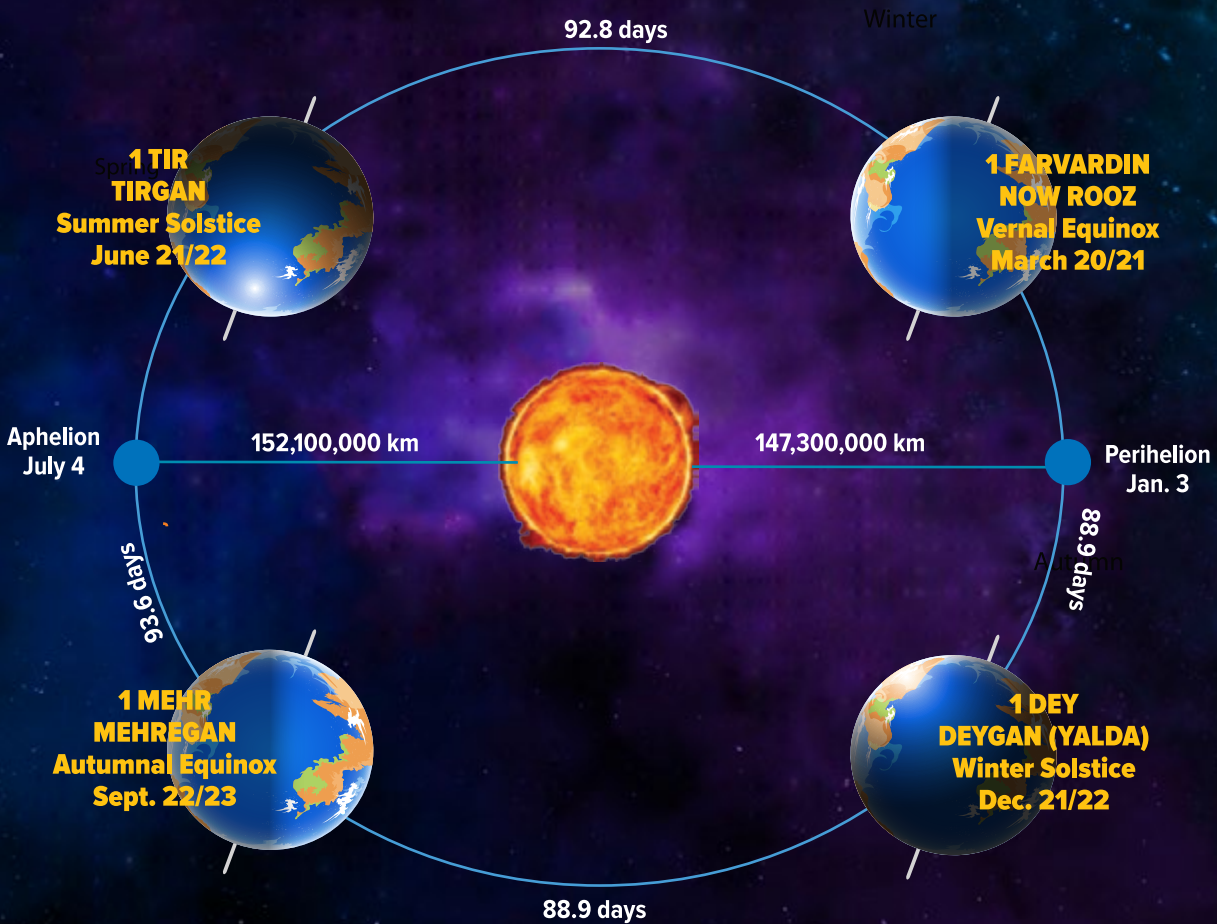


JOURNAL

Tir – Amرداد – Shehrever 1385 AY (Fasli) • Behman – Spendarmad 1385 AY, – Fravardin 1386 AY (Shenshai) • Spendarmad 1385 AY, – Fravardin – Ardibehesht 1386 AY (Kadimi)

Zarathushti Festivals: Mehregan Bundahishn 25:25 LONG BEFORE GALILEO





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FEZANA JOURNAL

PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

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FALL 2016:

ENJOYING YOUR SENIOR YEARS IN NORTH AMERICA

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WINTER 2016

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Explanation of the Cover
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1385 AY (Fasli)
1385 AY Fravardin
1385 AY (Shenshai)
1385 AY (Kadimi)

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www.fezana.org



Editorial

A Word from the Editor

Dear reader

When I accepted to be the editor of the Journal 10 years ago, I was determined to bring you informative and high quality issues 4 times a year, give a platform to young and budding writers to showcase their talents, a publication which was relevant to the young and old, a publication which the community would be proud to display in their homes and on their coffee tables. And we have delivered to you a very high quality publication, with pictures, sometimes in color, relevant topics of interest and news about our local and international community activities and achievements.

Today, I would like to introduce you to the great Journal team who is instrumental in producing these beautiful issues four times a year at a nominal price of \$25 a year. Producing a journal does not just happen, it comes from hard work, commitment, determination, but above all complete co-operation and trust in your team that all will be delivered on time. And all this on voluntary effort. The culture of volunteerism is alive in building the Zarathushti community in the second diaspora.

The editor in chief discusses with the publication chair Behram Pastakia, the theme for the cover story, a guest editor is named, articles are solicited, once received they are edited by the guest editor and the language editor, Doug Lange, then sent to Shahrokh Khanizadeh to format the text and images, the proof readers Vahishta Canteenwala, Yasmin Pavri and Nazneen Khumbatta go into action to read the articles with sharp eyes for any errors. Feroza Fitch in the meantime develops the beautiful covers for the Journal appropriate for the cover story. The articles then go back to Shahrokh for preparing the material for Printing at Regal Press by Marzi Byramji and his staff. The galley copy comes back to the editor-in-chief for a final proof reading, and signing off before it is printed. While this is going on Arnavaz Sethna our subscription manager is busy reminding subscribers to renew, processing new subscriptions and preparing labels for mailing. Once the printing is completed they are mailed from Regal Press. After that we have no control over the US and Canadian postal system.!!! The issues are also placed on the website by our IT specialist and FEZANA VP Arzan Sam Wadia, Aban Rustomji, the FIRES library expert

researches the authenticity of materials and book titles. In this process we must not forget to thank the authors, Zarathushtis and friends of Zarathushtis who provide their expertise and scholarly knowledge pro-bono to the Journal. I thank you all, very sincerely, too numerous to name individually.



Once the cover story is determined the whole process for each issue takes three months from start to finish. However the investment of time and thinking for soliciting the theme, the guest editor, and the authors starts much before three months. I always find myself living in the future, thinking and preparing for the next issues !!!

For the past 10 years the subscription rate has remained the same at US\$25, the printing and mailing costs have skyrocketed and advertisement support has shrunk. A quality product cannot be maintained at a cost below what it costs to produce. Reducing mailing cost is the first step in our cost-saving efforts. A survey was sent asking you as to your preference whether you would like to read the journal on line or continue receiving your hard copies. To date 303 of you have responded with 68.98% wanting to continue with the hard copy and 31.02% with an on line version. Many of you offered to make a donation to the Journal to keep it operating. We appreciate your gesture and all your constructive advice to reduce printing costs. We look forward to your donation. Many of you said "please increase the subscription rate". We have heard you, for new subscribers and for renewals, the subscription rate will now be \$35 for 1 year for a print copy for US and Canada. We have also heard those who opt for reading online. You will get your wish as well. We appreciate and thank you for all your past support. You have been our loyal readers and we want to continue to serve you and our beloved community. Without you, dear reader there would be no FEZANA JOURNAL, so keep those letters and comments coming.

Dolly Dastoor
Editor-in-chief

A Message from FEZANA President

The Next Generation is Stepping Up!

Many years ago, an Interfaith Group requested FEZANA to send a short Zoroastrian prayer to be inscribed on a satellite orbiting the Earth. I sent *Ashem Vohu*, as one of the three cardinal prayers, with their translations. To me, *Ashem Vohu* is a daily reminder to live up to a standard of righteousness, while performing my daily activities with pride and joy.

It is in this spirit of righteousness that a group of young and vibrant individuals have joined me as members of the newly elected FEZANA Executive. We invited our next generation to step up and lead, and they have done just that!

Arzan Sam Wadia, Webmaster for many, including fezana.org, and Afreed Mistry, FEZANA's Main Representative at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, are probably familiar to you. Arzan joins the FEZANA Executive as Vice President and Afreed has taken on the responsibilities of Assistant Secretary.

Percy Master, who has been a community contributor for many years in Houston and Denver, joins the Executive as Secretary. And, finally, Nilufer Shroff returns as FEZANA Treasurer. She has contributed immensely in the last term in establishing the processes for handling financial affairs and continues to do so today.

Passing the baton of community leadership to the next generation is not an overnight process. I am encouraged that when we asked for volunteers to play leadership roles, we received encouraging responses from new individuals. Debra Kolah, Nawaz Merchant, Ardeshir Irani, Afsaan Kermani, Guloo Austin, Shara Godiwala, and Pesi Vazifdar have all volunteered for various FEZANA committees to serve as co-chairs with respected veteran community leaders like Aban Rustomji, Ratan Mistry, Maneck Bhujwala, Dolly Dastoor, Saghar Javanshir, Behram Pastakia and Rohinton Rivetna. Shernaz Minwalla and Maneck Bhujwala extended their roles, working in the Religious Education and Research and Preservation Committee under the stewardship of Lovji Cama and Ervad Jehan Bagli.

This is a wonderful beginning. I am excited to work with these committed individuals and others who are



considering stepping up. We must also continue to build on our engagement with the next generation by inspiring their involvement with the community in different ways that matter to our lives in North America. We are always looking for more volunteers, so come join the team!

It's time for all hands on deck! New and experienced, men and women, Parsi and Persian – Zoroastrians all! Join the FEZANA Executive and other volunteers in working to make our Zoroastrian community in North America known as one that may be small in numbers, but enormous in its contribution to the world... a contribution that is guided by the principle of righteousness and preserves all that is good in this world that our children will inherit.

Hama Zor, Hama Asho Bade!
May we be united in righteousness!

Homi D. Gandhi
President, FEZANA
July 4, 2016

OpEd

Davood N. Rahni
New York 2016 Summer



The dwindling worldwide Zoroastrian population of 250,000, that has mainly resided in Iran and India, can trace their several millennia-old heritages back to the first monotheistic religion and their Persian lineage. Since the early 20th century, there has also emerged respectable diaspora clusters in the Americas, Europe and even some in the rest of Asia, Oceania and Africa. Zoroastrians have remained among the most vibrant communities contributing immensely through generating capital and employment opportunities, as well as their altruism, volunteerism, and philanthropy, extended toward the socio-economic development of their respective societies at-large and humanity as a whole.

FEZANA Journal, a well-revered publication, 30 years in the making, has and should continue to serve as the strong academic and communication bridge that binds all Zoroastrians together. FEZANA Journal is not only enjoyed by the Zoroastrians of the 27 associations in North America, but is also reviewed by some avid readers from the 250 million enthusiasts worldwide who possess an ancient linkage to the cultural aspects of Zoroastrianism. FEZANA Journal as an enlightening window, showcases the historical and seminal contributions of Zoroastrians to humanity, historical and contemporary, specially to educate and empower its youths and also the world. Accordingly, it has earned your trust and, thus, merits your unequivocal support, not only through individual and temple based subscriptions, but also through your bequest, endowments and capital support. One could envisage one issue or four issues in a year be dedicated to a specific family's name, or to pay tribute to a recently deceased. Moreover, every member of the community should serve as a FEZANA Journal ambassador by promoting it through subscriptions and fund drives; or, consider contributing to its content as an essay author or news reporter. Zoroastrians, at heart or by practice: let us all make a reinvigorated and conscientious effort to further elevate FEZANA Journal quality, stature, and readership, thereby better serving not only the North American community, but progressively our community at-large and beyond. I challenge the community's philanthropists and benefactors in particular, to once again rise and provide substantial funds to endow FEZANA Journal for our future generations.

Davood N. Rahni has served as the professor of analytical chemistry—and the former (int.) associate provost for academic affairs—at Pace University New York since the mid-80s. He is a prolific author, having written several hundred manuscripts and essays, poems and prose, and a recent book, **Bio-imaging in Neurodegenerations**; he has also held adjunct professorships in Environmental Law at Pace School of Law and in dermatology at New York Medical College. As a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar in Denmark, he has held visiting professorships at the universities of Oxford, Rome, Guilan, Tehran, and Florence. His main passion, however, is to learn and share his perspectives on the history, culture, and current affairs of Iran and the Iranians in diaspora (drahni@optonline.net).

Explanation of the Cover

Our ancient Persians knew of the revolution of the Earth around the Sun and they divided the seasons into months (Yehizaki) according to Bundahishn 25:25:
Spring months are Farwardin, Ardwhisht, Hordad
Summer months are Tir, Amordad, Shahrewar
Autumn months are Mehr, Aban, Adar
Winter months are Dey, Vohuman, Spandarmad.

FEZANA HOLDS THE 29TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, APRIL 29-MAY 1 2016 IN NOVI, MICHIGAN

The 29th Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America was held Friday 29th April to Sunday May 01, 2016, hosted by the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan and held at the Holiday Inn Farmington Hills in Novi, Michigan. Nearly 100 delegates representing the various FEZANA Member Associations, Small Groups and the various Committee Chairs attended this three day event. From the 29 member associations 16 sent representatives.

Pre-AGM Events

The AGM was preceded by the North America Regional Meeting of the World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce chaired by the newly elected president Edul Daver.

The discussions included ways and means to foster more interaction with FEZANA Member associations both locally and globally.



2015-16 FEZANA Executive, From left, Zenobia Damania, Office Administrator, Nilufer Shroff, Treasurer, Homi Gandhi VP, Katayun Kapadia, President and Saghar Javanshir, Secretary

Two Pre-AGM Sessions organized by FEZANA were held on Friday afternoon. The first one was the Seniors 55+ survey conducted by Navaz Merchant (ZAGNY) and Dolly Dastoor (ZAQ). The presentation discussed the findings of their survey. The session was video recorded. The second session was on Funds and Finances by Ratan Mistry (ZANC) Co-Chair of the Funds and Finance Committee. The session discussed ways and means of fundraising for FEZANA activities.

Friday evening saw the attendees gather at a local community center where everyone networked with the local Zarathushti community over dinner. The results of the FEZANA Executive elections were announced, followed by Member Association Reports presented by the various Presidents or FEZANA representatives present.

Katayun Kapadia, President FEZANA 2012-2016 finished her two 2 year terms and retired from her position. She will continue as FEZANA's Congress Committee Chair. Katayun was complimented by all for her excellent leadership and stewardship of FEZANA over the last 4 years

Saghar Javanshir, Secretary FEZANA 2015-17 stepped down from her post. Saghar's contribution to the FEZANA cause and her integral role within the Executive was appreciated.

The new elected FEZANA Executive 2016-2017 is

Homi D. Gandhi, President; Arzan Sam Wadia, Vice-President
Nilufer Shroff, Treasurer; Percy Master, Secretary, Afreed Mistry, Assistant Secretary.

Highlights

- \$21,000 was spent to send 36 youth to the 6th World Youth Congress in New Zealand, December 2015. Kayraz Irani presented a report.

- 13 youth from 7 countries including Iran (for the first time) attended the Return to Roots trip to India. A similar trip to Iran in two years is being planned. It was emphasized that such visits foster Zoroastrian identity and all associations were urged to donate to this worth cause.

- Fezana awards 6 scholarships of \$2000 each to 3 undergraduates and 3 graduates in addition to endowed scholarships

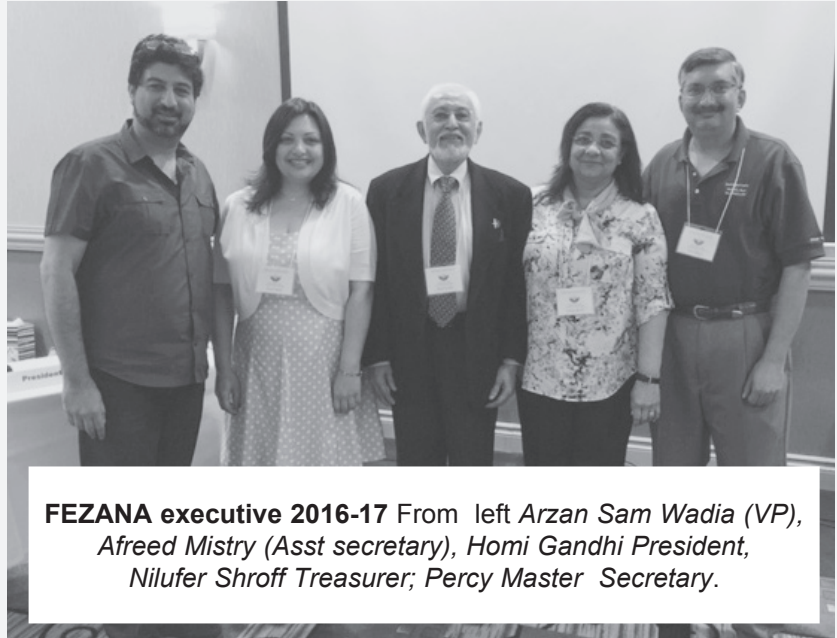
- The Faculty position at Stanford University in Zoroastrian Studies has been committed to be supported for the 3 three more years by FEZANA, 10 associations have pledged financial support.

- The FIRES now has a collection of 1004 catalog resources and 1146 holding records with a growing donation of books and other ,materials

- FEZANA website has an average of over 620 visitors a day from over 100 countries

for a total of over 226,000 clicks. The website handled over 180 Journal subscription renewals in 2015 . The FEZANA Bulletin goes to over 1500 readers, the facebook page has over 1,700 subscribers.

