symphony Orchestra, the New England Philharmonic, and many other groups.**

My wife Andrea and I have been married for six years. We have a son Kiyan who is two, and our family's latest addition is four-month-old Asha. As for the music, well, I have been a band 'geek' ever since the 6<sup>th</sup> grade when I started playing the clarinet and then picked up tenor saxophone in my high school's jazz band. I was First Clarinet for the MIT Symphony Orchestra for five years during my graduate studies and have played with numerous jazz and orchestra groups in the Cambridge and Boston area. Music has been a significant commitment for me over the years, one that I have embraced and thoroughly enjoyed.

**What was your early childhood like?**

I grew up in Kissimmee, Florida, a small town outside of Orlando. My parents came to the U.S. in 1980, and I was born a year later. I am the oldest of three, with two younger sisters. I remember our family meeting with other Zoroastrian families in the area to celebrate our traditional holidays. These families thought to do something more religion oriented for the kids, and a type of 'Sunday School' began using a book called *The Good Life*. We learned about Zoroastrian history, traditions, and prayers. Growing up, our family traveled back to India on an almost yearly basis, so Bombay always feels like home, and going to Agiaries provides much-needed respite and comfort.

**Please tell me about your maternal grandfather, Dasturji Minochehr-Homji.**

My grandfather was a High Priest at the Fasli Agiary at Churchgate in Bombay. One sad

fact was that I was not old enough to really know my grandfather personally. I have recollections of him, but I know him primarily through his audio recordings, his books, his manuscripts—I learned my Navjote prayers by listening to his voice from tape recordings.

It is humbling to realize his overwhelming presence in our community, one that I have come to clearly understand by speaking to fellow Zoroastrians. He was open and honest, very devout. He was stern, but in a kind way. Above all, my grandfather understood that the world did not have just one way of doing anything, and the same was true for religion. He believed in teaching the guidelines, providing empowerment, teaching someone how to think and then letting them go.

An ongoing project is to disseminate the words of Dasturji Minochehr-Homji through electronic media, online forums, etc., to those looking for his inspiration.

**You have said that Zoroastrianism has played a significant role in your life growing up.**

Yes, my parents and grandparents were my greatest influences and role models. Growing up in America I did have the usual challenges of a middle-schooler and also grappled with wearing my sudreh and kusti but not knowing where to recite my prayers during the school day (a quick visit to the bathroom often sufficed!). I personally wanted to know not just the pronunciation of the Old Avestan language, but I also wanted to understand and memorize word-for-word English translations.

**You have been active and involved in the Zoroastrian Association, ZAGBA. What has been your impetus to stay involved?**

When I first arrived in Boston, I remember attending a Zoroastrian get-together at someone's house. To be honest, I just felt so at home. Being around my community was natural, and I realized how genuine a community I was going to be a part of. For me, once the momentum of active participation began, I prioritized my time to remain involved in the Zoroastrian community.

Every year, I see lots of positive energy in individuals and boards in our ZAGBA community. As is typical, to get things done,

# Personal Profiles



*ZAGBA community members volunteer to help end hunger in New England by packaging meals and raising money for a Harvard Chaplains sponsored initiative. (Photo courtesy Parastu Dubash)*

one person starts with a vision and gets people excited and committed! I often say that the measure of your success is not that 100 people come to your events; it is touching and making an impact on even a handful that might show up.

## **What do you see as the role of service in our faith?**

Our Zoroastrian faith stands on the three pillars: good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. So, absolutely, the third pillar stands for the good deeds that we carry in the small packet in our sudreh, and, this necessarily translates to the active performance of service. Our good actions are necessary to manifest what we think (good thoughts) and speak (good words).

## **Our religion has withstood persecution, migration, and assimilation over the past 3000 years. There is always talk of the prospect of Zoroastrianism dying out.**

It is human nature to want Zoroastrianism to survive. I think too much emphasis is put on how Zoroastrianism has to look in the future instead of how we must strive to live out its core teachings. Some might say this is a limited Gathic perspective, but yes, I think Zoroastrianism will survive. We would like to continue this great way of thinking, to respect plants, animals, life, and respect people. If certain traditions die out, then so be it. So much has changed over the past 3000 years of Zoroastrianism as far as languages, immigration, and geography are concerned that sometimes we lose sight

of how we have survived for so long. It comes down to being a strong community, being seekers of knowledge and truth, having faith, and continuing on the path of Asha. I would like to be clear here that these are difficult questions, and I am answering not as a Zoroastrian Chaplain or as a Zoroastrian scholar or authority, but just as an individual.

## **Do you have ideas or initiatives you would like to see implemented in regards to Zoroastrians thriving in our North American home?**

I think FEZANA has put together excellent initiatives that move toward community building. This fosters a sense of self-worth and enables people from different perspectives to come together. Also, making things personal and on a local level is extremely important. Therefore, I think a most appropriate tag line would be to “act locally, think globally.” This can be an overarching vision to making sure we are always doing the right thing. FEZANA has played a great role as an umbrella organization. We as individuals must seek out the opportunities to act and create that momentum that, once started, is hard to stop!

To learn more about Daryush visit:  
[chaplains.harvard.edu/people/daryush-mehta](http://chaplains.harvard.edu/people/daryush-mehta)



# INTERFAITH INTERALIA

## LAUDATO SI: On Care for our Common Home An Abstract of the letter of Pope Francis

**"Laudato Si"** (Praise be to You) is the encyclical of Pope Francis.

In it, the Pope expresses his concern for civilization's current situation and touches on several important global issues; some of which threaten our standard of living and others, if continued, pose existential threats to planet Earth, mankind, and all living things.

The *Laudato Si* is subtitled "On care for our common home," a theme that includes his concerns for climate change to global warming to large population dispositions to the increasing gaps between the minority of *Haves* to the majority of *Have Nots*. He warns us that the current world model is unsustainable and if no long-term solution is found quickly, we will suffer the consequences of our actions and misdeeds.

Many critical points raised in *Laudato Si* mirror those of our Prophet Zarathustra, perhaps the world's first environmentalist, such as: respecting the environment and avoiding polluting Mother Nature, collaborating on solutions for our common home, considering ethics and morals in our daily life, and helping others who are less fortunate. He repeatedly points to the urgency of taking concrete step towards solutions before it gets too late.

Following is an essay on Pope's Francis *Laudato Si* from an ordinary Zarathushti, who claims no expertise on these issues. It is written with the heartfelt hope that it will catalyze more analytic discussions and in-depth critical writings by our own scholars for the next issue of The FEZANA Journal.

### THIS ESSAY WAS WRITTEN BEFORE THE VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS THE POPE TO USA

#### CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME—A REFLECTION ON POPE FRANCIS' LAUDATO SI

Although Pope Francis' message is alarming, he posits that information and knowledge can create the foundation for a better world and a brighter prospects for future generations of all living things and our planet.

We are all in this together; no one group, government, NGO, corporation, or leader can do the job. It will take dedicated and selfless collaboration to pull us back from the precipice. In this epic struggle for mankind's survival and improved conditions for all humans, we Zoroastrians innately believe and share in the Pope's worldview.

The *Laudato Si* have eloquently touched on critical points in this crucial time of our lives. But perhaps as a devoted Zoroastrian who firmly believes in humanity as per my upbringing in my Faith, I may be able to elaborate on the cause(s) of some or all the symptoms we are now witnessing and as described by his holiness, Pope Francis in his letter.

#### THE YIN AND YANG OF TECHNOLOGY

Throughout history, good ideas and inventions have been turned into bad. For example, the handheld phone has been a boon to relief agencies working in Africa, facilitating communications with



**Khosro Esfandiar  
Mehrfar**

# INTERFAITH INTERALIA

Religions Working for Peace and Justice

field facilities and international NGOs. On the other hand, rogue warlords use the same technology to terrorize and enslave populations. Whether the phone is good or bad depends on how it is used. A knife in the hand of a mad man kills, and in the hand of a surgeon gives life. Many optimistically view technology—in and of itself—as a solution for all of mankind's ills and woes. A one-dimensional and incorrect view, blind to the dark side of technology, which has contributed to our current survival crisis.