- FEZANA participated in over 16 interfaith activities throughout the year



FEZANA executive 2016-17 From left Arzan Sam Wadia (VP), Afreed Mistry (Asst secretary), Homi Gandhi President, Nilufer Shroff Treasurer; Percy Master Secretary.

30th Annual General Meeting 2017

Zoroastrian Association of Houston was awarded the bid to host the 2017 FEZANA Annual General Meeting

World Zoroastrian Congress June 1- 4 2018, in Perth, Australia.

World Youth Congress 2019 California

FEZANA Member Associations will be hosting the next WZYC in 2019. The winning bid was awarded to the California Zoroastrian Center (CZC).

Annual ZAOM Gala The local Zarathushti community presented an excellent Gala Banquet on Saturday night. with an entertainment program performed by the children of ZAOM. They sang an English version of *Chaiye hame Zarhosti*. (see page 7) A beautiful purple gara saree was raffled off and the lucky winner was Perinaz Gandhi from Washington, DC The Gala was a sold out event with over 220 people attending. There was a very palpable joyous community spirit in the air that evening.

The AGM ended on Sunday with the conclusion of all business and the approval of the budget for the year 2016-2017. A vote of thanks was proposed to the outgoing Executive. Thanks were also offered to the host association ZAOM who did an excellent job in hosting this AGM, and all those who attended left with wonderful memories that will last for many years.

For the regular items discussed on the agenda viz committee reports, other deliberations please visit www.fezana.org or read the Fezana bulletin May 2016.

MICHIGAN CHILDREN SING "WE ARE ZOROASTRIANS:" TO THE TUNE OF CHAIYYE HAME ZARATHUSHTI AT THE FEZANA AGM IN NOVI, MICHIGAN



From left to right:

Kayan Mehta (9), Skyla Chinoy (4), Zoish Mehta (14), Farishta Sachwani (7), Ferzeen Kavarana (6), Farah Kavarana (9), Jennifer Bugli (17), Cameron Chinoy (6), Rohin Bugli (10).

"We are Zoroastrians" was sung by little Zoroastrian children at the Michigan GALA night accompanied by the Ukulele.

The song was written by Anahita Kavarana for the current and future Zoroastrian generations of the English-speaking countries as in North America so that they may fully understand and appreciate each word they sing and be able to sing the song with passion and pride! Anahita and her two daughters figured out the musical chords to play the tune while singing the song.

Anahita would sincerely like to make this rendition available to as many Zoroastrian parents and children as possible so they can play the music as well as sing the song with ease. This simple song captures the true spirit of being a Zarathushti. The music and chords as printed will benefit the young, budding Zarathushtis to sing along.

Anahita Kavarana: awaterangel@yahoo.com

We Are Zoroastrians

Lyrics by: *Anahita Kavarana*

VERSE 1:

C2 G2 C4 C2 G2 C4
We are Zoroastrians, worshippers of Ahura Mazda,
C2 G2 C2 G2 Am2 F2 G4
Believers in Huvvarashita, Hukta and Humata.
C2 G2 C4 C2 G2 C4
Protectors of Lords Creations, keepers of peace and love,
C2 G2 C2 G2 Am2 F2 G4
Although we're just a handful, our deeds are well above!

CHORUS:

C6 G6 C4
We've kept the fire burning all these years,
C4 G4 Am4 G4
Following the path of our ancestors.
C6 G2 F4 C4
May Zarathustra's teachings be known to the world,
C4 G4 C2 G2 C4
May glory to Mazdayasnis be unfurled!

VERSE 2:

C2 G2 C4 C2 G2 C4
Canada, America, India, Pakistan,
C2 G2 C2 G2 Am2 F2 G4
New Zealand, Australia, Afghanistan, Iran.
C2 G2 C4 C2 G2 C4
Be it any language, be it any land,
C2 G2 C2 G2 Am2 F2 G4
Blending in its culture, we make it sweet and grand!

REPEAT CHORUS

UNITY AND WELFARE COMMITTEE REPORT



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The Unity and Welfare Committee, established in 2002, is a FEZANA committee designed to provide assistance to individuals, families, and organizations that are facing temporary difficulties due to medical emergencies, natural disasters, violence or legal issues.

Although based in North America, the committee works for the global Zarathushti community. Over the years we have worked with community members in need of assistance in: Canada, India, Iran, USA, Middle East, Pakistan, and New Zealand.

Given its charter, the committee works with its clients under a strict code of confidentiality. Each appeal is thoroughly researched by staff and if needed, expert legal, medical, and professional advice/opinions are also considered. When and where applicable, every effort is made to help establish a support system for the applicant with their local Anjuman or Association. We also monitor many of our beneficiaries to ensure that their lives remain on track and that the assistance provided is used for its intended purpose.

Each application requires certain documentation to substantiate the applicant's claims, such as doctors notes, bank statements, legal notice and so forth. We do not judge the choices made by the applicant, but rather assist them out of difficult situations, which will help them rise higher and live better lives.

Our committee is governed by the strict Terms of Reference (TOR) adopted by FEZANA. The TOR outlines the criterion to be considered when appeals are received and the due process for support.

Over the years, it has been this strict adherence to confidentiality and clarity in process that has allowed so many of our community members to place their implicit trust in us and the work that we do. We know and sincerely appreciate that the work we do would not be possible without the unconditional support of our generous donors.

Cases of this Quarter

1. Assisted a young man who lost his parents and his job.
2. Assisted a young mother with two teenage children who was evicted from her family home.
3. Assisted a woman, who was in a shelter, to gain her independence.

If you or someone you know is in need, please contact us. Be assured that we will do our best to assist. For cases that are not accepted by the committee, we attempt to find or refer the person to organizations and associations that may be better suited to provide the needed assistance; however, our relationship will continue until an adequate resolution has been reached.

THANK YOU to those who have supported the committee and its work over the past 14 years by sharing their wisdom, their listening ear, their guidance, and financial support.

Until next time: **Ushta-te** (may happiness be unto you always).

Advertisement Opportunity in the Fall Issue of FEZANA Journal

Our Fall 2016 issue of the FEZANA Journal will be devoted to **"Enjoying your senior years in North America"**. The FEZANA Journal has a wide readership among the North American diaspora (USA and Canada) as well as among the community stalwarts in India, Middle East, Singapore and Hong Kong. This beautifully produced magazine is published four times a year in print, and older issues are available online. The 26 member associations of FEZANA also funnel readers and individuals seeking services to the FEZANA webpages, where they can locate previous issues. This fall issue will be available September 2016. **Businesses that serve seniors** may be particularly benefitted by advertising in this issue.

This attractive issue will be a **resource for seniors**. Adults caring for seniors or approaching their retirement will also find in this issue a wealth of information and useful links. It will include a recent needs assessment of Zarathushti seniors in North America conducted by FEZANA and articles like "What do seniors want?", "Housing Options and Ideas", "Planning ahead for retirement", Resource lists, humorous articles and vignettes. **Businesses, financial and legal services, property developers, concierge services, investment services, orthopedic, geriatric and oncology centers, physician groups, health and wellness businesses and magazines, hospitals, nursing homes and adult day care services** may wish to advertise in this seminal issue.

We welcome your advertisements in this issue or in the upcoming four issues (annual advertisement).

All Fees in USD	Full Page	1/2 Page	1/4 Page	1/8 Page	Inside Front	Inside Back	Outside Back
Per Issue	___ 200	___ 100	___ 50	___ 30	___ 350	___ 300	___ 500
Four Quarterly Issues	___ 800	___ 400	___ 200	___ 120	___ 1,400	___ 1,200	___ 2000

Advertising Contact: Dolly Dastoor (1-450-656-2036) or dollydastoor@sympatico.ca

Ads are Black and White. Front and Back covers are always in color.

We suggest advertisement copy be directed at how your business supports *"Caring for seniors"*, *"Prepare for your senior years and enjoy the rewards"*, etc. We encourage the gentle use of humor. Large font, pictures and color will attract significant attention and help you generate relevant and actionable business leads.

The Journal will go online over the next year, to provide access through digital and mobile devices. In a phased approach we plan to build an attractive format with interactive surveys, as well as videos, clips and additional engaging content

Visit www.FEZANA.org to subscribe today.

In the 18th century, the Europeans became interested in the Avesta but the Zarathushtis were not of much help to them. Their knowledge was, at the most, limited to Pahlavi. In 1754, Anquetil Duperron, a young scholar of the Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris attempted to decipher the Avesta for the first time.¹ Later, other European scholars followed.

In the 1860s and 1870s, the linguist Martin Haug interpreted Zoroastrian scripture in Christian terms, and compared the Yazatas to the angels of Christianity. In this scheme, the Amesha Spentas are the archangel retinue of Ahura Mazda, with the hamkars as the supporting host of lesser angels.

At the time Haug wrote his translations, the Parsi (i.e. Indian Zoroastrian) community was under intense pressure from English and American missionaries, who severely criticized the Zoroastrians for—as John Wilson portrayed it in 1843—“polytheism”, which the missionaries argued was much less worth than their own “monotheism”. At the time, Zoroastrianism lacked theologians of its own, and so the Zoroastrians were poorly equipped to make their own case. In this situation, Haug’s counter-interpretation came as a welcome relief to the Parsis, and was (by-and-large) gratefully accepted as legitimate.

Haug’s interpretations were subsequently disseminated as Zoroastrian ones, which then eventually reached the west where they were seen to corroborate Haug. Like most of Haug’s interpretations, this comparison is today so well entrenched that a gloss of ‘yazata’ as ‘angel’ is almost universally accepted both in publications intended for a general audience [7][8] as well as in (non-philological) academic literature. [9][10] ²

Martin Haug’s misinterpretation has influenced the religion of Zarathushtra to this day. Haug was the first person to discover the Avesta which had given his interpretation of the Avesta credibility. His interpretation of the Avesta was expanded by later scholars and today, most Zarathushtis believe in them.

The lack of an internal source of knowledge of the Avesta language among the Zarathushtis and the constant repetition of the misinterpretation has made his interpretation “authentic.” Here it is appropriate to recall the anecdote of the Persian satirical character *Mulla Nasrudin*.

On a cold winter day Mulla Nasrudin, was sitting on a parapet outside his home enjoying the sun, when all of a sudden a thought came to his mind. He called out to a neighbour that was passing by and said, “I have heard, the neighbouring village is giving out free Aash (soup)”. Very soon, he saw all his neighbours with pots and pans going towards the village and as they passed by him they said, “Mulla, why are you sitting, in the neighbouring village they are distributing free Aash”. Mulla slyly smiled to himself and replied, “I am not hungry”.

In no time, he sees the whole village with pots in hand going towards the neighbouring village; he says to himself, “After all, may be it is true and I will miss out on the Aash.” He goes and picks up a pot and joins the crowd to get the free Aash.

The entire village believes in Haug’s misinterpretation, so maybe it is true. Mazda, Mazda Ahura,



Mehregan

Ahura and Ahura Mazda are all interpreted as God. That is, God is mentioned 353 times in 241 verses of the Gathas (on average, God is mentioned 1.4 times in each verse). Maybe that is the reason why no two translations of the Gathas are the same, maybe that is why the Gathas are difficult to understand, maybe that is why many believe that the miracle is in the sound: *Mantra Vani*.

What is fed to the brain as a child, remains forever. Nothing can effectively erase it in later years. This is the moral of the story of "Azi Dahaka" in the Avesta/(Zahhāk) in the Shahnameh, where the snakes on Zahhāk's shoulder have to be fed the brains of youths. The snake is the symbol of evil, in this case, it is about brainwashing children with established ideas. Unfortunately, the constant repetition of a wrong makes it sound right.

The Zarathushti festivals have had the same fate. At their inception, they were the celebration of Asha, the truth in nature, but due to circumstances³, the truth has been lost. On one hand, Zarathushtra is said to be the first to introduce monotheism, while all our customs and festivals are attributed to the worship of all sorts of Deities, Izads, and supernatural beings.

For a culture that has been applauded for its use of wisdom—even in the Bible—would the natural phenomena like Equinoxes and Solstices be the reason for celebration? Or, perhaps, the simple coincidence of a month and a day sharing the same name?

It seems that humans are prone to superstition rather than Truth. The title of the first Harry Potter book was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The author was rejected by every publisher in the UK; finally, she managed to publish it in a children series and received only a meagre \$4,000 for it. She then replaced the word "Philosopher" with the "**Sorcerer**" and sent it to America; today, she is the second richest woman in UK, wealthier than the Queen. The series have been translated into more than 35 languages—the Harry Potter movies have broken all previous records. Superstition sells internationally better than the truth.

In the following pages, we have tried to present you with both sides of the coin and give you food for thought.

May Wisdom (Mazda) Prevail
Fariborz Rahnamoon

1 <http://www.sacred-texts.com/zor/sbe04/sbe0402.htm>

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yazata>

3 Check <http://zarathushticalendar.com/> for more info.

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THESE ARTICLE ARE THE PERSONAL OPINION OF THE AUTHOR

Fariborz Rahnamoon was born in Yazd, Iran, and was educated in a Catholic school in Bombay. These early life experiences led him to research his own religion at an early age. He has a unique perspective on the Zarathushti religion and history, which is a result of over 40 years of research. He says, "The Zarathushti history that has come down to us has been written by its adversaries over the last 2,000 years and the Avesta has been deciphered and translated by Western scholars, thereby leading us astray." His findings and views are available on his website: www.ancientiran.com

His most recent project is working on the MazdaYasni calendar based on the Bundahishn, which is recognized as "the most accurate calendar from the 2nd millennium BCE that needs no adjustment for 110,000 years." It can be checked at <http://zarathushticalendar.com/>



Mehregan

MEHREGAN:

A CELEBRATION OF AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

FARIBORZ RAHNAMOON

Daryush the Great has left behind an inscription that says: ¹

A great god is Ahura Mazda ... who created happiness for humans.

Zarathushtis have always found reasons to celebrate and be happy. More than 23 festivals are celebrated every year, 11 of which are celebrations of natural occurrences, the rest commemorate important philosophic and cultural milestones.

Mehregan is the celebration of the Autumnal Equinox and the beginning of autumn, just as Now Rooz is the celebration of the Vernal Equinox and the beginning of spring. The Autumnal Equinox occurs on the 186th day following the Vernal Equinox. It is a natural event and is not controlled by any calendar; rather, the calendar was regulated by such accurate events in nature. The result was the Mazdayasni Calendar², which is explained in Bundahishn 25:25; today it is recognized as the most accurate calendar that ever existed, a calendar that needs no correction for 110,000 years.³

Naming the **Autumnal Equinox** “Mehregan” seems intentional. Contrary to some contemporary beliefs, Mehregan was not named to honor the ancient deity Mithra. For, with the coming of Zarathushtra, Mithra or Mehr (the ancient Sun god) and scores of other gods were supplanted by the one and only God—*Ahura Mazda, Creator of Wisdom*.

So Why was It Named Mehregan?

Zarathushtra preached that the **Truth** should be shared by words, not by force:

*Asha when you gain
With minds good use
Having realized wisdom
The path to righteousness
The ultimate message of Wisdom
Through words excellent
We shall turn (convert)
Those who do not know
By speaking*

Zarathushtra—Gatha—Yasna Ha 28.5 (FR)

This verse from the Gathas inspired Zarathushtis not to denigrate or destroy pagan symbols and statues, but to enlighten the pagans and give new meanings to their words, beliefs, and symbols. Therefore, Mithra or Mehr became repurposed to mean the physical sun rather than a god or deity. Mehr is categorized as a Yazata; Yazatas are not angels or gods, but a group name for the elements of Nature. Other Yazatas⁴ are the Moon, Stars, Earth, Water, Wind, infinite Space, and endless Time. Likewise, attributes, such as conscience, love, victory, truth, and wisdom are grouped under Yazata.

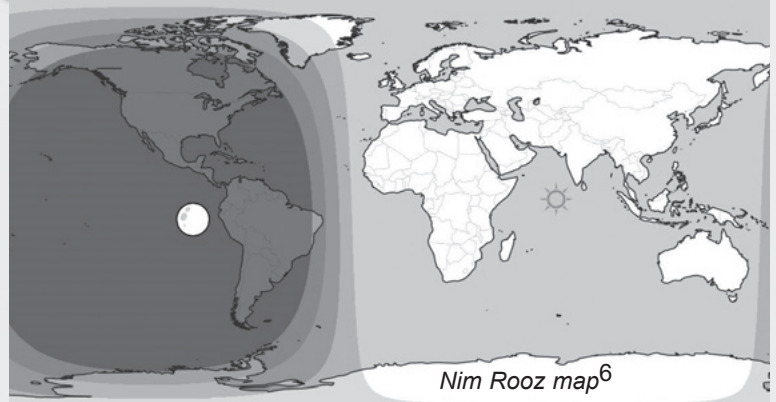
Mehr Yasht is a thesis on the Sun—it notes that the Sun’s rays purify and that Mehr, the Sun, always shines, even when it is not visible. This is why Mehr is symbolized as the overseer of contracts and promises. It also notes that when the Sun (Mithra) is overhead in *Vi-Maidhim*⁵ (“middle of the Earth”) the arms of Mithra (Rays of the Sun) holds the two corners of the earth. The landmarks given in Mehr Yasht designate 63 degrees longitude, as the center of the earth. Today in Afghanistan there still exists a province named NIM RUZ (mid-day). When the sun is at the mid-day position at 63 degrees longitude, there is sunshine all over the hemisphere, from Japan and Australia to Africa and Europe.

Thus, an important landmark in the journey of the earth around Mehr the sun, namely the Autumnal Equinox, is named Mehregan and celebrated. For that reason, **Mehregan should be celebrated at the exact**

Mehregan

moment of the Autumnal Equinox, just as Now Rooz is celebrated on the Vernal Equinox. Mehregan is not a celebration in honor of any Deity or Izad, as Zarathushtra preached monotheism.

Many historic events are commemorated on the Autumnal Equinox, like the coronation of kings and celebration of victories, such as the victory of Fareydoun over Zahak. These celebrations are coincidental with and not the origin of Mehregan celebrations. With the loss of the Mazdayasni calendar, the real origin the Autumnal Equinox no longer coincided with the first day of the month of Mehr; resultantly, lesser milestones (like the coincidence of month/day names) and events became associated with Mehregan.⁷



Celebration

Celebrations of most Persian festivals often last for days. Every major Zarathushti celebration has a symbolic theme around the number seven. For example, Gahanbars feature 7 types of fruits and dry fruits. Nou Rooz and Mehregan celebrations featured Haft SEENE, the Seven Trays, which were decorated with numerous seasonally available items.

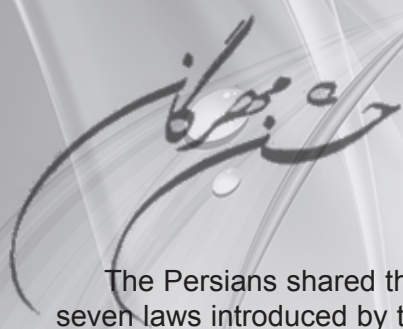
The number seven symbolically reminds us of the *Seven Eternal Laws*, the *Haft Amesha Spentas*, and our renewal of the pledge to progress toward perfection. They are based on the Gathas of Zarathushtra.

*Truly, the Asha (Truth) derived (2)
By the good mind (1)
Never before known
Among the wise and all creation
With it, make good rules, never waning (3)
Increasing righteousness (4)
Leading us towards Perfection (5)
Zarathushtra—Gatha—Yasna Ha 28.3 (FR)*

*And those who are righteous are so because of
Good deeds and use of the wisdom of the mind
In righteous way in tune with Wisdom in Existence
Their aim achieved as intended
And those assuredly are pleased (whose) result
Are known to be righteous, faithful, praise worthy (6)
Zarathushtra—Gatha—Yasna HA 28.10 (FR)*

The correlations between the Gatha and Amesha Spentas are:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1- Use your Good Mind to | 1- (Vohu Mana)-Bahman |
| 2- Derive the Truth in Asha | 2- (Asha Vahista)-Ardibehest |
| 3- With it make Good Rules never waning | 3- (Khas Atra Vairya)-Shahrivar |
| 4- Increasing Righteousness | 4- (Spanta Armaity)-Espand |
| 5- Leading us towards Perfection | 5- (Hurvatata)-Khordad |
| 6- The person who achieves perfection is Praiseworthy | 6- (Ameretata)-Amordad |
| 7- Such a person is in tune with the Wisdom of Existence and becomes one with the CREATOR of Wisdom | 7- (Ahura Mazda) |



Mehregan

The Persians shared this wisdom with everyone they came in contact with. For example, we find these seven laws introduced by the Persians in the Bible⁸ and the Torah, which have been enshrined by the Jews in the Menorah (Exodus 37:23).

In modern days “Haft Seene/Seven Trays” has been replaced by seven items starting with “S”, “Haft Seen/Seven Ss” (“S” indicating Spentas, the Laws). Each item has been given random philosophic meanings and some of the seven items start with “S” because of their Arabic names, thereby diverting people from relating it to the “Seven Eternal Laws” of Zarathushtra. This is understandable, otherwise the festival itself would be banned. In fact, during the past 1,400 years, Nou Rooz and Mehregan have been outlawed by most non-Iranian dynasties that have governed Iran—only to be revived when they were replaced by a Persian ruler. Nou Rooz, was banned by the Taliban in Afghanistan; and its revival by the Afghans is now opposed by the Saudis as being non-Islamic, as reported by BBC (March 20, 2016).

It is important that Zarathushtis do not get misled by misinformation; they should diligently preserve Mehregan’s original message and form of celebration. Celebrating Mehregan for any other reason sacrifices facts to fiction, which would abandon our ancestral scientific discoveries (such as the relationship of the sun and earth) and deny our ancestors the honor (Amordad) of its discovery—and yield the honor to Galileo. This has happened before! When our ancient knowledge re-emerged from Khorasan, in northern Iran, Persian scholars were forced to document our antecedents’ discoveries in Arabic, and for that reason they and hence their influence on the European Renaissance are today credited to Islam.

Time to Honor Our Ancestors by Reclaiming Their Wisdom

Now Rooz, Tirgan, Mehregan, and Deygan (Yalda) celebrate the beginning of the four seasons and the astronomical correlations of Sun and Earth. Seasons are not determined by calendars; seasons should determine the calendar. The Mazdayasni Calendar, based on the revolution of the earth around the sun has been recognized as the most accurate calendar and it needs no adjustment for 110,000 years.⁹ Scholars agree that this calendar was introduced in the 2nd Millennium BCE (1738 BCE). Despite this, the Mazdayasni Calendar continues to be referred to as the “Iranian solar Hijiri¹⁰ calendar”—which ignores the fact that Islam did not exist in the 2nd Millennium BCE.

We lost the Mazdayasni calendar due to circumstances beyond our control but now that we can we must proactively reclaim and promote our heritage and legacies

Khojasteh Mehregan Farkhondeh Baad May Wisdom (Mazda) Prevail

- 1 Darrius I the Great left 2 inscriptions at Naqsh- Rostam where he was buried; the upper register of which reads, in part the quote.
- 2 <http://zarathushticalendar.com/>
- 3 <http://www.timeanddate.com/date/perfect-calendar.html> and <http://zarathushticalendar.com/>
- 4 The Yazatas are Mah- (Moon), Tir- (Star), Zamyad-(Earth), Avan or Aban -(water), Thesis called Yashts written on these Yazatas as well as other similar attributes such as Wind, Infinite Space, Endless Time, Conscience, Love, Pleasure, Victory, Wisdom, Pleasure.
- 5 Mehr Yasht 103-104
- 6 Nim Rooz Map courtesy of <http://www.timeanddate.com/date/perfect-calendar.html>
- 7 See the story of Hiromba
- 8 http://ahura.homestead.com/files/IranZaminSeven/F_Influence_on_Religions_link.pdf
- 9 <http://www.timeanddate.com/date/perfect-calendar.html>
- 10 Hijiri is, the Hijrat, the flight of Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Madina.

THE STORY OF HIROMBA

FARIBORZ RAHNAMOOM

The **Hiromba** festival's history is very important to us as it helps us understand how the traditional dates of other festivals may have been determined in the past.

Why Reason was replaced with Rhyme? Why instead of the **Autumnal Equinox** we celebrate Mehr Mah and Mehr Rooz and, instead of the summer Solstice we celebrate Tir Mah and Tir Rooz?

The ancient Iranians had an in-depth knowledge of Asha and commemorated natural milestones with festivities. Their ancient science was lost twice. The more egregious was after the Arab invasion, as the Arabs killed the learned, burnt their books, forbade the use of Persian, and replaced the perfect solar calendar¹ with a lunar calendar. For the next 1,300 years, Iran was infrequently ruled by an Iranian dynasty, but whenever they did, most of them revived the ancient festivals. Of course, the lunar calendar was not of much help.

Hiromba is the name given to the Kadmi Festival of Sadeh. Today this festival is celebrated only in the Yazd village of Sharifabad, where Zarathushti participants gather from around the world.

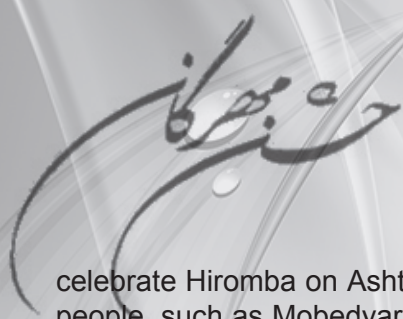
Sadeh, comes from the Persian word **Sad**, which means hundred. The Sadeh festival was once celebrated by the Iranians when they lived in the Arctic (**Aryaveja**), where they had seven months of summer and five months of winter. This seasonal pattern still exists in the Arctic. The Iranians welcomed the Arctic winter with the celebration of the **Ayeh Threm (Saarem)** (coming of winter) Gahanbar—Sadeh marked the hundredth day from the start of this winter. As the Arctic winter starts on October 23, (1 Aban), the hundredth day falls on January 30 (10 Bahman)².

While on the run for their lives after being branded as infidels, the remaining 7,711 Iranian Zarathushtis had no central organization or proper coordination; and, they were left with a bungled up calendar, which we now call the **Kadmi** (ancient) Calendar.

Since the Kadmi Calendar failed to track with the seasons, the relationship of Sadeh to the seasons was disconnected. But, because they knew that **Sad** meant 100, they imagined it stood for 100 days to Nou Rooz and so they celebrated Hiromba on Ashtad Rooz, the 26th day of Azar³ of the Kadmi calendar (April 9). Nou Rooz of the Kadmi calendar is on July 18, so 26 Azar (April 9) was 100 days⁴ before Kadmi Nou Rooz⁵.

After the ancient Mazdayasni Calendar was adopted in the 1940's by Reza Shah's government as the Iranian national calendar, the Iranian Zarathushtis gradually replaced their Kadmi calendar with the national calendar. While doing so, they added the 30 day names and the five Gatha days at the end of the year. They named this calendar the Fasli/Seasonal calendar—ironically, the seasons do not start on the first day of every 4th month like in the government's Mazdayasni calendar. In other words, only spring starts on Ourmazd Rooz, summer starts on Shahrivar Rooz, autumn and winter start on Amordad Rooz.

By 2000, only a few elders still followed the Kadmi calendar. Printed copies of the Kadmi calendar were no longer available. Keeping track of the Kadmi days and festivals without the printed calendar became a mathematical feat, then there came a chance for compromise. The Fasli and Kadmi day names coincided with each other in 2006. Mobed Niknam, who represented the Zarathushtis as a Member of Iranian Parliament, proposed to the Anjuman of Sharifabad that, since Ashtad Rooz coincided in both the Kadmi and Fasli calendars, they should keep the name of the day and forget the Kadmi month. It was agreed to



Mehregan

celebrate Hiromba on Ashtad Rooz of the Fasli Calendar, which is now on 26 of Farvardin (April 15) ⁶. Some people, such as Mobedyar Belivani of Sharifabad, do not think it was a right decision because the day count no longer adds up to 100 days before the Kadmi Nou Rooz. Although, the 100 days to Now Rooz was, in the first place, an incorrect assumption.

CONCLUSION

Although based on an incorrect premise, Hiromba (the Kadmi festival) the number of days added up to 100 and so they had a convincing argument. By switching the festival to the Fasli calendar, it lost that invalid validity. Now the future generations will have to find a reason for this celebration since it no longer adds up the 100, Sad. Since the Kadmi calendar, followed by many Iranian Zarathushtis, was not synchronized with the seasons, none of the festivals were “chronologically legitimate,” as there was no reason for celebration. Rationalizing the conundrum, the practice of rhyming month with day names was given prominence. However, that by itself did not seem reason enough, so Tirgan and Mehregan were also said to commemorate historic events. In the process, the science of the ancestors was sacrificed, and they were robbed of their right to being Amordad.

Since the festivals of Now Rooz and Yalda (Deygan) were celebrated by non Zarathushti Iranians, today it is celebrated at its proper scientific time, on the Vernal Equinox and Winter Solstice. The science of all other festivals has been sacrificed at the altar of superstition.

May Wisdom (Mazda) Prevail

ⁱ Bundahishn 25:25. Note this: the ‘vehizaki’ month Frawardin, the month Ardawahisht, and the month Hordad compose the season of spring. The month Tir, the month Amurdad, and the month Shahrewar are of summer. The month Mihr, the month Aban, and the month Adar are of autumn; and the month Day, [211] the month Vohuman, and the month Spandarmad are of winter.

26. And the sun returns to that point that degree of Aries from which it had started in the beginning, in three hundred and sixty-five days, and five hours, and a fraction, which are one year. As every three months, it comes to three constellations, more or less.

ⁱⁱ (Aban 30+Azar 30+ Dey 30+ Bahman10 = 100. This is as per the Mazdayasni calendar adopted by the Government of Iran) (Oct 9+ Nov 30+ Dec 31+ Jan 30=100).

ⁱⁱⁱ بعد از نایب رئیس انجمن زرتشتیان شریف آباد، شاپهرام بلیوانی نیز در مورد هیرمیا توضیحاتی را ارائه داد و گفت بر اساس تقویم قدیم هیرمیا در روز اشتاد ایزد و آذر ماه برگزار می شده است و از این روز تا نوروز دقیقاً صد روز فاصله است و بدین واسطه می توان این جشن را سده نامید.
<http://www.berasad.com/fa/content/view/1350/44/>

^{iv} (Azar 5days + Dey 30+ Bahman 30+ Espand 30+ 5Gatha days = 100.) (April 22+ May 31+ June 30+ July 17 = 100).

^v This belief has also been transferred to the Fasli calendar and we see that scholars and the lay people both try to legitimize the count of hundred days to Nou Rooz in the Fasli Calendar, by saying that from 10 Bahman (30 January) to Nou Rooz we have 50 days and 50 nights and that makes up the 100. This is wrong. As mentioned, it is the 100th day of the Arctic winter.

^{vi} وی همچنین در توضیحات کاملی از سنتهای هیرمیا گفت و به چند سال پیش اشاره نمود که اشتاد ایزد و آذرماه همزمان با اشتاد ایزد و فروردین ماه جدید شده و این روز را ثابت کرده اند. از نگاه موبدیار بلیوانی این اتفاق جالبی نبوده است و برای تغییر آن پیشنهاداتی را ارائه داد.
<http://www.berasad.com/fa/content/view/1350/44/>

Mehregan

MEHREGAN IN IRAN

MOBED MEHRABAN FIROZGARY

*Mas o Vah o Piroozgar baad Meinuy e Mehr e Iran, Daavar e Hazaar
Goosh, Baevar Cheshm.*

Raast Raast Daavar, Teez Teez Daavar

Exalted, better off and ever victorious may remain the Spirit of Iranian Mehr (Yazata); the Supreme Judge, having a thousand “Ears” and innumerable “Eyes,” who dispenses Justice Most Rightly and in the Sharpest manner.

Above are the Dibaache (introductory portion) of the Khorde Avestaic, Havan Gaah, and the Mehr Niyayesh (Iranian compilation).



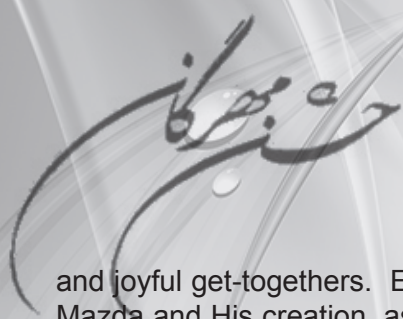
Why *Iranian* Mehr? What are the other Mehrs and how different are they from each other?

Mehr is the Farsi version of the Avestaic Mithra and has been praised throughout Iran over the past several millennia and invoked as a **Yazata** (one of the Praiseworthy Creations of the Almighty God). Mehr, as we will henceforth refer to the Yazata Mithra, has been praised as:

- “The Light Rays and Heat of Sun ...” are invoked in the sunrise prayers (the *Havan Gaah*) and within the *Mehr Niyayesh*, and as a complement to the *Khorshid Niyayesh* (in Veneration to the Sun). This demonstrates that our distant ancestors understood that the Sun’s heat and light are not inherent and, without them, the sun would be a dark sphere of rock. And, in the *Maah Niyayesh*, the Moon is described as *Maongahe Goo Chitrahe* or the ball-shaped—*Dari gooy*—Moon, rather than saying it resembles (how it appears): a varying flat crescent or circular star).
- Every morning our ancestors believed that, without fail, the Sun’s rays (Mehr) engulfed the “wide pastures” (to them, the entire world) and everything thereon; the Earth was then rid of dangers and the fearful darkness and cold. As such, Mehr bears the title *Raamanou Khwastrahe* or tranquility propagator.
- The unfailing, daily appearance of the Sun’s rays, which start as a reddish ring, is symbolized as the essence of fidelity. Over time, metal rings became emblematic of a binding contract, which continues in the form of the wedding ring. Any deviations from the vows made over a ring were considered as **Mehr o Droj** (lying to Mehr); those who transgressed were regarded as among the worst sinners. The troth undertaken called for fidelity, true friendship, kindness, love, peace, honesty, and the keeping of one’s word—the attributes of Mehr.
- The strict adherence to vows made unto Mehr, as well as allegiance to the other, good human traits as mandated by Mehr Yazata had to be followed faithfully—this obligation was infused into the ancient Iranian culture. Any deviations were considered sinful, with dire spiritual consequences. Mehr was established as the supreme spiritual judge, was ever wakeful and alert. Along with the Yazatas Sraosha, Rashnu, and Ashtad, every verdict would be sharply (**Teez teeZ daavar**) issued after hearing the testimony of a “thousand” witnesses (**Hazangra gaoshem**) and through innumerable observations (**Baevar chashmanem**). As against meting out punishments to the sinful, Mehr protects every righteous and contract binding person with equal fervor and might all along.

In contrast with the attributes of the Iranian Mehr (Avestaic Mithra), the Vedic Mitra, in short, is a Godhead figure of light and fidelity who rules this world with the Almighty Varuna. Eventually, a different concept of Mithra emerged as having the benefits of granting victory in wars, as well as providing material benefits, provided Mithra was sufficiently appeased with animal sacrifices and other Pagan rites. This version spread throughout the pre Christian Roman world. Symbolically, it is represented as a woman in the act of bleeding a hefty bull to death.

The Iranian Zartoshty calendar is filled with scores of festivities, all prefixed with the word **Jashan**. Jashan is from the root word Yaz/Yasna, which means ritual invocations; it has become synonymous with jubilation



Mehregan

and joyful get-togethers. Every Jashan celebration invariably starts with or includes invocations to Ahura Mazda and His creation, as well as praises to the Praiseworthy (Amesha Spentas and Yazatas) considered to have been appointed by Ahura Mazda as guardians over each aspect of His creation and bounties. Apart from that, every Jashan involves collective merrymaking and feasting. Even though events like the periodic Gahanbars and joyful pilgrimages to the “Peers” are not prefixed with Jashan, the end results are the same in that they have provided the members of our community with chances to (a) come together; (b) join in and spiritually benefit from Prayers, during which homage is paid to the boons of Ahura Mazda’s creations as well as All Souls including the recently deceased ones; (c) perpetuate the culturally instilled zeal to give in charity and community participations; and (d) discuss and deliberate over community related problems.