Technology is just an enabler, a tool, to facilitate the processes for the betterment of life. Eventually it is us, the humans who will use it for constructive or destructive purposes. I say this with certainty, based on experiences gained during my twenty-three years in the world of Information technology—from academia to government, commercial to business, and to the most important domain of all: People.

At the Industrial Revolution's dawn, we mostly used existing tools and created new ones to enable better lives and improve our standard of living. This worked for many decades until our priorities changed. As new technologies enabled us to enjoy increased leisure time, we gradually became more consumer-oriented; often buying, consuming, discarding, and wasting resources used to create products that we may or may not have needed. This very fundamental shift in our priorities is well-described in the Pope's encyclical.

## MASLOW'S INVERTED HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

We moved away from a benevolent, **Need**-based society where we helped each other to an egocentric, **Want**-based society where we rapidly developed **Me Only** mentalities. Personal wealth and ownership of high priced status tokens became the badge of pseudo-respect we garnered others envy.

***I need to emphasis that in my Zoroastrian belief, wealth and prosperity is encouraged. Material world is as precious and respectful as moral and spiritual world as long as we help others who are not as fortunate and blessed as us.***

And if we do not change our **Me Only** mentality, we will speed along on this destructive road with other members of the **Must Have** society, rapidly approaching the point of no return. That very expensive new car, with all of its glitz, glitter, and latest gadgets we bought last year consumed resources from around the world—many of which aren't recoverable. What happens when that car reaches the end of its life cycle? Where will its components end up? Now, multiply that one car by the hundreds and thousands of vehicles that are sold-used-junked every year around the world. We give as little thought as to where this car will end up, as we do to the other millions. The *Laudato Si* addresses these extravagant ways of life for the Haves and warns us of its global consequences. It encourages us to think twice, pause and look back on how far we have come and where we are heading.

To a degree, part of *Laudato Si* can be summarized as: Spend within our means. That is, first buy what we need, then buy what we want—then, and only if we can still afford it, without putting ourselves in debt, we may buy what we wish. The order of importance from Need to Want to Wish may reduce the amount of stress some of us go through just to possess items at any cost. The *Laudato Si*, elaborates on this simple fact of life by giving examples of how to live life simply.

Where and when will this vicious cycle of **Me Only-Must Have** end? We need a major **Paradigm Shift!** We need it in our lives; and we need it now—especially, in the developed western countries where waste is chronic and rampant.

I wonder if the creators of “i” products (iPad, iPhone, iPad, etc.) used “i” as a subliminal siren's call to the **Me Only-Must Have** segment. We will never know for sure

What I have extracted from the *Laudato Si* is that, the existing model, we all have got used to in the western



# INTERFAITH INTERALIA

Religions Working for Peace and Justice

society is no longer sustainable. What the Pope is presenting to the world in his encyclical is a message that we need to do a gradual but profound **Paradigm Shift**. The old model of living is not self sufficient and supportive of our future anymore and we will all suffer if we continue on this comfortable, but outdated model of living.

We, and our respective comfort zones, cannot avoid being impacted by events on the other side of the globe. With increasing frequency, disruptions caused by rogue leaders, terrorists, and environmental issues result in displacements of large populations—tragedies at the individual, family, local, regional, and global levels. Because of our global interconnectedness, we will eventually be impacted and suffer. The concept of a “Comfort Zone” will become a memory. The *Laudato Si* explicitly refers to these adverse impacts to the Only Common Home we all know... and have.

There are too many global issues of concern to name in this essay; his Holiness, Pope Francis, has articulated some of the major ones in *Laudato Si*. As a layman and Zoroastrian brought up in the fundamentals of my Faith, I share many common beliefs with the encyclical:

- *Deeply believing in the betterment of life for all.*
- *Seeking our own happiness in the joyfulness of others.*
- *Respecting our common home and her natural beauties.*
- *Keeping our environment pure and clean.*
- *Ensuring that we pass to our next generations all these beautiful precious and priceless blessings of Mother Nature, which have been bestowed upon us in a better shape that we received them.*

I have humbly and respectfully thought about a few proposed initiatives, which will be presented in the next issue of FEZANA Journal. For now, I found many similarities between the critical points raised in *Laudato Si* and what I have learned throughout my life as a Zoroastrian; therefore, the proposed initiatives are rooted in my personal Zoroastrian belief and the Pope's recent alarming, but timely announcement in ***Laudato Si: Our Common Home***, our cradle which in reality is just a tiny and fragile planet we call Mother Earth, not even a speck of dust in the vastness of time and space. Yet: do we respect our cradle... do we care for our mother earth?

After re-reading the ninety-nine pages and references of the ***Encylica Letter—Laudato Si***, the impression I got of its relationship to our Zoroastrian beliefs are:

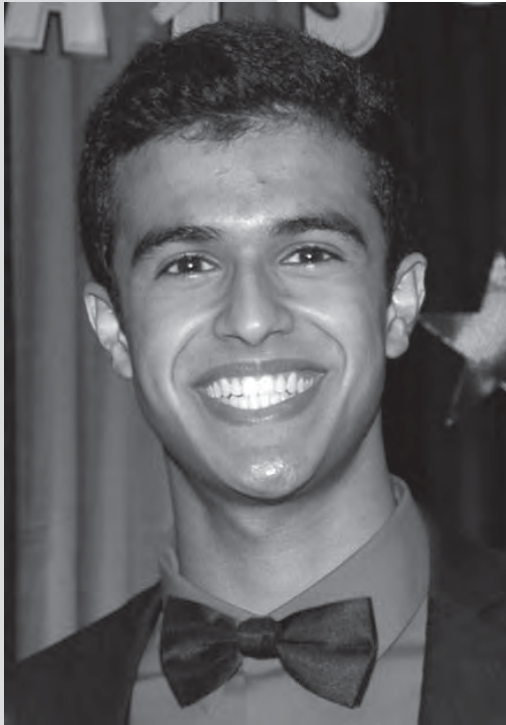
We, as Zoroastrians, believe we are all here for the betterment of the World and for all Beings. It is our duty to do so at any level and to the best of our ability. As a Zoroastrian, I am thankful to the Pope for creating awareness for our common home, a caring fact to what our holy prophet Zarathustra brought to us millenniums ago and, in addition, recognizing the undeniable fact that in our global society we are all tightly interconnected to each other and to Nature. This was a profound message brought to us by Prophet Zarathustra in the book of ***Gathas*** and by our Zoroastrian traditions and customs in holy book the Avesta.

I have summarized the Pope's message of his Encyclical Letter in the 2nd *Laudato Si* in just one statement using lay and simple words as:

***If we care for our common home and if we want a betterment of life for all Humanity on a tiny spec of land we call Mother Earth, we need a “Paradigm Shift” in my way of living.***

# INTERFAITH iNTERALIA

## LEAD INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON



My name is Ervad Vispi Katrak and I am the past President of the Youth Group at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston. I became a Navar in 2007 at the age of ten and have always taken part in religious ceremonies such as Jashans, Ghambars, and Muktd ceremonies. I recently graduated from high school and will be attending college at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Due to my involvement in the local Zoroastrian community in Greater Houston, I was approached to be a part of a prestigious youth leadership program called iLead with the Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston during my last of year of high school. They work with high school students of different faiths to help learn about other religions and bring the Houston community closer together. I was extremely proud to represent my Zoroastrian community to other high school students and to prominent business leaders who came and gave presentations to us. This program has been crucial for me, as I have learned about other people's faiths and become more knowledgeable.

Since I was the first Zoroastrian in the program, I was always approached by other iLead students asking me questions such as what does my **sudreh and kust** represent, or what steps did I take in order to become a priest. I was glad that I was asked about my religion as many people had not heard about it. It was also very nice to see so many people engaged in learning about Zoroastrianism. This program taught me many things, from religious tolerance to embracing my own religion amongst others and letting me become a more multicultural leader. One of my favorite activities from this program was student discussions over current religious topics around the world. These discussions taught me how to open my mind to the world and see things from many different points of views.

iLead has also allowed me to meet many unique leaders in the Houston community from the business, civil service, and faith communities. These leaders talked to us about how they started small and worked their way up to where they are now, and explaining to us the mistakes they made so that we as the next generation do not repeat their mistakes. In addition to my participation, I was also given a community service project to collect kitchen supplies for Houston refugees. I chose to hold the project at my center, and received enough donations that filled up my whole garage! Soon enough, in one of our sessions we met a refugee family and talked to them about the current and past obstacles in their life. I could sense a feeling of pride from them which made me realize that there are three types of people in this world – 1) people who are very lucky, 2) people who have to work hard to earn their success, and 3) the ones who are not at all lucky but are still some of the happiest and most optimistic people in your life you will ever meet.

It is programs like these that not only make you unique, but are also helpful to all young leaders once they move on into the real world. In our increasingly diverse world, conscientious and effective young leaders are the key to building a more peaceful and productive society.



# M I L E S T O N E S

## BIRTHS

**Aiden Kapadia**, a boy, to Tanya Mehta and Kash Kapadia in Palo Alto, on June 24, 2014.

**Arya Afza Kadva**, a boy, to Fredy and Alysha Kava, brother to Yazad Behram, in California on Sept 30, 2014.

**Amena Parendi Arafin**, a girl, to Parendi Mehta and Md Shek Arafie granddaughter to Nahid and Dinyar Mehta (Orlando, FL) in Visalia, CA on January, 22, 2015.

**Ezaad Bastani**, a boy to Naheed and Danesh Bastani, brother to Zarek in San Francisco, CA on Feb 18, 2015.

**Asha Mehta**, a girl to Daryush Mehta and Andrea Gabert, sister to Kiyan, granddaughter to Nahida and Dinyar Mehta (Florida) in Boston on April 19, 2015.

**Sven Desai-Sueptitz**, a boy, to Urvashi and Marco, brother to Sahana in Santa Clara CA. on Apr 30, 2015.

**Nora Elsa**, a girl to Pearl and Sean Driver, granddaughter to Maharukh Driver, and niece to Sheena Driver in Pittsburg, CA on May 1, 2015.

**Odin** a boy to Kersi and Anne (Gierhart) Contractor, grandson to Dorothy and Shahzad Contractor of San Jose, on June 3, 2015,

**Xerxes Aga**, a boy, to Lyla and Danny Aga, brother to Darius, grandson to Rohinton and Ruby Aga and Adil and late Veera Bharucha in Round Rock, TX on May 15, 2015.

**Kalen Ray Ayoup**, a boy, to Firuza and Robert Ayoup, brother to Ethan and Lukas Ayoup, grandson to Mehroo and Rohinton Chothia, Maneck Sattha, Gwen Ayoup and late Raymond Ayoup (Montreal, QUE), great grandson to Dhun and Yasmin Bhaya in ONT, Canada on June 1, 2015.

**Kamran Jivraj**, a boy, to Tanaz and Alim Jivraj, nephew to Navaz Khory, grandson to Farouk and Yasmin Khory and Amin and Naseem Jivraj, in ONT, Canada on June 18, 2015.

**Aryan Bharucha**, a boy, to Parvana and Burzin Bharucha, brother to Cyrus and Arnaz in ONT, Canada on June 20, 2015.

**Zoey Joon Hannah**, a girl to Saman and Aaron Hannah, granddaughter of Sima and Bahman Fereydoonzad, and Martin and Jim Hannah in Ottawa on June 21, 2015.

**Kaian Dastoor**, a boy to Jennifer and Homiyar Dastoor, brother to Nazhwan, grandson to Bapsy and Hoshang Vaid, in San Francisco, CA on June 29, 2015.

**Asha Zahoor**, a girl, to Naomi and Arash Zahoor in ONT, Canada on July 13, 2015.

**Aurelia Phelps**, a girl to Zara and Fred Philips, sister to Livia, in Ottawa, on July 25, 2015,

**Zai Gonda**, a boy to Ruzbeh and Arzan Gonda, grandson to Viloo and Pervez Gonda (Houston) and Meher and Khushru Patel (Mumbai) in Houston, on August 4, 2015.

**Ariyana Fitter**, a girl, to Sanobar Marker and Percy Fitter, granddaughter to Pervin and late Dara Fitter (Mumbai, India) and Phirozi and Eddie Marker (Pune, India) in Kirkland, WA on August 20, 2015.

**Zarah Merwan**, a girl to Pearl Panthaky and Kerman Merwan, sister to Syrah. Granddaughter to Meher and Jal Panthaky and Khorshed and Kersi Merwan in Mississauga, on August 20, 2015.

**Ariana Rustomji**, a girl to Pooja and Fawaz Rustomji, sister to Cyrus, granddaughter to Dinaz and Shahrokh Rustomji and Shukla Vig, in Unionville, Ontario, on September 14, 2015.

## NAVJOTES

**Zaren & Sohan Hormuzdiar**, sons of Jamshed & Natasha Hormuzdiar, grandsons to Er. Noshir Hormuzdiar, in Hayward, CA. on 17 May, 2015.

**Cossette Avari Ervin**, daughter of Mishez Avari and Tim Ervin in Rolling Meadows, IL. on May 31, 2015

**Hailey Kay Avari and Zachary Zubin Avari**, daughter and son of Jennifer and Zubin Avari, CT, in Rolling Meadows, IL, on May 31, 2015

**Natasha**, daughter of Minaz and Nozer Dungor, granddaughter of Farida and late Noshir B Dungor and Roshan and Behram F. Bhamgara, in Spring, TX on June 28, 2015.

**Freya Irani**, daughter of Mehraboon & Kamal Irani, WI, in Chacago on July 4, 2015.

**Natasha and Eric Patel**, children of Firoozi and Neville Patel, grandchildren of Aban and Dinshaw Dastur and late Dolly Homi Patel in North York, ONT on July 8, 2015.

**Neville Rustomji**, son of Dilnaaz and Eruch Rustomji, grandson of Rashne Patell and Rusi Rustomji, in Chicago on July 11, 2015.

**Zarius**, son of Tanaz Wadia and Mo Hajiani in Toronto. July 12, 2105

**Zaul Fereidooni**, son of Morvarid Dehmiri and Ramesh Fereidooni in Burlington, ONT on July 13, 2105.

**Rushad and Shiraz Austin**, children of Zareen and Pheroze Austin, grandchildren of Mobedyar Guloo and Marzban Austin (London, ONT) and Rupi and Lovji Hakim (New York) in Montreal, QUE on July 11, 2015.

**Helena Iranpur**, daughter of Meher and Mehernosh Behram Iranpur, granddaughter of Freny Iranpur in Montreal, QUE on July 25, 2015.

# M I L E S T O N E S

**Lilah Amato**, daughter of Shehnaz Pardiwala and Joe Amato, granddaughter of Perin and Soli Pardiwala, in Toronto, September 20, 2015.

**Dylan and Zain**, sons of Maria and Zach Moos, grandsons of Perviz and Phiroz Moos, in Montreal, on October 3, 2015.

## WEDDINGS

**Nadine Kanga** daughter of Cyra and Rustom kanga to **Daniel Weatherall**, son of Dr and Mrs Paul Weatherall, in Houston, on May 9, 2015.