The Jashan e Mehregan

The suffix **Gan** is allotted to those Jashans that fall on the concurrence of the Zarthushti calendar days (Ruz/Roj) with their homonymous name of month (Maah).

As discussed above, the attributes and grandeur with which the Iranian Mehr came to be held, it appears that the calendar was formulated to make the day and month names of Mehr coincided, which then would become the basis for a grand celebration. ***To top them all, the autumnal equinox was improvised, like Novrooz, which ends winter’s short days and the extreme cold of Iran, the autumnal equinox ends the scorching heat of the mostly arid climate of Iran—another good excuse for a grand celebration.***

As the Yazata Mehr is the promoter of love and justice, while rooting out cruelty and injustice, the Jashan Mehregan coincides with the victory of Kaveh (the blacksmith) who, under the leadership of Shah Fereidoon, annihilated the cruel and demonic king Azhi (= serpent /dragon) Dahak, or Zahak, whose shoulder bones had two ingrown venomous and fearful snakes that had to be fed with the brains of young boys and girls.

In the Haom Yasht (Yasna 9 Para 8), as well as Yasht XIV Karde 14 the Saga reads:

Yo Janat Azhi Dahakem (Shah Fereidun) smote and annihilated the Zahak, who had **Tri Zafnem** (3 muzzles—Zahak’s face and the faces of two snakes), **Tri Kamedredhem** (3 waists—one of his own and the waists of two snakes), **Khshavash Asheem** (6 eyes— ...), **Hazangra Yaukhsstem** (of a thousand tricks), **Daevim Drojem** (evil liar),

Ferdowsi, in his epic poem the *Shahname*, highlights and honors Iranian generosity by following the later scripture compilations of Bundaheshn where rather than having Zohak smitten, crushed, or annihilated, Ferdowsi leaves him alive, albeit chained in Mount Damavand’s crater.

Mehregan is considered to have been celebrated annually by the ancient Iranians on the day of the autumnal equinox. The Sassanids, however, extended Mehrgan celebrations to 6 days, which culminated in the Grand Mehregan; just as the 6th day of Novrooz festivities culminate in the Grand Novrooz celebrations. The practice of the 6-day Jashan e Mehregan celebrations is still prevalent amongst the traditional villagers of Yazd. However, these Behdeens have maintained the Kadmi religious calendar when celebrating the Mehregan (popularly called **Gesht**) and the Sade (popularly called **Hiromba**). (see pages xxx and xxx) Due to the elimination of intercalation days for that calendar system, such festivities have fallen well outside their astronomically intended celebration days. Their Mehregan celebrations have slipped far into the winter days.

The Jashan e Mehregan, according to Fasli and state calendars, is faithfully celebrated every year by not only Zartoshtis, sponsored by local Anjomans, other associations, and at homes, but also by Iranians dedicated to their ancestral heritage.

UNESCO and the Government of Iran have registered the Mehregan festivities as an Iranian Heritage.

The event was celebrated at the Tehran Intercultural Heritage Centre (ICH), which is housed in an impressive Ghajar period palace. Personalities like H. E. Mr Unesy, the Deputy to President Rohani and his special advisor on Iranian minority religious communities; our Z MP Dr. E Ekhtiary;

H. E. Shri DP Srivastava, Indian Ambassador to Iran; Ms. Ester Kuish Laroche, ICHTO Director and Area Representative of UNESCO; the Director and officials of the Tehran ICH Center, members of the Yadegar e Baastan Foundation; and invited personalities from various cultural centers, including the Tehran Z Anjuman officials.

For Farsi readers, the following Amordad link provides a great deal of variety, in terms of communities and places where the Jashan e Mehregan is celebrated.

<http://www.amordadnews.com/neveshtehNamyesh.aspx?Nid=15174>



The Tehran office of the UNESCO's Cultural Centre (ICTO) had an impressive cultural get together, on the last Mehregan festival, on Oct. 4th 2015.



Mehregan Reading and Translating portions of Mehr Yasht.



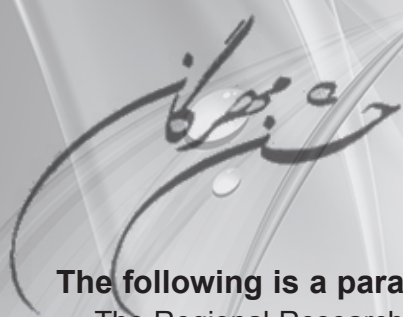
Proceedings in the Tehran office of the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre (ICTO) on the last Mehregan festival, on Oct. 4th 2015.



Mehregan with ICTO Dir. Ms. E Kuiseh Laroche of UNESCO and Mobed Mehraban Firozgary

The main portion of the UN.ORG.IR link is extracted below. Some of the items omitted, therein, are the speech given by Dr. Yunesi, the Deputy and special advisor to the IRI President Dr. Hasan Rouhani on Minority Communities of Iran, the Farsi version of a message on the occasion supplied by Dr. Shernaz Cama of the UNESCO PARZOR, the speech by Dr. Ms. Farzaneh Goshtasp of the Yadegar e Baastan organization and other officials of the UNESCO Tehran ICH management.

<http://un.org.ir/index.php/response-development/response-environment/1447-4-oct-2015-unesco-joins-celebration-of-mehregan>



Mehregan

The following is a paraphrased excerpt from an October 4, 1015, UNESCO news release:

The Regional Research Center for Safeguarding Intangible Heritage in West and Central Asia, under the Auspices of UNESCO ("Tehran ICH Center") organized a cultural evening on the occasion of Mehregan, on October 4, 2015.

The cultural evening consisted of chanting parts of Mehr Yasht by Zoroastrian priest, Mr. Firouzgary, and several speeches and lectures by culture experts and members of the Zoroastrian community. Ms. Kuisch Laroche, Director and Representative of the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office talked about the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and respecting cultural diversity. She also spoke of the relevance of Zoroastrian teachings, which promote "good thoughts, good words, and good deeds" in the context of UNESCO's mission to build peace in the minds of men.

Other important guests included Dr. Isfandiar Ekhtiari, Chairman of the Yadegare Bastan Research Center and Zoroastrian representative in the Islamic Parliament of Iran (Majlis) and Mr. Shri D. P. Srivastava, Indian Ambassador to Iran, who spoke about the Zoroastrian community in India, which currently numbers approximately 69,000 people. The speeches were followed by an introduction of the Mehregan ceremony and its history.

Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary is a member of the Board of Directors (Managing Committee) of the Tehran Anjuman e Mobedan having been elected repeatedly to serve for over 30 years to manage the Anjuman's affairs and his constitutional duties. He has been authorized by the Iranian Ministry of Justice as the sole Zarathushti marriage license issuing authority in Tehran. Born in Yazd, he received his Electronics degree from St Xavier's Technical Institute in Mumbai and worked at J.N. Marshall in India and at IBM, Honeywell, a medical instrument distributor and as consultant to several Glass manufacturing plants, in Iran. Mobed Firouzgary can be contacted at: firouzgary@gmail.com

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JASHNE MEHRIZAD AT ZAINABAD

Dr. IRANPUR BUSTANI

ZAINABAD is one of the few exclusively Zoroastrian villages left in Iran, a jewel in the desert wasteland of Yazd. It is situated approximately 20 kilometers north of Yazd, almost midway between Yazd city and its suburb, Taft. The dual carriageway from the City going towards Taft touches its outskirts.

Sadly, it is almost a ghost village now; whereas, before the 1940s, all the houses were occupied by staunch Zoroastrian families—all very religious, honest, and extremely hardworking. Back then, relations within the community were peaceful and smooth and, if any minor dispute arose (e.g. about water distribution), it was amicably resolved by the honest and respected Zoroastrian head of the village, a stalwart indeed!

The villagers turned the adjacent, parched desert into cultivable land with the limited water supply from their *qanat*, an ancient Persian underground water channelling system that moved water to the surface at the desired spot. The site where this precious water came to the surface was called *cheshma* (spring). This was the only steady source of water for the people of the village. Each family was allotted a fixed number of hours to obtain their water share for irrigation and unlimited access for domestic use.

By the 1930s, some of the young men began making the difficult trip to Mumbai with the hope of a better life. That was the era of the birth of the Irani teashops and restaurants in Mumbai. After a few years of hard work and saving some Rupees, the Irani youths would pay a short visit to their birthplaces to meet family members, perhaps get married—or, if already married, father a child—then quickly return to their tea-shops in Mumbai. This to-and-fro cycle would repeat, and when well-established in Bombay, some would bring the rest of their family to settle there.

In the 1950s, with progress and improvement of living conditions in Iran, some of these families returned to Iran. Most moved to Tehran for better jobs and better educational facilities for their children. During this period, the Iranian Zoroastrians made notable progress.

After the Islamic Revolution, there was a flood of Zoroastrian migration to the USA, Europe, Australia, and other countries. As a result, the population in Zainabad, like other villages and even towns in Iran, dwindled, leaving Zainabad a ghost village.

Only 3 or 4 Zoroastrian youths who resided in the city visited the village during the day to do some farming with the reduced supply of qanat water, take care of the fire temple, and feed the fire to keep it alive.

Come Mehrizad (Mehregan), as observed by the Kadmi calendar) the village would be shaken awake from its deep slumber by the Zainabadis that poured in from all over Iran, and even some foreign countries. They performed and celebrated this religious festivity, which their great-great grandparents, during the difficult ages, observed with great zeal. It was (and is) a job finding a parking spot.

Early on the first day, the Zainabadis gather in the main street adorned by its old and huge *sarv* (cedar) tree, a green and sacred emblem—probably planted at the same time as the foundation of the village.

The women dressed in their most colourful outfits, usually in the traditional costumes of their ancestors. Everybody was in a festive mood, meeting and greeting each other with smiles. For these 3 days the hurry, worry, tension, and problems of city life were forgotten.

The days were cold but sunny, the sky was so clear and deep blue, the air so fresh, clean and intoxicating, and the distant snow covered Shir kooh (Milky Mountain) beamed with whiteness from the north.

Soon the Zainabadis were assembled on the road and the joyful sounds of the crowd were drowned by the familiar sounds of the *sorna and daff* (hornpipe and tambourine). This musical call announces the start of the Gesht.

The musicians and Gesht leaders led the procession, followed by the crowd. They performed the Gesht ceremony inside all intact houses and outside ruined houses.

Quite a few of these houses have been renovated with modern comforts, including gas for heating and cooking, running water, electricity, and telephone lines—care was taken not to interfere with the original





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architecture of the house.

At every house the sound of the **sorna** ushers in complete silence. The Gesht leader holds a small tray of **lorik** (dry fruits and nuts) with a fresh fruit on top, called the fruit from the garden of heaven, usually a pomegranate. He then recites the names of all the deceased from that house and wishes peace and rest for their souls. Next, he mentions the living descendants and wishes them health and happiness. Last, but not least, the names of the young and unmarried are brought to the attention of the audience. The wish for the youngsters is that they will soon get a good and favourable partner, get married, settle down at the earliest, and have a happy and productive life together. After the announcements, the music, singing, and merrymaking resumes. Dry nuts, seeds, and sweets are served and, at some of the houses, tea or hot chocolate.

All the houses are covered accordingly; the residents of each donate a sum of money. The money collected adds up to a generous sum, which is then used for the upkeep of the village fire temple for the next year.

This Mehrizad function takes two and a half days. On the third evening, a gahambar is held in the hall of the fire temple with the entire crowd present. Small quantities of lorik and fruit, used for the prayer, were collected from each house. The ceremony ends with the serving of tasty hot **aash**. Each person will receive enough to fill the container he or she brought.

With the gradual setting of the sun, most Zainabadis will depart the village, leaving a few to stay overnight and leave in the early morning before the sun brightens the horizon. Deep silence settles over this lovable place, plunging Zainabad in a deep slumber, only to be wakened by the Zainabadis who return to the village to celebrate Nowruz.



The start of Gesht is announced to the assembled crowd with the familiar sounds of the sorna and daff (hornpipe and tambourine).

Dr. Iranpur Bustani, M.B., B.S. Bombay, F.R.C.S. London, is a Consultant Surgeon at Kasra General Hospital, Tehran. He is Professor Emeritus of Surgery and formerly Head of the Surgical Department at Shahid Beheshti University. He is of Zainabadi descent, from his mother's side.

Tribute to Dr Meherbanoo Bakhtiary (Bustani) 1935-2010

Mme Meherbanoo Bustani was a remarkable woman who devoted her time and energy to spread the knowledge of the Zarathushti religion and culture in Iran and around the world. She worked tirelessly with PARZOR to support and defend the establishment of the Iranian Zarathushti origin of NowRuz, as an Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. The letter of February 23, 2010 announcing the UN recognition of NowRuz was read to her in her hospital bed. She died shortly after.

Born in Mumbai and trained as a physician at Grant Medical College and KEM Hospital in Mumbai, she practiced as a gynecologist in England with her husband Dr Iranpur Bustani. After the Iranian revolution she gave up her practice and worked for the Zoroastrian community, using her considerable talents at networking and writing in lucid and understandable English. She was the secretary of the 6th WZC in Tehran 1996, and played a very active role in the celebration of the 3000th

anniversary of Zarathushti Culture

The community is grateful to her for the role she played with PARZOR in getting NowRuz recognized by UN as an Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

See FJ Summer 2010 Vol 24 No2

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MEHREGAN: PAST AND PRESENT

DINA G. McINTYRE.

In a time of myth and legend, before recorded history, we are told there was a cruel tyrant called Zohak, under whose rule people suffered greatly. Zohak's cruelty and injustice became so intolerable that he was finally overthrown under the leadership of Kaveh the blacksmith, and the legendary hero Faridoon, who became king in his place.

Upon the defeat of Zohak, Faridoon decreed that a great festival be held, and, according to Zoroastrian tradition, this festival came to be known as Mehregan, which in ancient times was also celebrated as a harvest festival, and today is generally celebrated in early October.

It is widely held, however, that the origins of Mehregan predated Zoroastrianism and the feast was originally celebrated to honor Mithra, a pre-Zoroastrian deity of the Indo-European tribes. In the centuries following Zarathushtra, the worship of Mithra became syncretized with Zarathushtra's religion.

The word *mithra* means contract, keeping one's word. In later Sasanian times, the word evolved into *mehr*.¹ In addition to contracts and keeping one's word, the meaning of *mehr* included good relationship or friendship. And its symbol was light. Essentially, Mehregan is a festival to celebrate the victory of goodness and also a festival of friendship and light.

While the origins of Mehregan are interesting, why has it survived for thousands of years? Why was this festival embraced by our monotheistic Zoroastrian ancestors as the celebration of goodness over evil? Why is this festival still celebrated today, when the ancient Indo-European deity who started it has been forgotten for centuries?

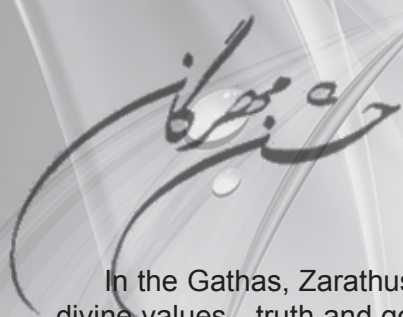
I think the answer is that there is, and always will be, a hunger in humans for the good guys to win. This is what Mehregan represents—that darkness and evil will be overcome, that goodness, integrity, friendship, and light will win—all fundamentals of the Zoroastrian religion. Small wonder that ancient Zoroastrians embraced this festival and made it their own.

Today, we tend to intellectualize our religion—to concentrate on how it values intelligence and righteousness. But we tend to forget the central role goodness and friendship play. In ancient times, our religion was called the Good Religion because a commitment to goodness is at its core. Even the divine characteristic, *vohu manah*, is not just intelligence, but **good** thinking (*vohu mano*)—intelligence committed to goodness. And the ways in which Zarathushtra uses “good mind” in the Gathas encompasses all aspects of good conscious activity.

Friendship is also a central concept of our religion. Zarathushtra describes the relationship between man and God not as that of a father to a child, or a master to a servant, but as that of a friend to a friend, or a beloved to a beloved.

And we all know the role light plays in our religion. But we sometimes fixate on the symbol and forget the meaning behind it.





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In the Gathas, Zarathushtra uses light as an adjective, or symbol, to describe *Ahura Mazda* and His divine values—truth and good thinking. For example, he speaks of “sunlike truth” Y32.2,² and “the sunlike gain of good thinking” Y53.4.³ He describes *Ahura Mazda* as sunlike and glorious:

“I shall declare to you in verse...the glories of Him who offers solicitude, the Wise Lord...” Y46.17.

“...May the Wise Lord listen, in whose glory I have taken counsel with good thinking.” Y45.6.

“...Him who has the appearance of the sun...” Y43.16.