**Niloofer Kiani** to **Mehrdad Mehrein**, son of Mahvash and late Behman Mehrein in Toronto, ONT on May 22, 2015.

**Farzad Sidhwa**, son of Fali and Zarine Sidhwa to **Anna Rustifo** in Canton, Ohio on June 6, 2015.

**Hufarish Mahava**, daughter of Viraf and Irene Mahava, to Nozer Golwalla (from British Columbia) son of Perviz and Dadi Golwalla (Mumbai) in Ottawa on August 8, 2015.

**Rayomond** son of Pearline and Sarosh Collector to **Sarah**, daughter of Karen and Ron Erickson in Galveston on August 8, 2015.

**Minoo** son of Roshan and Bomi Gazdar (Houston) to **Karin Heelas**, in Buckinghamshire, England on August 22, 2015.

**Ariane**, daughter of Mitra and Dr Hushang Namiranian to **Bardia**, son of Farzaneh and Dr Homayoon Moosavi, in Montreal, on August 29, 2015.

## DEATHS

**Fakir Pirojshah Jokhi**, husband of Gool and father of Sanobar Hector Mehta and Monaz Jadwindar Singh beloved grandfather of Shireen & Zia Mehta and Nishan & Anaiya Singh, (all of San Francisco Bay area) in Mumbai on February 24, 2015.

**Rustom Faramroze Sattha**, husband of Siloo Sattha, father of Farhad, brother of Guloo Tamboli, Maneck and Jehangir in Mumbai, India on May 10, 2015. (ZSO)

**Golbanou Bastanizadeh**, mother of Shahin, Shahnaz, Darius and Shahriar Darayan, mother-in-law of Gitty and Marjan in Houston on May 10, 2015. (ZAH)

**Homaiji Beji Dubash**, mother of Nina Homi Ghadially, sister of late Homi and Hoshi Patel, grandmother of Behramjee Ghadially, Rovina Zubin Sethna and Saneeya Hormazd Kanga, in Karachi on June 8, 2015 (ZSO)

**Hildegard Mehrebani** mother of Firoozeh, Gita (Rashid) of Montreal. Ardeshtir, Bahram in Arizona, June 10, 2015.

**Banoo Kiani Cham** on June 19, 2015 (CZC-LA)

**Khorshed Homi Canteenwala** (73) in Winnipeg, June 23 2015.

**Hilla Dara Deboo**, wife of Dara Deboo, mother of Zarin (Neriosang) Karanjia, Hoshi (Sunny) Deboo, Manchi Deboo, grandmother of Mehrab Deboo, Sherry Deboo, Kureshaan Roman, Zarvan Karanjia, great grandmother of Camran, Ariana, Olivia, Zarius and Joshua in Irvine, CA on June 29, 2015.

**Jeroo Darius Kotwal**, 78, wife of Ervad Darius, daughter of Dina and Pirojsha Sukheshwala, mother of Navaz (Shane) Patrick, BC., Shernaz (Philip), BC, and late Pervez, grandmother of James, Adam, Zoe, Kieran, and great grandmother of Kylie in Montreal, on June 29, 2015. (ZAQ)

**Sohrab Jangi**, 80, husband of Amy Jangi, father of Borzu and Daryush, father-in-law of Niloufer and Tinaz, grandfather Armaan, Ava and Maya in North Vancouver, BC on July 2, 2015.

**Mehraban Shahrivini**, husband of Simin Shahrivini, father of Mahyar, Mahtab and Khashaiar, father-in-law of Shahrod, Minoo and Anahita, grandfather of Sam, Shawheen, Aurash, Niki, Nima, Shayan and Sanaz in North Vancouver, BC on July 6, 2015.

**Jangoo Gagrati**, 87, son of Khorshed and Ratanshaw Gagrati, brother of late Nerges Rumwalla and late Freny Framrose, survived by nieces Jean, Dinaz and Shirine, died July 10, 2015. (ZAO)

**Minochere (Minoo) Burjorji Kharas**, husband of late Zenobia Kharas, father of Prochi Jamshed Mistry (Los Angeles, CA) and Spenta Rustom Mavalwala, grandfather of Nerissa and Zeritta Mavalwala, and Cheyenne Jamshed Mistry in Karachi, Pakistan on July 13, 2015.

**Dinshaw Framroze Bardoliwalla**, 70, husband of Hutoxi, father of Nenshad and Shehnaz, grandfather of Asha, Tyrese, Zara, Ava and Vera, brother to Hosi and Dinaz, died in New York, on July 14, 2015. (ZAGNY)

**Faramarz (FAJU) Godrej Irani**, 91, husband of late Golkhandan Yazdgerdyan, son of Godrej Rustom and Phiruz Godrej Irani, father of Sohrab Irani, Dolly Bakshai, Rustom Irani, Darius Framrose, Roshan Irani and Kashmira Torki, grandfather of Firoozeh, Shiraz, Darayus, Farah, Manijeh, Romin, Natashah, Roxana and Ryan in San Diego on July 17, 2015.

**Munchershaw Choksey** (74) husband of Mehroo, brother of Kersey, father of Pourushasp (Melissa) (Houston, TX), Mehernosh (Abu Dhabi); Delnaz (Hormuz) Dastur (Mississauga), grandfather of Farnaz Choksey (Houston), Faredoon Dastur (Mississauga) in Mumbai on July 29, 2015. (ZAC)



# M I L E S T O N E S

**Erach Munshi**, husband of late Perin Munshi, uncle of Feroze Munshi, great uncle of Hanoz and Minaz in New York on July 25, 2015 (ZAGNY).

**Homi Chinoy**, age 94 - husband of Perviz, father of Yasmin, Firdosh, Niloufer (Jamie), grandfather of Terri, Shantele, Shane, Aidan and Logan and great grandfather to 3, in Perth, Ontario on July 29, 2015.

**Parviz Kiamanesh** on July 31, 2015 (CZC-LA)

**Tehmi Lavangia**, mother of Piroja (Rusi) Press in NJ on August 3, 2105.

**Jaloo Collie (nee Sarkari)**, aunt of Neville and Yezdi Sarkari in NJ on August 3, 2015.

**Baji Kapadia**, 88, husband of late Yvonne Kapadia, father of Dr Cyrus Kapadia of New Jersey and Sam Kapadia of New York, brother of Farokh (late Gool) Kapadia, (Montreal) in New Jersey, on August 14, 2015.

**Cyrus Mavalvala**, 64 years, son of Soli and Roshan Mavalwala, husband of Dee Mavalvala, brother of Yasmin (Zubin) Petigara, Pervin Petigara (North Vancouver, BC), Aspi and Marzban Mavalvala (Karachi, Pakistan) in California on August 16, 2015.

**Pouruchisti Jamshed Bharucha**, 88, wife of late Jamshed, mother of Vahishta (Jambi) Canteenwalla, Montreal and Xerxes (Karachi), grandmother of Shauna and Zara (Fred Phelps), and great grandmother of Livia and Aurelia, in Karachi, August 18, 2015

**Dilnavaz Meer**, 75, devoted wife of Feroze Meer; mother of Sanobar Tamboli and Rupina Meer; grandmother of Darius and Alyssa Tamboli; and, sister of Hoshang Shroff, (Vancouver) Katy Behrana, (Karachi) Rumi Shroff (Vancouver) and Kersi Shroff (Washington) , in Houston, TX, on August 24, 2015.

**Edi Faramarz Pavri**, 75, husband of Parvaneh Khosravi, father of Armiti Faramarz Pavri, father-in-law of Kouroush Bastanipour, grandfather of Aundia and Bardia in New Westminster, BC on August 26, 2015. (ZSBC)

**Navaz Mistry** wife of Ronnie Mistry, sister-in-law of D Silloo Mistry, in Toronto, September 6, 2015. (ZSO)

**Minocher Behram Irani**, husband of Gulchereh Irani, father of Mona (Adil) Antia, Yasmin (Sarosh) Tafti and Dinyar ( Iryna) Irani. Grandfather of Rayomond & Behram Antia, Kaizad & Yazad Tafti and Benjamin, Sophia & Kashmira Irani, in Toronto, on

September 16, 2015.

**Gool Hoshang Wadia**, wife of late Hoshang Wadia, mother of Bapsy, Aspi (Kashmira) Wadia, Arnavaaz (Byram) Mistry, Pouri (Raphy) Satyavrata), sister of Byram (homai) Randeria; Dhunji and Dhun Randeira, keki Navroze, Pervin and Soli) Patel ; Prochi and Jamshed Sethna, grandmother of Afreed Mistry, Delnavaz and Behzad Dastur, Pirzad and Hormazs Wadia, Nilesh and Rita Satyavrata, great-grandmother of Parinaz Dastur. on September 16, 2015. (ZSO)

**Iraj Behmardi**, 62, husband of Fereshteh Bastanipour; father of Parmis and Parmida, father-in-law of Arman Sarfenia and Babak Kalantari; son-in-law of Shirin and Rostam Bastanipour, brother of Adokht and Roshan Behmardi; brother-in-law of Kourosh, Shahin, Shahnaz, and Farnaz Bastanipour, Armiti Pavri, Feraydoon Shahzadi, Fariborz Yazdani, and Daryoush Khanbadi; in Abbotsford, British Columbia, on September 17, 2015.

**Jamshed Limki**, husband of Freny, in Houston, TX on September 21, 2015

## Matrimonials for Fall 2015

**Fezana Journal will co-ordinate initial contacts between interested parties. We do not assume responsibility for verifying credentials. Contact Roshan Rivetna at [RRRivetna@aol.com](mailto:RRRivetna@aol.com)**

**Female, 34**, beautiful, good looking, from reputed, affluent Parsi family. MBA (finance) working in Mumbai. Enjoys music, traveling and reading. Parents invite correspondence from well-placed family of similar status. Contact [parsimatch@yahoo.com](mailto:parsimatch@yahoo.com). [F14.17].

**Female, 24**, 5' 4", fair, slim, Masters in Computer Application, appearing for CA from Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, Bachelors in Commerce. Enjoys sports, computer games, Internet, movies, music (plays guitar), dancing, reading, different cuisines. Contact [farhad\\_savai@hotmail.com](mailto:farhad_savai@hotmail.com). [F14.31].

**Female, 34**, pretty, 5 ft, 110 lbs, working for Financial Responsibility Unit for Pennsylvania State Government. Honest, loving, very

# M I L E S T O N E S

social, understanding and easy to get along with. Interested in meeting an understanding and caring lifetime partner. Contact (717) 514 1113 or [AfsanehMlrani@gmail.com](mailto:AfsanehMlrani@gmail.com). [F14.32].

**Female, 39**, post-graduate, working in life sciences in Mumbai. Down-to-earth, easy-going, peace-loving, caring and open-minded; interests include art, performing arts, music, occasional dancing, and cooking. Enjoy the outdoors, nature, photography, traveling, trying new cuisines, movies, comedy and light reading. Contact [myuniversitymylife@gmail.com](mailto:myuniversitymylife@gmail.com). [F15.25].

**Female, 34**, 5' 8", B.Com. Working in Mumbai. Take party orders and sell home made mithais and chocolates, do hair-styling, makeup and sari-draping. Specifically interested in boy settled in USA or Canada. Contact [tanazmistry@hotmail.com](mailto:tanazmistry@hotmail.com). [15.39].

**Female, 35**, 5' 3", B.A. working in Mumbai. Very friendly and caring; interested in settling in Mumbai or abroad. Contact [lifecompanion30@gmail.com](mailto:lifecompanion30@gmail.com). [F15.41].

**Female, 34**, 5' 2", M.Com and MBA. Working as Marketing Manager in a multi-national company in Mumbai. Interested in meeting a well-educated boy from a good family. Willing to settle abroad. Contact 91 022 2380 4088, [manashni123@hotmail.com](mailto:manashni123@hotmail.com). [F15.55].

**Female, 38**, Masters in Zoology and Botany (Bombay University) and Masters in Marine Policy (University of Delaware) working as Interior Architect in Mumbai. Outgoing, enjoy traveling and the outdoors; passion for art and culture and going to dance and music performances. Contact [abedbug@yahoo.com](mailto:abedbug@yahoo.com). [F15.57]

## Looking for a Soul Mate?

Have you seen the **new user-friendly matrimonial website** created to assist Zarathushtis of all ages. It was made possible through the personal funding assistance of a concerned gentleman in the USA. He writes "Ahura Mazda willing, it will continue

forever with my support, and that of other like-minded individuals. There will be no charge for participants." Please visit: [www.zoroastrianmatrimonial](http://www.zoroastrianmatrimonial)

Also try these matrimonial sites and services:

[www.chaalokaajkariye.com](http://www.chaalokaajkariye.com)  
[www.Matrimonial.Zoroastrianism.com](http://www.Matrimonial.Zoroastrianism.com)  
[www.zoroastrians.net](http://www.zoroastrians.net)  
[www.TheParsiMatch.com](http://www.TheParsiMatch.com)  
[www.shaadi.com](http://www.shaadi.com)  
[www.ParsiMatrimony.com](http://www.ParsiMatrimony.com)  
[www.ParsiShaadi.com](http://www.ParsiShaadi.com)  
[www.MatrimonialParsiZoroastrianism.com](http://www.MatrimonialParsiZoroastrianism.com)  
 Mrs. Gool Banaji, Parel, Mumbai, [goolpesi@gmail.com](mailto:goolpesi@gmail.com), tel: 91-22-2416 6120.

**PLEASE SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS FOR MILESTONES TO**  
**MAHRUKH MOTAFRAM, TEL 425-961-0298**  
**MAHRUKHM83@GMAIL.COM**

## LATE NEWS

**Perin Darabshah Randeria**, 95, mother of Gulestan (Farrokh) Deboo, of New Canaan, CT, Shanaaz (Farhad) Cana of Pittsburgh, Houtoxi (Farahad) Contractor, of Laguna Beach, CA, Noshirvan (Naushad) Randeria, grandmother of Anahita (Deboo) Pavri, Shanaya Deboo, Laila (Contractor) Bodhanwalla, Cyra (Contractor) Morena, Cyrus Cama, Shireen (Cama) Daruwala, Cyrus and Jamsheed Randeria, great-grandmother of Ariana and Darian Pavri, Iyana and Arshan Bodhanwalla and Ryaan and Riaa Morena, in Ahmedabad, India on September 26, 2015.



# M I L E S T O N E S

## SERMONS AT RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

IN THIS ISSUE WE PUBLISH TWO SERMONS DELIVERED BY

1 *ERVAD TEHEMTON MIRZA, OF LONDON, ONTARIO AT NAVJOTES OF SHIRAZ AND RUSHAD AUSTIN IN MONTREAL.*

2 *ERVAD NOZER KOTWAL OF TORONTO AT FUNERAL OF JEROO KOTWAL IN MONTREAL*

**WE HOPE OTHER MOBEDS MAY FIND THIS USEFUL IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES. (Please fill in the names as appropriate)**

**AUSTIN NAVJOTE: (RUSHAD & SHIRAZ)**

**JULY 11, 2015 – MONTREAL.**

**(ROJ ZAMYAD -MAH BAHMAN)**

### ***Rushad and Shiraz:***

You are about to take an oath of allegiance to the Zoroastrian religion; the religion of your ancestors; a religion that promotes peace, harmony and good living; a religion that our Lord Ahura Mazda – Lord of Wisdom has sent to us through our prophet Zarathushtra for the benefit of all mankind.

By declaring your allegiance, you undertake to live your life as directed by our Zoroastrian religion.