The later Avestan texts also frequently speak of the Wise Lord as radiant and glorious.⁴

So well-known was this symbolism that the philosopher Porphyry, who lived around 300 ACE, described the “God” worshipped by the Iranians as follows:

*“The body of Oromazdes is like light and his soul like truth.”*⁵

In short, Zarathushtra uses light as a symbol to describe the divine. This is a lovely idea, because Zarathushtra’s idea of the divine is not some patriarch with a long beard sitting up in the clouds somewhere, he teaches that the divine lives within each of us. So as we increase the divine in ourselves, by bringing His attributes, the *amesha spenta*, to life with our thoughts, words and actions, we become more filled with light. In ancient Iranian paintings, this idea was depicted as a flaming halo, or glory around the head of such a person. And the Persian poet, Jami, expresses the same thought, but in a different way:

*The essences are each a separate glass,
Through which the Sun of Being’s Light is passed,
Each tinted fragment sparkles with the Sun,
A thousand colors, but the Light is One.”*⁶

If the light of our Beloved Friend lives in each one of us, we begin to understand why, in Zarathushtra’s view, we must treat each other with friendship, with respect, with goodness, with love, in short, with *mehr*.⁷ It is interesting how this symbolism has found expression in different ways in Zoroastrian traditions. For example, the fire for an *atash behram* is created by mixing many different fires—the household fire, the fires from different trades, a shepherd’s fire, a military fire, fire from lightning, fire from a neighbor’s hearth, fire from a burning corpse, and fire from burning trash.⁸ What does this tell us? It tells me the person who invented this ritual was trying to demonstrate that the sacred comes from all aspects of life. This idea is reflected in ancient texts, which state that there is a fire in all things—in man, in animals, in plants, in the clouds, in the world itself.⁹

That beautiful symbolism is worth re-creating in our lives, to remind us of its meaning. I hope someday our community centers will do a mini-adaption of that ancient symbolism of creating an *atash behram* fire, by having each attending family contribute a flame to create a community fire. I hope we will look behind the symbolism to what it represents, that we are using the divine within each of us to create a community of friendship and goodness and light.

I used to live in Pennsylvania, where the winters are long, dark and cold, not unlike the winters in Iran. I like to think of Mehregan as an act of defiance. In the face of winter, we celebrate a festival of light, an affirmation of belief that the darkness will not win.

Is it worth keeping this festival of Mehregan alive? The ways in which ancient Zoroastrians dressed, their language, their diets, their sports, their institutions, all are very different from the way we live today. But the values they cherished, the things of the spirit that flamed their souls and gave meaning to their

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lives are still relevant. We just need to re-invent the material expressions of these things of the spirit.

If you think the festival of Mehregan is worth keeping alive, I'd like to make a suggestion. Zarathushtra was very wise. He taught that the material and the spiritual are inextricably linked. Material things, without the spiritual, are empty. By the same token, as wonderful as things of the spirit may be, how do they find expression except through the material—through thoughts, words and actions. The happiest outcome is when material things are infused with a good spirit. And when things of the spirit are effectively expressed in material words and actions.

So for Mehregan celebrations, I suggest the following: Several months before the festival, get your children together. Explain to them the values the festival promotes. Then ask them to come up with ways of celebrating it, which will symbolize or express the meaning of Mehregan in ways they can relate to. Try to remember that our kids have in them the divine characteristic, *vohu manah*, good thinking. Give them a chance to use it.

Whatever the children come up with, treat their views with respect. The objective here is meaningful participation. If the kids come up with something impractical, show them the problems in a friendly way, and let them use their own good thinking (their *vohu manah*) to work around the problems.

If we are to preserve the spirit of Zarathushtra's teachings, we need to re-invent ways of expressing them that are in keeping with today's world – just as our ancestors did. And our children are the most valuable resource we have for that process.

1 According to Dr. Esmail Nooriala, the word "mehr" is derived from the Aryan word "mei" meaning relationship. See Nooriala, *A Brief Description of Mithra, Mehr, Mehrgan and Yalda*, a talk given in Denver, and obtained from the Internet.

2 "...He who is allied with good thinking and the good companion of **sunlike truth**....." Y32.2. All quotations from the Gathas are from Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, (Brill, 1975).

3 "...the Wise Lord shall grant (to her) the sunlike gain of good thinking..." Y53.4.

4 Y1.1, Sirozah 1.1, Ormazd Yasht verse 12, to list a couple of examples.

5 Quoted in Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, Lecture 2, page 67 (AMS Press NY reprint). See also, T. R. Sethna, *Book of Instructions on Zoroastrian Religion*, page 17 (published by Informal Religious Meetings Trust Fund, Karachi, 1980).

6 I am indebted to Dr. Daryoush Jahanian for this translation by Dr. S. H. Nasr (whose translation I do not have access to).

7 A contemporary Iranian poet, Akhavan Saales, laments that: "We have surpassed the orbit of the moon, but we are yet far, far, from the domain of Mehr." Quoted from the paper of Dr. Esmail Nooriala, referred to above.

8 J. J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, 2d ed. 1986 reprint, pages 200-201.

9 Y17.11, a later text written in the Younger Avestan language, as translated by Mills and explained in his footnotes, in *Sacred Books of the East*, Volume 31, pages 258 to 259; and the *Bundahishn*, Ch. 17.1, a much later text written in Pahlavi, as translated by E.W. West, in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 5, pages 61 through 64.

Dina G. McIntyre is a Zoroastrian who was born in India and came to the United States to attend college. She received a Bachelor of Science from Carnegie Mellon University and a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh. Dina practiced law in the United States from 1964 until her retirement in 2005. She has been a student of the teachings of Zarathushtra since the early 1980s, and was the editor of a course on the Gathas in 1989-90. She has lectured on the teachings of Zarathushtra in the United States, Canada, England, India, South America, New Zealand, Australia and at the Parliament of World Religions. Her writings on the teachings of Zarathushtra have appeared in various journals and websites.



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JUSTICE AS FRIENDSHIP: ETHICAL COMPANIONSHIP WITHIN THE HEROIC NARRATIVES OF MITHRA

NEVILLE PANTHAKI

History is a much maligned discourse. Rather than an unbiased recounting of the past, history may become a political project of the present to create a heroic narrative. This use of history is disingenuous, and its accompanying logic that attempts to cite past deeds for current pride, is plagiarism. What is, however, most interesting about this sort of historicism, is that it represents a sociology of epistemology. I mean that much can be discerned about what one believes, how one thinks, what is sacred and why, from investigating one's projections of self upon history and within heroic narratives. For example, the statement "our forefathers always did this..." or "King Cyrus did that..." usually betrays more about the speaker's prejudices, than it accurately depicts the past.

In this sense, we can conveniently avoid debates regarding the validity or accuracy of history, or for that matter religion, by maintaining a focus of investigation upon the narrative itself. The narrative, with all its casual relationships that contribute to espousing a dogma (belief system), is what is important. It is less important whether a religious text or tradition justifies present practice. It is more important how and why present interlocutors attach importance to whatever they are saying, what and why they believe, and how they construe the notion of sacredness.

In exploring the history of Mithra, one perceives the attachment to several concepts that transcend ethnicities and time. A history of the heroic narratives of Mithra yield an appreciation of fundamental relationships which ancient peoples shared across empires and over centuries. Hence, rather than an investigation of what Zoroastrianism means for Mithra, one should contemplate what Mithra means for Zoroastrianism. This is also chronologically sound, since Mithra predates 'Zoroastrianism' which as a monolithic practise or tradition evolved over centuries and in relation to its environment of multiple belief systems of Iranic and non-Iranic peoples.

Irrespective of the discrepancies regarding translation, a reading of the *yasht* to Mithra (Meher Yasht) indicates that this deity was identified by many epithets. Of particular importance is that Mithra was known as "the lord of wide pastures", and the "upholder of contracts". We know that Mithra was a prominent figure of the Indo-Iranian pantheon. After the migration of what became the Vedic people into the subcontinent (India), Mithra continued to be held in high esteem (*Mitra*). Similarly, we know that through cross cultural interactions of one sort or another, Mithra was imported and indigenized within the pantheon of the Roman Empire. What is remarkable about this, is that rather than a top-down process of officialdom and imposition, Mithra worship across Eurasia in all periods was popular. One may go so far as to argue that adoration of Mithra represented heresy or a challenge to any officially sanctioned dogma.

One reason for the culturally diverse acceptance of Mithra was the association of justice with this deity. However, more than law and order in a rewards and punishment sense akin to tales within the Abrahamic faiths or Greco-Roman pantheon, Mithra was considered to be a companion to those who tread upon the path towards *asha*. Mithra was *mithra*, literally, friend. Assuredly he was known to smite those who transgressed *asha*, but it is important to note that *asha* was defined in terms of ethical companionship. Societal



Investiture of Sassanid emperor Ardashir I or II (3rd century CE bas-relief at Taq-e Bostan, Iran. On the left stands the yazata Mithra with raised barsom, sanctifying the investiture. By Philippe Chavin - Own work, CC BY 2.5,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1134061>

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relationships were scaled versions of the ethics of companionship. Thus proper relationships were judged as those exhibiting reciprocity, kindness, forgiveness, aid, and fellowship. Mithra helped one to achieve justice through performative acts of friendship. In this sense, Mithra's role is unique even within what we presently consider the Zoroastrian canon (*Yasna*).



Obverse: Tauroctony Scene



Reverse: Banquet Scene

Double-sided 2nd-3rd century Mithraic altarpiece found near Fiano Romano, near Rome, and now in the Louvre.

© User:PHGCOM, 2006/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY-SA-3.0

Mithra was the standard bearer for the social contract. Mithra definitely adjudicated in matters associated with property and propriety, but not from the perspective of corporate law in matters brought before a claims court. Mithra should not be interpreted as the precursor for enshrining the unalienable right to pursue capitalism within the legal code. It must rather be understood that Mithra's function was to uphold peace by perpetuating a social contract based upon ethical companionship. This is a concept of justice, not via the prescription of a schedule of various punishments, but through a pedagogy of companionship.

To illustrate the relevance of this dichotomy, we may utilize an analogy by way of a comparison between two premises regarding medical science. The Western, now contemporary global concept of medicine, emanate from an operating principle which seeks to cure illness. The Eastern, and all global modalities based on traditional practises of medicine, emanate from an operating principle which seeks to promote health. One conceptualization of justice and medicine targets transgression as it appears, while the other conceptualization pre-emptively fosters harmony.

With this brief explanation it becomes clear why Mithra adulation percolated throughout the ancient world irrespective of geographic or cultural borders. These were centuries of civil and political strife, caused by the contestation of single and absolute truths, laws, rights and beliefs. One's confessional faith (religion) was often perceived as a political oath of loyalty or complicity with criminality. In such a setting, where temples were more often than not erected as a testament to political supremacy or to promote conformity of faith practises, Mithra remained neutral. This detachment from official incorporation into codified dogma, allowed Mithra to be appropriated by anyone who considered friendship to be the cornerstone of justice. More importantly, adulation of Mithra did not entail dispossessing oneself of any other allegiances, whether political or religious. If a problem arose, this was with dogmatic systems which forbade the worship of any but officially sanctioned deities.

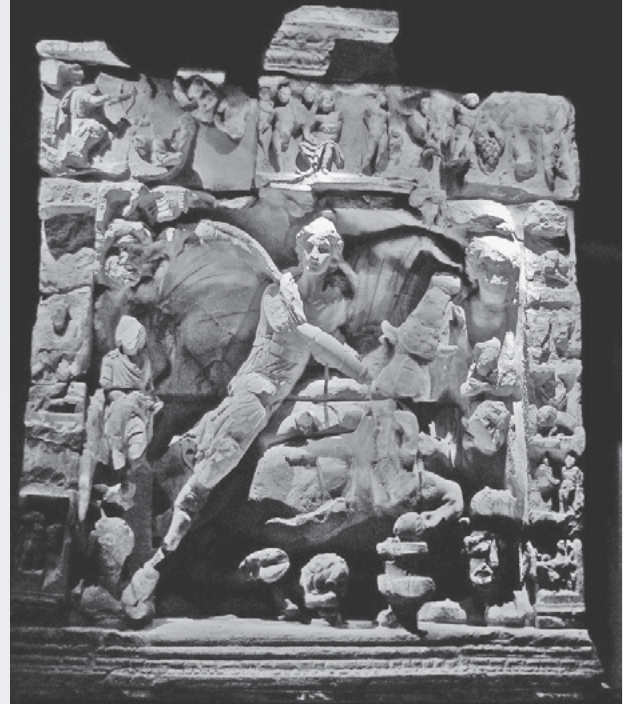
Indeed, as popular adulation for Mithra travelled into the hearts of people, across culture and borders, Mithra was re-imagined. This is perhaps the most conclusive evidence that Mithra's lore was popular. In

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Mithra's various manifestations, Mithra appears re-interpreted so as to make belief indigenous. Mithra myths in Iberia and Gaul (Spain, France) describe Mithra in native terms with regard to attire, figure, behaviour, geography, and context of story. This is equally true in the case of Mithra lore in Armenia, India, or Persia. This process of Mithra assimilation also indicates an agreement among Eurasian peoples that ethical companionship was a mark of justice.



Mithras cult relief, found at Apulum. Alba Iulia, Romania, National Museum of the Union 2011
© User: Codrin. B/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY-SA-3.0



CIMRM 966(v.l, p. 323-325): Bas-relief of the tauroctony of the Mithraic mysteries. Found in 1895 at the Sarrebourg mithraeum (Pons Saravi, Gallia Belgica). Now on display at La Cour d'Or museum. © User: Vassil/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY-SA-3.0/GFDL

And this is why it doesn't matter from the perspective of sourcing the 'origins' of Mithra, where Mithra began, went, or belongs. Friendship is not an invention or a commodity, but a way of being. It is multi-centred. That the Mithra of Rome seems different from the Mithra of Persia because of the depiction and stories, is true. However, the centrality of concepts such as justice, renewal, companionship is irrefutable. Besides, recall the somewhat cynical adage that man creates god. If this is the case, why wouldn't we do it in our own image, or something which is familiar, comforting and meaningful to us? You must excuse human nature for these self-projections, but if parents can desire that their children look and act like them, can one expect their god(s) shouldn't?

It reminds me of a line from the movie *Khuda Gawah*, in which Amitabh Bachchan plays a Pathan. Upon reaching the border of India, presumably having ridden a horse from Afghanistan and across Pakistan (just go with it, ok?), Bachchan's character utters a salutation as part of self-reflection regarding his identity and belief. He announces "*ishq mera majzub, mohabat mera iman!*" Part of this movie depicts the cross-cultural collegiality (love, loyalty) between a Pathan and a Rajput, based upon shared core beliefs that revolve around ethical companionship and justice as friendship. It seems a modern Mithra epic to me.

Neville Gustad Panthaki has two Doctorates (Ph.D) in Eurasian History and International Diplomacy (York University, Toronto) and Social Justice Education (Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto).

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DEPICTION OF MITHRA IN MEHER YASHT

ERVAD TEHEMTON MIRZA



A pre-Zarathustra oral scripture with layers of post-Zarathustra written text, and the longest of all Yashts, Meher Yasht is dedicated to Lord Mithra; singing his praise and glory, offering him sacrifice and libation, seeking his favour and protection, and recognizing his fascinating characteristics

Contents of the Body of Meher Yasht:

Mithra and Ahura Mazda (1–3):

The Yasht starts out with Ahura Mazda's proclamation to Zarathustra that He created Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, as worthy of sacrifice and prayer as Ahura Mazda himself. Ahura Mazda instructs Zarathustra to never break a contract, be it with one from another faith or with one of his own faith (Zoroastrian) and confirms that Mithra will reward those who keep a contract.

Mithra Favors Those Who Worship Him First (8–9):

Of the two warring sides that go into battle against blood-thirsty enemies, Mithra will favor whichever side worships him first with their faith and devotion.

Undeceivable Mithra's Wrath (18):

No chief of the house, borough, town, or province can deceive Mithra. If anyone attempts to do so, Mithra will get angry and feel offended and will destroy the house, borough, town, province, and their chiefs. He will take away the strength from their arms and feet, eyesight from their eyes, and hearing from their ears. Their horses will become unruly and their weapons will become ineffective. His wrath will be slow to relent.

Rewards His Worshippers (28–34):

Those who offer Mithra libation and sacrifice, invoked in his own name and with proper words, are rewarded with splendid and comfortable houses, made beautiful with women, chariots, herds of oxen, and male children.

Mithra in Battle (35–43):

Mithra engages in battle, smashes regiments, terrorizes and frightens the contract breakers, and breaks their heads. Though well-aimed, the deceitful ones' weapons cause no harm. With the help of **Rashnu** and **Sarosh**, the deceitful ones' swift horses take them to Mithra who is angry and offended. Mithra knocks them down and kills them by the tens of thousands.

Mithra's Spies (44–46):

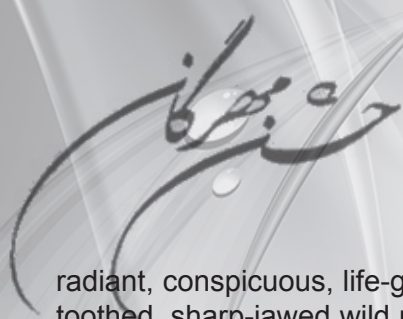
Mithra's abode extends throughout the earth and is unrestricted. Sitting at peaks and watch posts, his spies seek out and remember the contract breakers and guard those who the contract breakers attempt to harm. The all-knowing and powerful Mithra helps them with all the strength of his soul.

Mithra the Complainer (53–59):

Mithra complains to Ahura Mazda that mortals do not worship him with his name uttered in the way other deities are worshipped. He promises to visit his truthful worshippers.

Mithra's Travel Chariot (67–69):

Mithra travels in a large-wheeled chariot, made of heavenly substance, accompanied by the wheel of sovereignty, glory-made by Mazda and victory-made by Ahura. His chariot is drawn by spiritual, white,



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radiant, conspicuous, life-giving, knowing and swift horses. **Varathreyna**, in the shape of a ferocious, sharp-toothed, sharp-jawed wild male boar with sharp tusks, leads his chariot and attacks its opponents, knocks them down with a toss, cuts them into pieces, mingles their bones, hair, brains, and blood with the earth.

Mithra, Dispenser of Justice (80–87):

Ahura Mazda appointed Mithra as a judge of the material world. With a thousand senses and ten thousand eyes, Mithra watches those who lie unto him—the powerful, all knowing, and undeceivable. Armed with this knowledge, Mithra dispenses justice.