Repeat after me:

***Rajistaaio, Chistaaio***

Now that you have taken this path of allegiance to Zoroastrianism, in the name of Ahura Mazda, the Great Architect of the Universe, I invest you with this “*Sudreh*,,,,,” a distinguishing badge of a Zarhosti. “*Sud*” means *Pure or correct* and “*Reh*” means *road or path*. When combined, it means “*Pure or correct path*”. It is made out of cotton to signify simplicity. A pocket in the front (a *Gireban*) is a repository of your good deeds. May your “*Gireban*” remain filled with your good deeds. As a Zarhosti, you are to wear a *Sudreh* from this day forward, for the rest of your life

You will raise your hand in prayer as I invest you with your *Sudreh*:

***Yatha Ahu Vairyo***

In the name of Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom,

I invest you with this....a “*Kusti*.” a distinguishing badge of a Zarhosti.

It is made of wool of lamb,.....pure and spotless, an emblem of innocence. It is made up of 72 threads, to remind you of 72 chapters of our prayer book... *Yajashne*. The end of *Kusti* breaks into three parts, to represent three tenants of our religion. *Humata, Hukhta, Huvarshta*. (Good thoughts, good words and good



***Ervad Gev Karkaria on right performing the navjote of Shiraz and Ervad Tehemton Mirza on left performing the navjote of Rushad***

# M I L E S T O N E S

deeds). You are to tie your Kusti on your waist (the middle part of your body), to remind you to take a middle path (or a path of moderation) in all your religious undertakings.

As a Zarthosti, you are also to wear a Kusti from this day forward, for the rest of your life.

*Pa Nameazdan, Ahura Mazda Khodai, Avazuni, Gurze Khure Avazaiyad, Dadar Ahura Mazda...Rayoman Khoramand .*

Please join Mobed Gev and I, as we bless these newly initiated Zarthostis. Congregation prays together.



## SERMON AT NAVJOTE

ERVAD TEHEMTON F MIRZA,  
London, Ontario

Navjote –xxxx

*Life has many milestones.*

*Milestones mark our achievements or successful events in our life.*

*Like the first breath you took when you were born.*

*I doubt you remember it... ..*

*likely you were fast asleep just after you were born .....*

*but to your parents,..... you were a miracle .....*

*and a milestone in their lives.*

*Your first steps as you started to walk.*

*I am sure you took a step or two, and then fell.*

*You got up again and walked some more, and you fell.....*

*but eventually you learned to walk .....and to run.....and to jump  
a milestone in your life.....*

*and now, I am sure you can outrun your parents ..*

*Your first words ....*

*There is nothing more thrilling to parents than the first few words of their child. First they were just some  
“gibberish.....”, and you spoke...”mmmaa” and “daaada”,,, and then a few more words.*

*Your parents prompted you to speak some more.....*

*Certainly a milestone in your life.....*

*And now that you learnt how to sing.... and laugh..... and talk.....,*

*You speak so much that.....,*

*I am sure your parents have to tell you to be quiet...*

*Your First day at school....I bet you were very excited.....*

*I am not sure who cried more.... Was it you or your mom?*

*These are all milestones...or important events....or achievements of your life.*

*Today, you have scored one more milestone or achievement in your life. Your Navjote.*

*Today will be engraved in your memory as a day you were admitted to the Zoroastrian faith.*

*Till today, as a child, you had a job to grow, learn and have fun. You parents’ job was to love, nurture and*



# M I L E S T O N E S

*protect you. Today, your jobs are changing. Your new job is to now make the most of your life and take responsibility. Your parents' new job is to love you and support you in your endeavors.  
You are given a Zoroastrian religious and spiritual identity.....  
From this day forward, you can call yourself a proud Zarthosti.*

*As a Zarthosti, you are responsible for all your thoughts, all your words and all your deeds.*

*xxxxxx, ....I welcome you.....to the Zarthosti religion.*

*As you go through your journey of life, you will achieve more successes or milestones (or firsts in life)....  
You will go to High School or better yet, .....  
you will get your drivers' license.....  
(and ask your Dad if you could borrow his car)  
Your first day at University  
(particularly if you choose a University far away from home)  
and to your graduation...  
(nobody will be more proud than your grand parents) ....  
and you will shine in your chosen profession.*

*As you progress through all these milestones,  
keep your faith.....*

*in the Grand Architect of the Universe, Ahura Mazda*

*and follow the teachings of our Prophet Zarathushtra.*

*Keep your thoughts positive  
because your thoughts become your **WORDS**.  
Keep your words positive  
because your words become your **ACTIONS**.  
Keep your actions positive  
because your actions become your **HABITS**.  
Keep your habits positive  
because your habits become your **VALUES**.  
Keep your values positive  
because your values become your **DESTINY**.*

*So xxxxx,  
I urge you to take this opportunity to start your life,  
based on the fundamental teachings of Zarathushtra;  
Humata Hukhta Huvasta (Good thoughts, good words, good deeds)*

*May Ahura Mazda bless you.... as a Zarthosti.  
May you live a long...., healthy.... and prosperous life,  
May you be successful.... in any venture you pursue.  
May you live long .....to see your world fulfilled,  
May you only speak words of wisdom..... and friendship  
May you be guided .....by the achievements of our ancestors  
And may you be protected by the Great Architect of the Universe, Ahura Mazda."  
May Ahura Mazda bless you and watch over you.*

**Atha Zamyad, Yatha Aفرinami.**

# M I L E S T O N E S

## SERMON AT FUNERALS

ERVAD NOZER SORABJI KOTWAL.

We learn, through our Prophet Zarathustra, that we cannot live for ever, nor can we die at our own free will. There are those, that have well borne the burden of life, like our dear xxxx, and it is time for them to rest. There are also those, who are young and innocent, or in the prime of life, who are called away to heaven. Peremptory is the summons of death; none can resist it. Neither a priest, nor a king, nor a peasant can retard the faithful hour of death.

When **Spenta Mainu & Angre Mainu**, the twin primeval spirits of Ahura Mazda met, they created life & non-life. Life & death are like twins, they are inseparable. Death is life's inevitable accompaniment. However, life dies in body only; it does not die in Spirit. Death confers Life's liberty. Death in this world, is in fact, the beginning of life in the next world. "ZADO MARG". Life and death is like the chamber with two doors facing each other, - from one, one enters and it is life, - from another, one departs to start a greater and better existence.

Death, which leaves the body lifeless, liberates the soul that embarks upon its journey to heaven. Death has freed xxx from her material bondage. Her earthly work is done, so now she has gone to the world of peace and rest, where light fades not and happiness fails not. Our beloved xxxx has died in body to live in spirit a life higher & nobler than our thoughts can measure and our mind can conceive.

XXXXXX may no longer be with us, however, her memory will be with us for ever. We shall always remember the joy and love she imparted to us and all those around her during her lifetime. She lived a full, useful and good life and left a trail of sweetness behind, like a true Zarathusti. Lived her religion. This gathering today says it all. It is the living proof of the impact xxxxx made, on so many lives, during her short tenure on this earth.

xxxxx has gone to a greater and better existence, however, her family and friends are grieved and wounded from the loss of their dear one, who had shared their joy and sorrows in this world. Life suddenly seems to them, shorn of it's sweetness, and the world seems to have lost it's light. Everything around them seems dead and dismal. We pray, dear Ahura Mazda that you heal their wounds, and wipe away their tears. Give them especially her husband xxxx and her children xxxxx courage in their sorrow, and grant them the strength to bear the suffering. Be by their side, so that they can lean on Thee, in their time of loneliness.

Finally, dear Ahura Mazda, we offer our loving remembrance and prayer for her soul. Help her to hear our prayers and sense our loving thoughts. Help her to be with us in spirit, help her to join us in all our good endeavors, and feel for us and love us as we feel for her and love her. Bless her soul in Thy safekeeping and let her remain wrapped in the warmth of Thy love. May the blessings of Thy Holy Angels **SAROSH, RASHNA, and MEHER** be hers for ever, and may her **Farohar abide in eternal peace and heavenly joy**.  
Amen.