Who Seeks Mithra's help? (83–87):

With uplifted hands, a poor man, who follows the good law, but was wronged and deprived of his rights, calls on Mithra for help; so does the one who is in danger of death; or is the master of the house, borough, town, and country when in distress. The cow, while lost, seeks his help to find her way to the safety of her stable. He helps those who satisfy him and crushes those who offend him.

How to Worship Mithra (88–94):

Hail to the man who offers him sacrifice and prayers in his house, while holding the holy wood, ceremonial twigs (*barasma*), holy meat, and holy mortar in his well-washed hands.

Mithra's Role after Sunset (95–101):

Once the sun sets, Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, sleepless, and ever awake, travels the earth holding his mace and surveys everything that is between the earth and the sky. Forces of destruction, violence, Daevas, and deceitful people flee in fear as he travels with Sarosh at his right hand and Rashnu at his left and with the waters, plants, and the souls (**Fravashis**) of the faithful all around him. He slays the men and their horses of the nations that are his enemies.

Mithra, 100 Times Better (104–107):

Were the evil thoughts, words, and deeds of a mortal a hundred times worse, they would not be as much as the good thoughts, words, and deeds of Mithra. His wisdom is more than a hundred times greater than that of any mortal. He can hear more than a hundred times better than a mortal. His ears are equipped with a thousand senses and he sees every mortal who tells a lie.

Mithra's Search (108–111):

Mithra searches for those who will offer him a good sacrifice so he can reward them with brightness, glory, good health, riches, virtuous offspring, and most perfect sovereignty.

Mithra searches for those who will deceive him and punish them with sickness and death, poverty, and sterility, he will slay their offspring with a single strike and take away their sovereignty.

Sanctity (Value) of Mithra's Contract (115–118):

The Sanctity of Mithra's contract is:

- Twentyfold between two friends
- Thirtyfold between two men of the same clan (group)
- Fortyfold between two of the same house or partners
- Fiftyfold between spouses
- Sixtyfold between students
- Seventyfold between student and teacher
- Eightyfold between son-in-law and father-in law
- Ninetyfold between two brothers
- Hundredfold between father and son
- Thousand fold between two nations
- Ten thousand fold when connected with the law of Mazda (Mazdayasni religion)

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Sacrifice unto Mithra (119–120):

Zarathustra is asked by Ahura Mazda to instruct his disciples to sacrifice cattle, birds, and fowls to Mithra. Worshippers of Mazda are asked to offer Zoatar-prepared Haoma unto Mithra to please him and keep him away from anger.

Preparation for Libation to Mithra (121–122):

In an answer to Zarathustra's question, Ahura Mazda outlines a purification process for drinking libations to please Mithra. Mortals are asked to wash their bodies for three days and three nights, undergo a penance of thirty lashes as a sacrifice and in praise of Mithra, wash their bodies for an additional two days and two nights, and receive an additional twenty lashes as a sacrifice and in praise of Mithra. Ahura Mazda forbids anyone from drinking these libations unless they master ***Stoata Yasna*** and ***Vispe Ratavo***.

Rites by Truthful/Untruthful Priests (136-139):

Ahura Mazda reveals to Zarathustra that Mithra will visit dwellings of the mortals and bestow his boon on those who have complied with God's teachings and for whom a holy priest has offered a sacrifice unto Mithra with bundles of sacrificial twigs (*barasam*).

Ahura Mazda pities the mortal on whose behalf an untruthful, impious priest has performed the rites, regardless of the length of his sacrifice, as Ahura Mazda, the Amesha-Spentas, or Mithra will not be pleased by him.

A CRITICAL LOOK AT MITHRA OF MEHER YASHT

Meher Yasht portrays Mithra as the lord of wide pastures, with a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes, who upholds contracts, rewards his worshippers, dispenses justice, champions the poor and needy, enforces law after darkness, and is 100 times better than the worst humans.

Meher Yasht also portrays Mithra as a mercenary (who sides with whoever worships him first), has a bad and long-lasting temper, is fierce and ruthless in battle, hungry for worship, and seeks animal sacrifices.

Mithra supports moral hierarchy in his listing of sanctity of contract.

A mortal needs to worship and praise Mithra first by cleansing himself and then by physical self-torture (by lashes) and then, in a prescribed manner, by offering him libations and ritual offerings through a truthful priest.

Though the supremacy of Ahura Mazda is established at the outset and mentioned throughout the body of the Yasht, it is interesting to observe that, in contrast to Zarathustra's pioneering concept of Monotheism, various passages of the Yasht refer pray and worship Mithra as a god. These passages may relate to its pre-Zoroastrian component

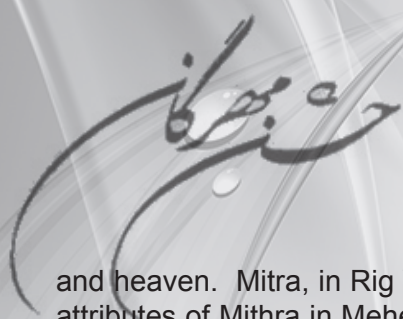
Zarathustra's silence on Mithra

Though experts differ on the reason for Zarathustra's silence on Mithra, it could be argued that Mithra did not meet the standards that Zarathustra expected of a Divinity.

Zarathustra's version of God, Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom, is significantly different from Mithra (at least as described in Meher Yasht); and, hence, Zarathustra's silence on Mithra in his texts. It is believed that Mithra was revived in post-Zarathustra writings, with some added layers of references to Ahura Mazda and Zarathustra.

Mithra (Mitra) in Rig Veda

Though the Hindu scripture, Rig Veda, has only one hymn to Mitra, his characteristics are largely the same as found in Meher Yasht. Rig Veda (3.59) speaks of Mitra, an Aditya, whose eyes never close, who keeps the sacred law, and who rewards those that commit to him. He keeps and supports the settlements of his worshippers and blesses them with winning powers and fame. His fame reaches around the earth



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and heaven. Mitra, in Rig Veda, is often coupled with Varuna. However, the confrontational and punishing attributes of Mithra in Meher Yasht are absent in Mitra of Rig Veda. These attributes are awarded to **Indra**, who crushes those who deceive an ally and violate a contract or treaty.

The Roman Mithra

During the 1st century CE, Rome boasted a strong army, waged numerous battles, and expanded its empire to England to Africa to Syria. To cope with the uncertainties and risks of their military lives, Roman military officials, as well as their soldiers understood the importance of worshipping a god that would be their ally, accompany them in their battles and fight their enemies along with them, punish and destroy their enemies and give his worshippers the protection and prosperity that they seek. As Rome's expanding eastern border came in contact with the northwest frontier of the Persian Empire, the Roman military likely found their god in Mithra (as described in Meher Yasht) and took up his worship—and added to his mysteries and myths, which were not found in Meher Yasht. Mithra's worship spread throughout the Roman Empire till the 4th century when it lost its prominence and strength to Christianity.

Mithra Immortalized

Though some scholars have claimed Mithra's demise in the 4th century CE, Mithra was immortalized in Hindu and Zoroastrian scriptures, practices, ceremonies, and celebrations.

Mithraeum, a religious organization dedicated to the worship of Mithras has attempted to revive the *Roman Mithraism* with its mysteries and ceremonies. However, the *Persian Mithra* has been venerated, remembered, and worshipped on a day dedicated to Mithra (**Jashan-e-Mehregan**) for generations.

A Prayer to Mithra (58):

Grant us these boons which we beg of thee, O powerful god! in accordance with the words of revelation, namely, riches, strength, and victory, good conscience and bliss, good fame and a good soul; wisdom and the knowledge that gives happiness, the victorious strength given by Ahura, the crushing Ascendant of Asha-Vahishta, and conversation (with God) on the Holy Word.

Mithra's Response to His Faithful (74):

O Ahura Mazda, most beneficent spirit! Maker of the material world, thou Holy One!

If men would worship me (Mithra) with a sacrifice in which I were invoked by my own name, as they worship the other gods with sacrifices in which they are invoked by their own names, then I should come to the faithful at the appointed time; I should come in the appointed time of my beautiful, immortal life.

May Mithra visit us and bless us as we worship him at Mehregan.

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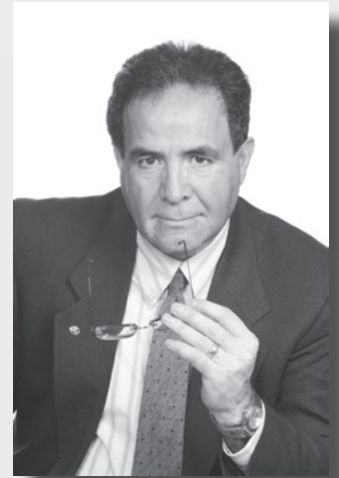
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The Celebration at Autumnal Equinox in Iran Since Antiquity

DAVOOD N. RAHNI
NEW YORK



It was during the mid-60s, in Iran, that the primary school yard overflowed with hundreds of playful, nutty, and noisy K-6 students. They were quieted when the custodian rang the shiny brass bell that hung on the school's front porch. The boys and girls of each grade line up, left-to-right, by height. The boys' haircuts were short and the girls' hair was tied back. Nails were clipped and all hygiene requirements met. Each student wore their best outfit, on which a white circular patch of cloth was sewn onto their jacket collar. Everyone carried a segmented, compressible red, white, and green (colors of the Iranian flag) plastic cup for drinking water; a handkerchief and snacks were stuffed inside. It is Mehr 1st, the beginning of autumn, Jashn Mehregān. The National Anthem and *sorud amezooogar* (the teacher's appreciation song) were sung by the students, who were accompanied by the chirping of migratory birds winging south. The song was followed by the principal

and the PTA chair's welcoming statements to everyone on the first day of the academic year—the first day of school is on the **autumnal equinox (Mehregān)**.

School days were Saturday through Thursday and began at 8:30 and ended at 4:00, with a two-hour lunch break. Thursdays were most pleasing as we went home at noon to start our one and a half day weekend! It should be noted that Nowruz, observed at the spring **vernal equinox**, has and will remain the most revered annual celebration in Iran. Mehrgān is, in essence, the mirror image of Nowruz in that night and day are each 12 hours long. The other major celebrations in Iran are Tirgan and Daygan (the summer and winter solstices, respectively) and Sadeh (fifty nights and days before Nowruz).



The Mehregān table at the Persian school, operated by the Iranian American Society of New York (2011)

Mehregān is celebrated as the last day of the summer harvest, which is when the farmers till and sow their fields for the following spring. It is the time to prepare for the harsh winter ahead by preserving foods, drying fruits and nuts, preserving pickles, and other essentials. It also signals the last opportunity to pick mid-fall fruits and nuts, such as persimmons, pomegranates, medlars, quince, almonds, and walnuts. It was as if the trees were programmed to the exact second to change their leaves' colors, drop, and be carried on the fall wind. After months of dry weather, Mehregān also signaled the start of fall's periodical rains, the essential component of germinations and cyclical rebirth that would arrive during Nowruz. Mehregān was originally a feast held to honor the Persian Goddess Mithra, until the 4th century BCE, when it became one of the two and, later, four most revered Zoroastrian feasts. Mehregān was celebrated in an extravagant style at Persepolis. Not only was it the time for concluding the harvests, it was also when the semi-annual taxes were collected. Visitors from different parts of the Persian Empire brought gifts to the king at Persepolis, *Takhte Jamshid* (the Throne of Jamshid), when all partook in an extravagant festival.

During the 7th century, Mehregān was celebrated the same as Nowruz. There were even some efforts to elevate Mehregān over Nowruz as the most revered Persian New Year. It remained customary for people to send presents to the King and to each other at Mehregān. Rich people usually gave gold and silver coins; heroes and warriors gave horses, swords, and javelins; while commoners gave gifts according



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Mehregān Table Persian Festival of Autumn in Holland.
(Photo courtesy of Persian Dutch Network)



The Mehregān spread table (WWW.Dusharm.com,
Dream of Persia)

to their financial means—apples, persimmons, and pomegranates were acceptable gifts. Those fortunate enough would help the poor with donations and goods as gifts, as they also did at Nowruz and other celestial celebrations.

Even though Mehregān is not as elaborately celebrated in Iran as Nowruz, people still wear new wintry clothes when visiting each other. Similar to Haft-seen at Nowruz, the sides of the tablecloth at Mehregān are decorated with dry, wild marjoram. A copy of the Khordeh Avesta (the “abridged” Avesta), a mirror, and a *sormeh-dan* (a traditional eyeliner or kohl) are placed on the table with rosewater, sweets, flowers, vegetables, dried wheat/barley husks, fall fruits (especially pomegranates and apples), and nuts, such as, almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios. A few silver coins and lotus seeds are also placed in a water bowl scented with a marjoram elixir. A small brazier is placed on the table where *kondor/loban* (frankincense) and *espan* (Syrian Rue seeds) are burned to ward off evil forces.

At the autumnal equinox or the closest lunch time to when the ceremony begins, everyone in the family gathers in front of the mirror to pray. Sherbet is drunk and then—as an omen—*sormeh* mascara is applied to lengthen the eyelashes. Handfuls of wild marjoram, lotus, and sugar plum seeds are thrown over one another’s heads while they embrace. In the 1960s, the Iranian Royal Postal Service issued a series of stamps to commemorate Mehrgān Festival.



Commemorative postal stamps for Mehrgān issued during the 1960s.

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Returning to school's first days: as we played in our yard and neighborhood, we witnessed the many birds migrating south—presumably from north of the Caspian Sea and from Russian Siberia—toward the warm waters of the Persian Gulf for the winter. Among them, the good omen storks and cranes were particularly fascinating as they came back to the same nests on high trees, buildings, or the cliff edges. After the harvesting and seeding were completed we, who lived in the suburbs, were excited that our country relatives would visit us soon; especially, our grandparents who often stayed for extended visits. They brought us fresh and dried fruits, mixed nuts (*Ajil*), and dried, pitted apricots or peaches with crushed walnuts and a bit of sugar inside and threaded as a necklace (*Joze-ghand*). The preserved lamb meat cooked in its own fat called *ghormeh*, from which we made *abgoosht*, the legume lamb stew, was such a delicious winter delicacy! And, as to my grandfather's grape syrup, *shireh angoor*, we could not wait for the first snow to make *barf shireh* ices and eat them under a *korsi* warmed by a brazier refilled daily with charcoal. Another country gift was the trapezoid-shaped threaded dried rue (*espan*) and frankincense that we hung over the front door, presumably to ward off evil spirits! I vividly recall my first day at school, it was the afternoon of Mehr 1 and I was six years old. Under the watchful eye of my grandmother, Maryam, I struggled to crack open an almond with a rock. Missing the almond, I smashed my thumb with the rock. Six months later, on Nowruz, my blackened nail fell off and was replaced with a brand new nail! Was this a fortuitous sign of rebirth and rejuvenation?

Mehregān also serves as a transitory juncture of retrospections for the preceding six months, introspection for the early fall, and prospection—with trepidations and anticipations—for what we can expect during the six months to Nowruz. During that time of reflection, we enjoy crushing colorful autumn leaves as we walked through the long, narrow, a tall mud-walled garden alleys in Evin, remains among our most nostalgic memories. I shall revere the intoxicating, mixed aromas of mud, rain, leaves, and smashed fruits for as long as I live; it gives me a soothing sense of somber solitude, which I have never experienced anywhere else.

For those of us fortunate enough to be born and raised in Iran, where the national festivals as Mehregān and Nowruz have and continue to remain intertwined with our psyche and, as we breathed, inhaled, smelled, ingested, and felt these festivities on our skin, in our flesh and bone and enjoyed them immensely, the same celebration in diaspora can only go so far. Then again, that should not mean we give up these annual rituals, but, instead, we should create little Irans or Gujarats in our communities to ensure our children learn and carry on these spiritual reconnections with Mother Nature.

(All photos courtesy of the author, except where noted.)

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MEHER YAZAD, JASHNE MEHREGAN AND ST. MICHAEL

(Adapted from an original article on Meher Yazad

by Er. Dr. Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi)

ERVAD Dr RAMIYAR KARANJIA

While reciting the Meher Nyaish daily, we remember the divine being Meher Yazad and ask for his grace.

The word Meher is the Persian form of the Avestaic “Mithra.” Mithra is derived from the root **mit** “to tie, to join, to unite, to pledge.” This word is similar to the Sanskrit word **mitra**, which comes from the root **mid** “to like, to love.”



In Avesta, the word is used in different contexts. Its principal meaning is light and the divine being presiding over light. In a secondary sense, the divine being also presides over moral ‘light’ and thus over truth, honesty, sanctity of promise and friendship.

Meher as physical light: The sun, presided over by Khorshed Yazad, is the source of light for our world. Meher Yazad, however, presides over sunlight as well as lights from other heavenly bodies throughout the universe.

Meher Yazad encompasses the light of the sun not only after the sun becomes visible, but according to Meher Yasht (95 & 15), it also presides over the light visible before the rising and after the setting of the sun.

Khorshed and Meher are allegorically referred to as the two eyes of Ahura Mazda. On the basis of internal and external evidence, however, one can say that the status of Meher Yazad was much higher than Khorshed Yazad. Though Khorshed Yazad, representing the sun, is supreme in our solar system, Meher Yazad’s light encompasses billions of stars across the universe.

Meher as moral ‘light’: Meher Yazad as light, at a moral level, presides over and symbolizes the virtues of order, law, truth, honesty and sanctity of promise. The extent of our happiness in this life is directly dependent on our practicing the virtues embodied by Meher Yazad.

Meher Yazad disseminates moral light by spreading truth, honesty and justice. All religions and civilizations have compared truth with light and falsehood with darkness. The virtues of honesty, sanctity of promise and true friendship are associated with truth and hence with light. Since Meher Yazad presides over contracts and friendships, these two virtues are also referred to as Mithra in the Avesta. For this reason, whenever ancient Iranians asked anybody to speak the Truth, they did so in the name of Meher Yazad.

In the Avesta, Meher Yazad is referred to as having one thousand eyes and ten thousand ears through which he perceives the truth and gives justice by rewarding the truthful and punishing the liars.

Meher Yazad is also one of the judges at the judgement of the soul after it crosses the Chinwad Bridge.

Swearing: Ancient Iranians were very much averse to swearing. The reason swearing was forbidden, even for telling truth, was that the virtue of truth was so deep rooted among ancient Iranians that every spoken word was considered to be truthful. If one needed to swear to justify what one said, this amounted to

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doubting the integrity of the person and this deeply affected their self-respect. The word of an Iranian was a gentleman's word. If it was not accepted, and to make it acceptable if one had to resort to swearing, this was considered degrading. If swearing was inevitable then it was done in the name of Meher Yazad.

Jashne Mehregan

The Jashan of Mehregan is performed on roz Meher of mah Meher. Meher, being the sixteenth roz and seventh mah, is exactly in the middle of the month and year respectively. According to Mr. K.R. Cama, this peculiarity of Meher Yazad sheds valuable light on many aspects related to the divine being.

1. Meher is between the darkness of the night and the light of the sun.
2. The abode of Meher is on Mount Alburz between the earth and the sky.
3. Meher is the link which transmits the light from the heavenly bodies to the earth.
4. Meher presides on promises between two parties.
5. Meher presides over friendship between two sides.
6. According to Plutarch, an arbitrator between two persons was referred to as Mithra.
7. Presiding over truth and honesty, Meher is responsible for the present and the future.
8. As a judge Meher has to weigh the facts presented by two parties, and give judgement.
9. Meher is present at the Chinwad bridge between the physical and the spiritual worlds to give justice to the souls after weighing their good and evil acts.

The Jashan of Mehregan is an important event in the Zoroastrian calendar. It was of great significance for the following reasons:

1. It is a day of Parabh, a day on which the divine beings presiding over the roz and the mah are the same.
2. This day is in the middle of the Zoroastrian calendar year.
3. The Jashan is in honour of Meher Yazad, who as a divine being has a higher status among the Yazads. Meher Yazad presides over physical and moral light, the former responsible for the creations in the world and the latter for the happiness of mankind.
4. Just as the Jamshedi Nauroz Jashan is performed to celebrate the seasonal event of vernal equinox, the Mehregan Jashan is performed to celebrate the seasonal event of **autumnal equinox**. Both the days mark days and nights of equal durations and the beginning of a new season.
5. It is a day of great importance in the history of ancient Iran. It is on this day that the Peshdadian king Faridun defeated the evil Zohak, and having imprisoned him on Mount Demavand of the Alburz range, brought Iran once again under the suzerainty of Iranian Kings. Faridun occupied the throne on roz Meher of mah Meher and celebrated the day by performance of a Jashan.

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On this day the king and his noblemen assembled together as equals to celebrate the Jashan. A fire was lit and fragrant herbs were burnt on it. Everybody prayed to God in unison forgetting past discords. The day was designated for rest and people abstained from work. People feasted on rich food and enjoyed themselves.

The festival of Mehregan reminds us to be thankful to God for his creations, especially His first creation, light, over which Meher Yazad presides. It also reminds us to imbibe the moral qualities of truth, justice and sanctity of promise.

The Jashan of Mehregan is performed by Zarthoshtis to this day. Till the last century, Iranian Zoroastrians sacrificed a goat on this day. Rituals were performed on certain parts of the sacrificed animal. It was considered meritorious to ritually partake the offerings after the ritual. The offerings were then taken home and distributed among the poor. The festivities lasted five days.

St. Michael

Several characteristics of St. Michael of the Christians seem to have been borrowed from Meher Yazad.

Meher is the only Yazad who was worshipped and venerated in the West among the Europeans under the name Mithra. The worship of Mithra spread to Asia Minor, Cappadocia, Armenia, Greece and Rome under the cult of Mithraism. However, elements of animal sacrifice crept into this form of worship.

Mr. K.R. Cama, in his masterful treatise '**Mithraic Worship**' states that many times reliefs depicted in places of Mithra worship were misunderstood to be reliefs of animal sacrifice. For instance, one such relief in a cave depicts a young man on his knees piercing the belly of a bull with a dagger. This relief, generally understood to convey an animal sacrifice, actually seems to depict an astronomical phenomenon. The bull represents Taurus the Bull in the Zodiac. The young man depicts Mithra, and as Mithra is associated with the Sun, the dagger piercing the bull is symbolic of the rays of the sun entering the sign of Taurus during the time of Vernal Equinox.

According to the Bible, St. Michael was one of the chief princes and he helped Daniel against the Prince of Persia. He is the deliverer of Israel from their troubles. In the New Testament he is depicted as fighting against the dragon in heaven.

Hebrew and Christian scriptures portray the following characteristics of St. Michael:

- 1 As captain of the heavenly assembly, and conqueror of the powers of hell.
- 2 As lord of the souls, conductor and guardian of the spirits of the dead.
- 3 As patron saint and prince of the Christian Church.

St. Michael was considered the Patron Saint of France. After the conquest of England by the Normans, his worship spread to England and many temples were built in his honor.

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مهرگان خجسته باد

مهر بیفزای ای نگار ماه چهر مهربان

روز مهر و ماه مهر و جشن فرخ مهرگان

میستایم مهر ایزد را ، و آن اهورای بزرگ بی همتا آفریننده آنرا

میستایم با آیین دین ، با شاخه های سبز برسم ، ماه را و آن خورشید را ، ستارگان را و مهر را که سرور همه کشورهاست

میستایم با همه جان ، آن ایزدی را که شکوهمند است ، میستایم با آیین دین ، آن ایزدی را که دارنده دشتهای سبز رسته فراخ است ، که آسایش بخش و نگاهبان سر زمین ایران است

میستایم مهر ایزد خوش پیکر نیرومند را که ره آورد ما میسازد آن بهترین بخششهای اهورایی را ، آزادی ، بهروزی ، رهایی در داوری ، تندرستی ، پیروزی ، پاکی و پارسایی را

و مزدا اهوراست که همه آگاهی از کردارهای راستین ستایشگرانه مردم دارد

پاداش اهورایی از آن زنان و مردانی است که نگاهداری آیین های دینشان و ستایش آنان برای مهر ایزد به راستی و درستی باشد

بهترین راه شناسایی و دست یابی به پایه شکوه ، دانش و کارآیی هر مردمی شناخت فرهنگ و آیین و شیوه زندگی آنان است . زیرا با نگرش به دیر پای و رستادها (آداب و رسوم) و ریشه کرویزی (منطقی) آن میشود پی به دانش و بینش (علم) نیاکان و بنیان گذاران آن مردم و آن کشور برد

نیاکان اندیشمند نژاد پر گهر آریایی در سایه آموزشهای ارزنده کیش پاک زردشتی آگاه بودند که نیرومندی روان و اندیشه بدون نیرومندی و پاکی تن سر انجام نمییابد . از این رو همواره کوشش میشد که پرورش اندیشه و پندار را همراه با پرورش و نیرومندی تن به جوانان و نو باوگان بیاموزند

ایرانیان نژاده از دیر باز میدانستند که شادی و شادمانی سبب نیرومندی تن و آسایش روان بوده و تیمار و اندوه شوند (موجب) کاهش آن است . پدران اندیشمند ما به جشن ها و شادی ها آنچنان پایگاهی بلند داده اند که آنرا همپای آفرینش جهان و مردم میدا نستند تا آنجا که داریوش بزرگ هخامنشی پادشاه ایران در سنگ نبشته هایش از اهورامزدا میخواهد که برای مردمش همواره شادی بیافریند

از اینرو پدران و مادران فرهیخته باستانی ما از هر انگیزه تاریخی ، میهنی و آیینی بهره گرفته و جشنی بر پا میکردند و پس از نیایش دانای بزرگ هستی بخش اهورامزدا خداوند ایران زمین و گیتی برای زیبایی های زندگی به پای کوبی ، شادمانی و خرمی میپرداختند

بوش (وجود) جشنها در ایران باستان با تاریخ ، فرهنگ و آیین ایرانیان آمیخته است ، و هر آنگاه ایرانیان پیروز به سر زمینهای دیگر دستیابی داشتند این رستادهای (آداب و رسوم) نیکو و و پسندیده را با خود به آن دیار به ارمغان برده اند . در فرهنگ پارسی و آیین سپنتای مزدیسنی نشانی از روزهای سوگ و اندوه نمیباشد و زندگی آوردگه کار و کوشش ، شادی ، خرمی و خوش گذرانی است

دو جشن بسیار بزرگ ایرانیان در فرهنگ پارسی و دین بهی که بیش از جشنهای دیگر شکوهمندند و دلهای مرده را زنده و روانهای افسرده را شاداب میکنند ، نوروز و مهرگانند

نوروز از آن جمشید پشدادی و مهرگان از آن فریدون پشدادی است

روز دهم مهر ماه روز مهرگان از ماه مهر است که از دیر باز نیاکان سرفراز و بالنده ما با دیدگاه بسیار دانشی و بینشی بر این روز فرخنده ارج نهاده و آنرا گرامی داشته و به جشن و پایکوبی پرداخته اند.

سخن در باره خجسته جشن مهرگان بی پایان است. ولی از آنجا که از دید زمانی دست تنگ است به ناچار آنرا کوتاه میکنیم و به گفتاری اندک ولی گویا از دیدهای گوناگون بسنده میکنیم.

مهرگان و نوروز از روزگار باستان برای ایرانیان بسیار گرامی بوده و در گذشته پیش از آفند تازیان به نیا خاکمان ایران، تمام رستک هایی (مراسمی) که برای نوروز برگزار میشد برای مهرگان نیز انجام میکردید. برای شناخت هر چه بهتر جشن مهرگان در این نوشتار کوشش میشود آنرا از دیدگاه های دانشی، فرهنگی، آیینی، سرشتی (طبیعت) و تاریخی بر رسی کنیم.

پس از اینکه آموزگار یکم نخستین پیام آور یکتا پرستی گیتی و پدر اختر شناسی گاهنامه ماهی را به گاهنامه خورشیدی دگرگون کرد سال به ۳۶۵ روز، دو ورشیم (فصل) تابستان هفت ماهه از فروردین تا مهر و زمستان ۵ ماهه از آذر ماه تا اسفند، و هر ماه به ۳۰ (سی) روز که هر روز به نام ایزد و یا امشاسپندی نامگذاری شد. زینهار در این گاهنامه در پایان سال ۵ روز افزون میامد که این پنج روزه را پنجه اندرگاه مینامند و به نام پنج بخش سرودهای مینوی گاتاها اهنود، اشتود، سپنتمد، وهوخشتر، و وهیشتاوایش نام گذاری شده است که هر چهار سال یک روز به آن میافزایند و آن سال را اورداد مینامند. پنجه اندرگاه که همزمان با گاهانبار چهره همس پت میدیم گاه است و یژه نیایش و ستایش اهورامزدا برای زیبایی های زندگی و روزهای دهش و همیاری به تهی داستان و بی نوایان به گونه ای که آنان کوچک به شمار نیابند میباشد. در این گاهنامه شش ماه از سال به نام شش فروزه رسای اهورایی امشاسپندان بهمن، اردیبهشت، شهریور، اسفند، خرداد و امرداد و شش ماه دیگر به نام شش ایزد برگزیده فروردین، تیر، مهر، آبان، آذر و دی نامگذاری گردیده است.

سر تاسر اوستا همواره سخن از دو ورشیم تابستان هفت ماهه و زمستان پنج ماهه است که جشن هزاره ها نوروز پیروز پس از گاهانبار همس پت میدیم گاه آغاز نوروز و جشن سال نو است و جشن مهرگان جشن پیش باز زمستان پنج ماهه بود که پیش از چهره ایاسرم گاه در مهر روز از مهر ماه آغاز شده و در انارام روز از مهر ماه پایان مییابد. از آن زمان تا کنون هر گاه نام روز و نام ماه با هم برابر بیافتد، بهدینان آنروز را خجسته دانسته و به نام آن امشاسپند و یا ایزد جشن میگیرند و به شادی و شادمانی میپردازند. در این گاه شماری، روز ۱۶ هر ماه به نام ایزد مهر نام گذاری شده است. ولی سپستر که روانشاد اختر شناس، دانشمند بلند پایه، انگارشگر (ریاضی دان) و پزشک ایرانی خیام نیشابوری با هنجار (تنظیم) گاهنامه جلالی و دگرگونی که در روزهای شش ماه نخستین سال نمود، روز مهر در ماه مهر از شانزدهم به دهم جابه جا شد و زردشتیان نیز به پیروی از گاهنامه سپنتای مزدیسنی جشن مهرگان را هم اکنون هر ساله در روز دهم مهر برگزار میکنند.

از دید اختر شناسی که پدران ما از دیر باز از این دانش آگاهی فروان داشتند، در یافته بودند که در دو هنگام از سال درازای روز و شب از اپاختر (شمال) تا نیمروز (جنوب) و از خاور تا باختر با هم برابر که دوازده تسو (ساعت) روز و دوازده تسو شب داریم. در این دو هنگام گوشه رویه (صفحه) کمر بندی زمین با رویه کمر بندی خورشید که باختریان آنرا "سان دکلنیشن" مینامند سفر است. این دو هنگام چرخش سال نو جشن هزاره ها نوروز پیروز میباشد که باختریان آنرا "فرست پونت آف اریز" و هنگام آغاز پاییز که روز یکم از مهر ماه است و باختریان آنرا "فرست پونت آف لیبرال" مینامند که اکنون پس از گذشت بیش از چهار هزار سال از آن زمان هنوز این دو هنگام از دید اختر شناسی و راه نوردی، دریا نوردی و به ویژه در دانش هوانوردی نوین در جای نخستین جای دارد. زینهار در آغاز تابستان و آغاز زمستان اندازه این گوشه به بیشترین که بیست و سه درجه و چهل و پنج دقیقه میباشد میرسد در اینجا میبینیم که خجسته جشن مهرگان گذشته از پایگاه بلند فرهنگی و آیینی، پایه ژرف دانشی نیز دارد.

مهرنگهبان ماه هفتم سال خورشیدی در گاهنامه سرفراز ایرانی است. مهر یکی از کهنترین خدایان هند و اروپایی است که روزگاری از کناره چین تا رم نیایش سوی پارسیان بود.

مهر که در سانسکریت میترا و در پهلوی میتر خوانده میشود همواره در کنار واژه هایی چون خورشید، دوستی، و پیمان جای دارد و بگونه ای دیگر همان فروهر، تابش و گرمی خورشید است. در گاتاها واژه میتر یکبار آمده است، زینهار نه در پرویز (جلوه) فرشته یا ایزد بلکه به آرش خویش کاری دینی. در فرگرد چهارم و نبداد واژه میتر با مهر تنها به آرش پیمان، دوستی و پایگاه بلند آن در پایداری و استواری در پیمان آمده و پیمان شکن یار اهریمن است.

هم چنین در یشت دهم که ویژه مهر ایزد است تکیه بر پایگاه سر افراز مهر در آرش استواری، خستویی و پابندی به پیمان است. واژه میتر اوستایی و مهر پارسی در سانسکریت به آرش دوستی آمده و در وید بر همان هند که یکی از کهنترین دفترهای دینی است پروردگار روشنایی و فروغ است.

در آیین سپنتای مزدیسنی مهر پاسبان راستی و پیمان است

پیش از آنکه در سایه مهر اهورایی آیین سپنتای مزدیسنی به دست آموزگار یکم نخستین پیام آور یکتا پرستی گیتی اشو زردشت اسپنتمان برای به زیستی آدمیان به مردم ارمغان شود، مهر یکی از خدایان کهن آریایی بود که پیروان آنرا مهری مینامیدند و در نزد نیاکان باستانی آریایی ما از ارج بسیاری بر خوردار بود. در آن هنگام پیروان این آیین که پارسیان آنرا مهری و باختریان آنرا میترا ییزم مینامند از تاجیکستان تا فراسوی رم باستانی گسترده بودند. در این زمان نیز شما میتوانید از نیایشگاههای کهن و باستانی پیروان مهر در اروپا به ویژه در ایتالیا بازدید کنید. آیین مهر تا سال ۳۲۴ ترسایی به هنگامی که کنستانتین ترسا بر یسلیوس مهری امپراتور پیروز گشت دین دادگانی (رسمی) آن کشور بود.

در این هنگام به فرمان کنستانتین دین دادگانی به دین ترسایی دگرگون شد. آگوستین که خود از رهبران آیین مهری در آن سر زمین بود و تا پایه نهم که آخرین پایه این کیش بود نیز بالا رفته بود برای نگهداری بهره های تنیک (منافع شخصی) به آیین ترسایی در آمد و داور کاوش باوری (تفتیش عقاید) در دادگاههای کنستانتین شد که مهریان را بازپرسی کرده و به مرگ ایراخت (محکوم) میکرد و آنانرا زنده زنده به چلیپا میکشید. در اینجا دل چکامه سرای ایرانی به درد آمده و چنین گفت

مهر به پوشید چهر

ریخت ز مغ آبرو

ترسا چنان شب پره

دیده بینا گرفت

لاف زد و هرزه گفت

مهر خدایی نهفت

زبان گستاخ چون

زنگ کلیسا گرفت

پس از گسترش آیین بهی، مهر در پرویز (جلوه) یکی از ایزدان و فرشتگان به دین بهی راه یافت و نام ایزد گرفت. ایزد که در بنیاد از ریشه یز یا یسن میاید به آرش ستودن است. در نخستین آیین یکتا پرستی گیتی آیین بهی، مهر پشتیبان دوستی، سوگند و پیمان است. زردشتیان پیمان شکنی را یکی از بزرگترین گناهان میدانند و پیمان شکن یار اهریمن است، چه این پیمان با یک مزدا پرست باشد و چه با یک دیو پرست. مهر به آرش دوستی، مهربانی، پیشروی دوستی و داور بزرگ است. ایزد مهر ایزد راستی و گفتار راست و زیباست و اهورامزدا نگهداری مردم را به او سپرده است، از اینرو در مهر یشت آمده است که ایزد مهر هزاران گوش برای شنیدن و هزاران چشم برای دیدن دارد و از فراز نای آسمان همواره کردار مردمان را مینگرد و از نیکان نگهداری مینماید. ایزد مهر دشمن بی امان دروغ و دروغگویان است، و گفتن دروغ بیش از هر چیز او را آزار میدهد. ایزد مهر نگهدار خانواده، شهر، کشور و بخشنده دارایی، روزی، پیروزی، شهریاری و فرمانروایی است و داور کردار آدمیان در روز واپسین است. در مهر یشت ایزد مهر بسیار ستوده شده و او را پیوند روشنایی جهان گیتی و جهان مینوی میدانند. در فرهنگ افسانه ای آمده است که در روز مهرگان اهورامزدا زمین را گسترانید و برای روانها تن آفرید. در این روز به ماه روشنایی بخشید. هم چنین است که هر چیزی که دارای بالش و گوالش باشد در این روز به رسایی بالایش خود خواهد رسید. در گذشته در این روز بهدینان کشتی همگانی بسته و اهورا مزدا دانای بزرگ هستی بخش خداوند ایران زمین و گیتی را برای آفریده های نیک بسیارش نیایش و ستایش میکردند. نیساریان در گذشته به هنگام نبرد ایزد مهر را به یاری میخواندند و او نیز با کمک ایزد بهرام و وره رام آنانرا یاری مینموند.