(Reference : "Let Us Pray - to Ahura Mazda" by Noshir H. Vajifdar. Third Edition published 1984. Printed at Perina Printers, 87 General Patters Road, Madras-2. "Prayers in Remembrance of the Departed (pages 115 - 120) and "Prayer for the Dead" (pages 138 - 141).



## Lest We Forget : Grief is a Zoroastrian Rite of Passage

**Neville Gustad Panthaki**

I have had the opportunity to speak and interrogate the concept of grief within the context of academic discussions on comparative notions of loss, within interfaith discussions regarding the afterlife, and within palliative care programs that serve both the terminally ill and their families. Upon this occasion of Muktaḍ (Shenshai) I thought it poignant when asked to write a short article, to reflect upon the process of grief and its necessity from a Zoroastrian perspective. Dispose of what you may know of about the five stages of grieving by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), and instead contemplate grief through the lens of the six *Amesha Spentas*.

Let me begin by emphatically stating that grief is different from sadness or depression. Grief is necessary, constructive, *Khshatra Variya*...righteous strength and dominion exuded as visceral purity, the product of love, educative, transformative, and definite as a relative period of time. By contrast, suffering is unnecessary, destructive, *drug*...evil and sinful, weakness exuded as spiritual impotence, the product of selfishness, ignorance, paralysis, with a longevity that denies time itself. Grief is a Zoroastrian rite of passage because it represents a testimony to the value of the gift you had (life, love, companionship, fellowship, communion), and a proclamation that despite its loss one has faith enough to continue.

One distinction should be made regarding the process and chronology of grief, which is that it is a mistake to associate grief with 'closure'. Indeed, 'closure' is a false and wholly irrational notion. Grief does not come to a close and one does not 'stop feeling' loss. However the process of grieving gradually changes its methodology, perhaps from sorrow to quiet meditation to reflexive engagement with life. It is in this way, that grief is like *Vohu Mana*...the good mind, necessary, educative, and transformative.

Regarding the latter, grief not only transforms the person, but also acts in a transitional function to accustom the person to the new relationship which she/he has with the deceased. But make no mistake, the relationship is never severed and there is no 'closure' to it, it is simply transformed into something beyond physical (spiritual, emotional, memorial) which keeps growing. Unless you are a psychopath,

why wouldn't it? How do you stop loving? How do you forget history? Why would you injure yourself spiritually as well as commit a sin, by trying to 'erase' time or 'end' the ultimate divine gift and message that is love/*eshq/ishq/mohabat/fanna/pyar/prem*. God... *Ahura Mazda*? Although the jury is out regarding the Zoroastrian position on reincarnation, I would humbly suggest that this 'living on beyond the physical' is as good a temporal definition of reincarnation as any... *Ameratat...Immortality*.

More often than not, spirit injury and psychological harm are done to those experiencing grief by people who attempt to stifle the process. Many a time these are the people closest to the griever, who are 'concerned for the well being and sanity' of the griever and their capacity 'to move forward'. But since when did the best practices for moving forward become synonymous with disallowing human emotion? Stop and consider the cruelty that occurs when one is denied by family and community. Suffering is illness or selfishness, the *Fravashis* of the departed and all the *Amesha Spentas* weep as you forswear your oath to *Ahura Mazda* by disallowing life to continue and entrusting your departed to *Her/His* rapture; but the lack of fellowship that is denied by family and community to someone who is passing through grief is equally sinful and cruel.

*Ahura Mazda* made you conscious so that you could experience life. Death is part of life. Grief is this truth...*Asha Vahishta*...awareness, grief is a proclamation of faith and hope as much as it is of love and belief in God, Nature, Life and Humanity. Grief is, dare I say, a duty that you must uphold and collaborate with others to fulfil. It is the 'duality' of cosmic truth, this cycle...*Haurvatat*...completeness and wholeness.

Duly deny suffering and help those who are anguishing aimlessly, to recover. But be forewarned that all attempts at the forcible erasure of one's own (or others) spiritual hard-drive will result in failure. It is impossible because there is a back-up to default factory settings already in place...and its stored in... the 'Cloud' next to *Spenta Armaity*...Infinite Love/Devotion.

**ATHA JAMIYAT, YATHA AFRINAMI!**

# Obituary

## ERACH MUNSHI, FIRST PRESIDENT OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF GREATER NEW YORK (ZAGNY) DIES AT 86

1930-2015

**W**ith great sorrow ZAGNY reported the passing of its founding member and first president, Prof. Erach Munshi on Saturday July 25th, 2015.

Erach played a pivotal role in the early history of ZAGNY. Even before ZAGNY was formed, Erach and a few friends used to organize dinners for Jamshedi Nowroze and Shenshahi Nowroze, inviting every Zoroastrian in the metropolitan area they could find. In 1973, the community organized itself into the **Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York**, and Erach served as the first president for two terms. As president, he played a leading role in the search and acquisition of the property that would become the first Arbab Rustom Guiv Dar e-Mehr in North America. The Dar e-Mehr became the home of ZAGNY and the first Zoroastrian Community Center in North America. When the Dar e-Mehr Zoroastrian Temple Religious Corporation was created to manage the property, Erach served as one of the first six trustees. And in 1986, when the need arose, Erach was elected as president of ZAGNY and served two more terms.

Erach and his late wife Perin lived in New York for many years. In the early years of the community many people coming to New York were given his name and phone number by friends in India, in case they ran into trouble or needed a place to stay for a few days. As a professor in business administration at St. John's University he has often been helpful in pointing fresh graduates towards job opportunities and has used his contacts to help young people and

new comers to the area to find jobs.

About 35 years ago, Erach and his wife Perin began inviting the community to a lunch at the Dar e-Mehr to raise money for the **Udvada Fund**. The fund was used to help the poor, primarily priests in Udvada, Surat and Navsari and the surrounding towns and villages. The fund collects \$30-35,000 each year, not only from members of the ZAGNY community, but also from donors all over North America. Every penny collected was sent to various charities and temples in India and Erach personally checked on the proper distribution of the Udvada Fund each time he visited India.

The Udvada Funds will be maintained by ZAGNY in memory of Erach and readers wishing to make donations may send to ZAGNY.

Dar e Mehr Zoroastrian Temple  
106 Pomona Road Suffern, NY 10901

Erach is survived by his nephew Feroze Munshi and Feroze's two children Hanoz and Minaz, whom Erach helped to immigrate to the US.

**Our deepest condolences to family and friends of Prof Erach Munshi, and we wish them strength during this difficult time.**

**Obituary ZAGNY**



# Obituary

## *Piloo Nanavutty Jungalwalla*, A ZOROASTRIAN

SCHOLAR, EDUCATIONIST AND WRITER DIED ON AUGUST 18, AGED 101



**June 30 1914 –August 18, 2015**

Over fifty years ago, two Parsis were Principals of two newly set up Women's Colleges in Delhi. Both had been trained at Oxford and Cambridge; Dr. Dastur of Lady Shri Ram College in elite South Delhi and Mrs. Piloo Nanavutty of Janki Devi Memorial College catering to a first generation of women, just emerging out of purdah. Piloo aunty, as she was known to all of us, was first and foremost an educationist. This contribution, as well as her rebelling against the British during the Independence movement, wearing only khadi and Indian weaves, is not known within the Parsi community. Yet, it was her old students from Janki Devi, who came together when she passed away on Parsi New Year's day 2015, to offer tribute.

For the Parsis of Delhi and India her first contribution

was *The Gathas* which she wrote in collaboration with Dastur Bode. Yet, it is the little ***Fravarane: "I Believe", A Zoroastrian Child's Confession of Faith***, which ran into five editions and her monumental book, ***The Parsis*** published by National Book Trust which will keep her memory alive. ***Fravarane*** sold even in 1987 for Rs. 3 and ***The Parsis*** for Rs. 13. She donated every paisa that she earned all her life to further the cause of educating Parsis about their religion by her Book Trust set up at the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. Russi Lala once told me that of all the books on the Parsis that he had read, Piloo's was the most informative, a book which he used as a reference guide all his life. She held classes for the constantly changing Delhi Parsi population at various houses, including Dr. D.N. Wadia's beautiful home on King Georges Avenue. There Parsi children and their parents gathered and learnt Monajats, the meaning of prayers and above all, the right to question, through the simple story of a Parsi child Kershasp explaining "What is a Parsi", the faith, its prayers and symbols, to Vikram his classmate, who wanted to understand this strange religion.

Piloo collected awards and recognition all through the 101 years of her life. She was the first Parsi to work with the Interfaith Movement both in India and England. Her second book on ***The Gathas: Hymns In Praise of Wisdom*** won her the Padma Shri Award for her contributions to Zoroastrian studies. It was Piloo's donation of Rs. 6 lakhs which enabled UNESCO Parzor to initiate the Meherjirana Library Project which today is recognized as a centre for Zoroastrian scholarship globally.

It was not just in these external contributions that I remember Piloo aunty. She could find a *Nirang* of healing for a sick friend, a quotation from the *Zamyad Yasht* for a paper I had to write, and all of this would come to me neatly typed out by her with special annotations to help me understand and learn. Thanks to her devotion to educating Zoroastrians, she came back in her late 80's to the newly formed **Farohar** classes of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. She had taught Niloufer Shroff and others who remembered those classes, when their own children were growing

up. They then formalized these lessons and under Rukshana Shroff and Kerman Mehta the **Farohars** have completed over 27 years of activity across India and two new generations.

Piloo was married to Dr Nowshir Jungalwalla, a WHO expert in Public Health, is survived by her son Dr Hoshang Jungalwalla, her sister Perin Lalkaka and her sister in law Scylla Vatcha. Her father was Justice Nanavutty.

Piloo's end was only redeemed by her loyal servant Ramesh and his family. As she withdrew into a world of her own after celebrating her centenary at the DPA with a cake, songs and generations of her students, she only could recognize Ramesh's family. All her

friends had passed on and she was alone in a huge house which was full of books which she could not read and full of music which she could no longer hear. Her address book was full of names from literature and history: Yeats, Geoffrey Keynes, Kathleen Raine, L.M. Singhvi, Dr. Karan Singh and many others. She once told me how Kathleen Raine and she danced with W. B. Yeats and Jack, his brother, during a visit to Ireland. They all shared a deep sense of the Sacred Tradition and a belief in the immortal dance and dancer. Today, these mystics, writers, poets and Illuminati are together. May her soul Rest In Peace.

**Shernaz Cama PARZOR**

## PERSISTENCE SPELLS SUCCESS



*"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.  
Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.  
Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.  
Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.  
Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.  
The slogan Press On! has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."*

☒

**Calvin Coolidge**

*"Character consists of what you do on the third and fourth tries."*

☒ James A. Michener

*"We are made to persist, that's how we find out who we are."*

**Tobias Wolff**



# Books & ARTS

## Cyrus The Great

By Sam Kerr , Sydney, Australia

Publishers - Lulu ([lulu@email.lulu.com](mailto:lulu@email.lulu.com)) pgs 334

Price In US and Canada \$11.82+postage and shipping , In Australia Aud \$19.95; in UK Pound Stirling 8.99

**WHEN ORDERING THE BOOK ON LINE PLEASE TYPE THE FULL NAME OF THE BOOK IN THE SEARCH LINE**

### CYRUS THE GREAT– CELESTIAL SOVEREIGN

#### AUTHOR'S COMMENTS

Cyrus the Great lived 599-529 BCE and ruled 559-529 BCE.

The book unfolds the life of one who lived well, as history has documented, and, how he brought about a beneficent civic and civil order much ahead of his times.

Born in an obscure tribal region surrounded by archaic states where rulers inflicted their cruel will upon the subjects, Cyrus realized, early in life, that the imposition of a common model on everyone leads only to a decline of individuality and anarchy and, brings all progress to a halt.

The book is a quasi-historical narrative, a fictionalized historical biography, tracing Cyrus's life from birth to death stepwise in a chronological order, relying on archaeology, the Old Testament and

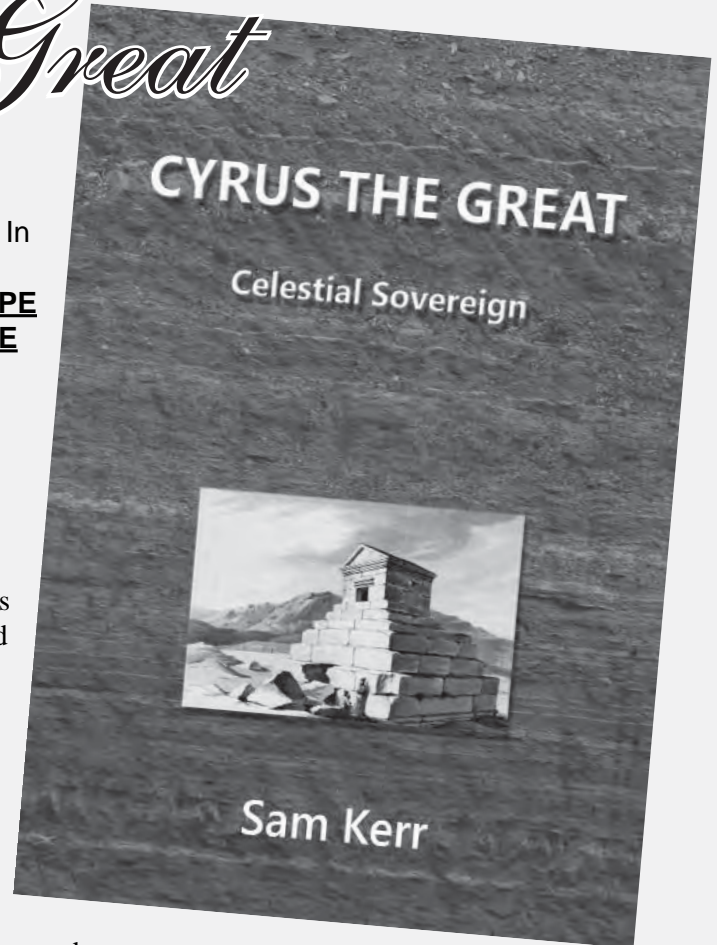
other legitimate sources in the search for valid clues. Included is a study into the nature of a wide variety of peoples, their cultures, habits, inclinations, manner of speaking and their differing way of life of the time. The few minor gaps in the narrative, where conclusive pointers were not obviously forthcoming, have been filled by justifiable inference and a few likely names and events from the Avestan texts hoping to enhance the lucid flow of the narrative. The original Avestan, Old Iranian, Hebrew and Semitic names, assisted by Greek, Latin and Vedic equivalents in the foot-notes have been retained. The addition of fictional material was done with a hope to place emphasis on his humanitarian facets, which changed the prevailing chaotic way of life to a new 'World Order' in the, then, known Classical World.

There is an 'Introduction' depicting the early occurrence of Indo-Iranian civilization of relevance to the narrative in the known ancient Classical World. Historical genealogy of the contemporary rulers of other lands in the ancient Classical World and the chronology of events, relevant to the subsequent unfolding of the life of this great human, have been tabulated. There are **two full-page maps** of this ancient region. There are **three more ancient maps** in the narrative to help follow the movements of the Great King during his many conquests in the vast hinterland of Eurasia.

Clearly, Cyrus has personified the superior worth of unassuming simplicity, asserted by humanitarian deeds in life. He was the first human to be titled 'The Great' in documented history, certainly not for indeterminate reasons.

**Sam Kerr**, born in Mumbai of Zarathushti parents, is a staunch follower of the Zarathushti religion. Has written extensively. Sam is a surgeon by profession.

**About the cover** An old painting of the Tomb of Cyrus dated 1818 by Sir Robert Porter, an explorer, writer and Iranologist reflects the poignant end in the last page.





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