Mehregan

Happy Mehregān

Article in Farsi by: **Commader Nariman Aryaban**

نوشته: آقای نریمان آریابان

Synopsis in English by **Armita Soroosh**

**On this day of Mehr, in the month of Mehr, on
the happy occasion of Mehregan,
Be kinder my love, my lovely
compassionate friend**

(Famous Persian poem about
Mehregan)

*I cherish Mehr Izad and it's creator,
the wise Ahura Mazda. I
cherish Mehr with our religious
ceremonies and our deeply
rooted traditions, just as I
cherish the moon, the sun, the
stars and Mehr, who is
the king of all lands...*

*With all my soul, I cherish the
glorious Mehr Izad, who owns
the vast green meadows, who
gives us peace and tranquility,
who protects Iran: the land of
Persians,*

*I cherish the powerful and mighty
Mehr Izad, who leads us to
the best creations of Ahura
Mazda: knowledge, good
judgment, health, success,
and everlasting love.*

*It is Ahura Mazda who knows of
all our deeds, may Ahura
Mazda's blessing be on the
behdin men and women
who carry on the traditions,
who perform the religious
ceremonies to cherish Mehr
Izad.*

The ancient Iranians valued happiness; it was so important and ranked so highly that happiness was regarded as one of the creations of Ahura Mazda.

They valued being happy together, with the rich and poor gathering as one in various festivals and celebrations; that is one of the reasons they treasured the major festivals such as Nowruz, Mehregan, Tiregan and Sadeh. This admiration was noted on an Archimedean Royal Inscription ordered by Darius the Great, requesting Ahura Mazda to grant happiness to his people:

*A great god is Ahura Mazda,
who created this earth,
who created this sky,
who created man,
who created happiness for man,
who made Darius king.*

Before Zarathustra, who was the first monotheistic prophet, Mehr was one of the oldest divinities or gods worshiped by Aryans, and had a significant influence in our ancestors' lives. After Zoroastrianism spread throughout Persia, Mehr's influence continued and Mehr entered into the Zoroastrian religion as one of the angels named as "Izad". The word "Izad" is referred to as "Yaz" or "Yasan" in Avesta, meaning "to worship" or "to honor". In the Zoroastrian religion "Izad Mehr" (or Mehr Izad) is the holy guardian of Friendship, Keeper of Oaths, and Supporter of Loyalists. In the Zoroastrian religion, keeping ones promise is of great importance, and this is why breaking a vow or a promise is incomprehensible, and any person who breaks a promise cannot be considered a good Zoroastrian.

Influenced by the Zoroastrian religion and rich Persian culture, Nowruz and Mehregan are the two most important celebrations. After the attack of Arabs on Persia, following the fall of the Persian Empire, despite efforts to diminish ancient Persian traditions and celebrations, they have survived throughout thousands of years. Many Zoroastrians lost their lives to ensure these celebrations were passed from one generation to the next. Nowruz and Mehregan are still celebrated so very splendidly today inside as well as outside of Iran. In the past centuries, these two religious and cultural celebrations have intrigued many astronomers to study the vernal equinox calling them "First Point of Aries" (which is the beginning of Spring) and "First point of Libra" (beginning of Autumn).

Mehregan

As beautifully documented in the Shahnameh by Poet Ferdowsi, Nowruz is accredited to King Jamshid as the "new day" and Mehregan represents the victory day of King Fereydoon over the evil Zahak; two epic stories well versed in Shahnameh.

The Mehregan festival which has been inherited from our Zoroastrian ancestors and regarded with great respect and wisdom, starts on the day of Mehr in the month of Mehr and ends on the day of Raam for a total of 6 days. Our Zoroastrian ancestors celebrated these 6 days: **Mehr, Soroosh, Rashn, Farvardin, Verahram & Raam** by singing and dancing throughout.

In the Archimedean dynasty, Mehregan was celebrated gloriously and the month of Mehr was devoted to observance and worshiping of Ahura Mazda. Likewise, in the Ashkanian dynasty, Mehregan was celebrated splendidly and with great glory. In the Sassanid dynasty, the Persian king would wear a Purple Royal robe and a crown in the shape of the Sun. He would then accept the public into the palace. First, a royal messenger would inform the king and the public about the latest achievements in the kingdom. Then people in different groups would approach the king sitting at his throne and give their Mehregan greetings. This ceremony then was followed by prayers to Ahura Mazda and the Mehr Izad; wishing for good health, for peace, harmony, wealth, courage, and for having wise and gracious children.

Considering the richness and depth of Mehr in Persian culture and Zoroastrianism and the role it plays not only as the protector of friendship, but also as the peacekeeper between nations, it is our obligation to cherish and celebrate the Mehregan festival, and it is our duty to make it as glorious as our ancestors celebrated it.

And most importantly, it is our duty to apply its values and principles to our lives.

Armita P. Soroosh has been a member of Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington Inc. (ZAMWI) for the past five years. She lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland with her husband and two sons.

MEHREGAN

When the deep sea divers
Unravel the mystery
Of the deep blue sea
Beautiful coral reefs
Colorful plankton
Snaky eels
Same way I feel about Zoroastrianism
As slowly & steadily
All the rich traditions
Culture are being revealed to me

Meher signifies the glorious sun
Always up at the crack of dawn
Giver of light warmth & heat
Without which we would
Freeze to death
The day would not be complete

Meher takes relationships
Very very seriously
In dealing with one another
If one fails to keep one's word
Surely from Meher one will hear

Whether they be Yazatas
Amesha Spentas
They are actually Divine Attributes
Of Ahura Mazda!

PS: Even if the world were dark & cold
Where we would have to grope our way
With smiles on our faces
And happiness in our hearts
We can wipe the misery away!

Farida Bamji, Ottawa, Canada

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM: ZOROASTRIAN RETURN TO ROOTS.

Arzan Sam Wadia
*Core Team Member, Return To Roots
& Vice-President FEZANA*

The Zoroastrian Return To Roots Program in its third year of inception has already exceeded the goals and aspirations of its founding team. Over three separate trips to India in 2013-14, 2015 and 2016, a total of 45 Zarathushti youth from 7 countries have had a chance to travel for two weeks to India to get a deeper understanding of the Zoroastrian way of life. The program initiated under the aegis of PARZOR enables Zarathushti youth to meet with entrepreneurs, business houses, visit sites of historical and religious significance, have audiences with religious scholars, and take part in national exhibitions, seminars and programs. The youth also get a chance to meet their peers from the Zoroastrian diaspora globally and establish lifelong bonds of friendship.



For all of us involved in putting together these trips, the logistics of the trip planning falls into place fairly easily. This is primarily due to the fact that the Zarathushtis of India welcome the youth with open arms and in many a case go above and beyond, just so that the generation of tomorrow get an opportunity to know more about their roots in India. The financial aid of organizational and individual donors and sponsors helps make the program accessible to all the candidates who apply, and who require funding. FEZANA through its executive in 2013 became one of the first organizational supporters of the program and for the last program contributed US\$ 10,000 towards the Return To Roots 2016. **This contribution is just one of other similar initiatives that come from FEZANA's General Fund.**

In the next few pages you will read what the Return To Roots 2016 Fellows have to say about this program in their own words. Our earnest hope is that after reading, you will help in promoting this program by sharing these stories with your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and any youth you know. We hope that they will join us on our future trips to India and Iran. If you would like to support the program financially, you can always donate to the **FEZANA General Fund.**

In conclusion I would leave you with a tidbit that is a true testament of the sense of mission that permeates the program. The third Return To Roots program had alumni from the previous two programs manage the organizational logistics right from selection to arranging for all travel details to the details of activities on the ground. And the three of them joined the trip because they felt that the most significant way they could give back to the program would be through active participation and a donation of their time and focus, which in today's world sometimes are more valuable than dollars and cents. They are not alone, we have a queue of Fellows wanting to volunteer to be organizers of the next programs in India and Iran, and we hope that as many as possible of the Zarathushti youth will join them.

Zoroastrian Youth Return To Their Roots

IN SEARCH OF THEIR IDENTITY

ANUSHAE PARAKH, RETURN TO ROOTS CO-ORGANIZER

I first heard about the 2015 Zoroastrian Return to Roots program from one of my childhood friends. At the time she was doing her undergraduate thesis on Zoroastrian iconography and was extremely keen on taking the opportunity to experience 'RTR'. Needless to say she said it would be a memorable experience if I joined her. After some thought I decided to come on the trip without expectation of any kind. The experiences that I immersed myself in and the people that surrounded me, will never be taken away from me. Thus, being invited for RTR 3 in 2016 as a co-organizer, I was not only ecstatic, but I was honored.

As a participant, the friendships and memories I created are ones I will cherish forever. I never thought I would visit the Serum Institute, visit the Varoli River and stand on the very banks my forefathers stepped on and be struck by awe while standing in the presence of the majestic Iranshah. As an organizer, I would say my experience felt more 'real', because I could stand back and observe as a whole, the journey these young men and women from around the world who had embarked on, to reconnect with their roots.

I soaked in their eclectic personalities and developed a new found appreciation of their varying perspectives about the world. This allowed me to truly appreciate what the RTR offers for the youth diaspora and what it has the potential to do- the potential to change lives. Each participant I spoke to after the trip could not thank the co-chairs and organizers enough. They said they will never forget what they have learnt and felt as they did on this spiritual journey.

The articles written below are the accounts from RTR fellows, each person reflecting upon their personal Section experiences having recently finished their trip in March 2016. These accounts show the diversity among participants but also their shared values. The participants were active in engaging fully with each experience we embarked on, while simultaneously making an objective judgment about what they were taught about the Zoroastrian culture and faith. They also formed lasting friendships and strong bonds of solidarity as was evident through the course of the trip. What made RTR a trip of a lifetime for everyone was that we had all come for the same reasons- our own curiosity, drive and a yearning for some meaning and understanding about our roots.

PhD student **Jehangir Cama**, commented that this RTR trip was unique in that it coincided with the launch of the Everlasting Flame Programme in Delhi, showcasing Parsi Zoroastrian culture. For him, this was the perfect combination of historical and modern dynamics of the culture which he could share with his fellow Zarthusthi friends. For **Shireen Patel**, growing up in Lahore, Pakistan meant that the population of Parsis decreased over the years, leaving her and her siblings isolated from and confused about their culture. For the first time, Shireen could say she gained a group of Zoroastrian friends from around the world. Similar to Shireen, **Parisa Parsi** from USA, showed that she too struggled to balance her identity between her religion, ethnicity and nationality. She soon found out that her fellow Zoroastrians from the diaspora faced these same challenges, making her more determined to join hands to allow to bridge the gaps between Iranian and Parsi Zoroastrians. Undergraduate student **Sanaira Monedegarian** was certain about

the decision she had made to come to India- she was determined to recover her past. In a similar vein, Sanaira's fellow participant, a priest from Mumbai, **Sheherazad Pavri** came for the same reason. However, unlike majority of the participants, growing up in India meant that Sheherazad was aware of the fact that many Indian Parsis take the value of their community for granted. The trip instilled in him a new found sense of responsibility to encourage the Zoroastrian youth to get more actively involved in community activities.

Born and brought up in Karachi, Anushae is one of the co-organizers of the RTR 2016 program. Shortly after completing her undergraduate in Sociology and MSc in Environment and Development from England, she started work in Bangkok. She is currently a program assistant for a regional program focusing on coastal ecosystem conservation. Some unforgettable moments from the trip include the times spent in the bus playing endless games of 'Mafia' and having heated debates about everything under the sun. Her favorite memory was visiting the Iranshah at night and being united as one in prayer. In her spare time Anushae enjoys painting, travelling and cooking.

Inauguration of Threads of Continuity

JEHANGIR CAMA, INDIA/UK

I must admit, I initially didn't consider myself quite the right candidate for the Return to Roots programme. Even though I've lived abroad in England for the past seven years, my involvement with Parzor and various other community matters left me feeling as though I was still very much in the thick of all things Parsi back home, hardly requiring a return to my "roots". However, since I was in any case visiting India for the launch of the Everlasting Flame Programme, and tempted by the prospect of travelling to new places in Gujarat, I decided to take part in the third episode of the Return to Roots initiative run by Parzor.

I am extremely glad that I did. RTR was, in many ways, a revelation. Not only did I see parts of Mumbai and Gujarat that I hadn't seen before, I particularly enjoyed the company of an interesting, diverse group of Zarthustis from across the globe. In a community that is so thinly spread across continents, the RTR programme is a great example of bringing people together. Bonds formed when travelling as a group are stronger, in my opinion, than those that can be formed at conferences and other showcase events, and for me making a bunch of new friends was the best part of the programme.

Travelling through the original Parsi heartlands of Gujarat was a special experience. The inner archaeologist in me enjoyed visiting the Sanjan excavation site with Dr. Rukshana Nanji, who has worked on the excavations herself. The Sanjan *dakhma* is considered the earliest archaeological evidence of the Parsis in India; it is something that is desperately in need of preservation, in the light of encroachment on the lands of the Sanjan excavations. I also enjoyed going back to Udvada; I was last there two decades ago, and much has changed since. We attended the late night *boi* ceremony at the Iranshah, which was a wonderful experience. It was also a revelation to see such a clear night sky in India, away from the pollution of the big cities. I even managed to see a shooting star for only the second time in my life there! As we left Udvada the following morning, I had my first glass of *doodh-na-puff* in over twenty years, which was just about the icing on the cake.

The trip also finally brought me to Navsari, and the Meherjirana Library that I'd heard so much about. The library hosts a treasure trove of manuscripts, and we witnessed first-hand the restoration work being carried



out by INTACH and others to preserve this wonderful collection. Navsari was also the birthplace of various community stalwarts such as Sir Jamsetji Tata and the first Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy. Visiting their ancestral homes in the Parsi *Vad* of Navsari put their lives in perspective, and showed how far one can go from relatively humble beginnings. In the evening we were treated to a demonstration of *kusti* weaving and *toran* making at Jamshed Baug, following which the Iranians in the group decided to celebrate the Iranian Fire Festival *Chaharshanbe Suri*. This involved starting a small fire and getting people to jump over it with Iranian music playing in the background. As a group bonding exercise it worked brilliantly, and was one of the most memorable events of the tour.

This particular RTR trip was scheduled to coincide with the launch of the Everlasting Flame International Programme in Delhi. This mega spectacle on the Parsi Zoroastrians encompassed three major exhibitions and a two month long cultural programme showcasing Parsi Zoroastrian culture to the world at large. This unique experience provided the perfect ending for the RTR tour. In addition to viewing the exhibitions and attending the festivities, the group got a chance to interact with community leaders from India and abroad. In a tour meant to reconnect Zoroastrians with their cultural roots, these events were truly the *pièce de résistance*, and



Inauguration of the Threads of Continuity Exhibition

were much appreciated by all. The RTR programme provides fresh insights into Parsi Zoroastrian religion and culture, in a very enjoyable manner. I cannot remember when I last had such fun travelling in India. It has given me new Zarthusti friends spread out from Bangkok to California, pursuing various careers, but all bound by an interest in their culture and origins. It has also given me new perspectives on my culture and religion, and I cannot recommend the programme highly enough.

Jehangir Cama, originally from Delhi, recently completed his PhD in biophysics at Trinity College, Cambridge. He now works as a research scientist at the Cavendish Laboratory and the Stem Cell Institute in Cambridge. He is also a pianist, having performed recitals in Cambridge and Delhi, an avid golfer, and has interests ranging from night photography to Russian literature. He has been closely involved with the UNESCO Parzor project since its inception in 1999.

IN SEARCH OF MY IDENTITY- BY RETURNING TO MY ROOTS

Growing up in North America, the renowned "Great Melting Pot," meant battling with many identities. I'm an American, I'm an Iranian, I am a woman, and I'm a Zoroastrian. Trying to find a sensitive balance among my identities has been an undeniable challenge. Every day I'm faced with choices, choices that may help me face pressing challenges, and choices that make it more obscure and difficult.

Going on the Return to Roots program has been a choice that has helped me understand where I stand as a young Zoroastrian. The opportunity to meet outstanding youths from all over the world on grounds that hold so much emotion, history, and adversity has provided an irreplaceable perspective. Learning about how the minority youth Zoroastrians in Lahore, Pakistan manage to keep their identity as Zoroastrians alive, despite the disparate community has opened my eyes to the many challenges Zoroastrian youth face worldwide.

In joining us together, RTR created a journey that exposed us to the many hardships that Zoroastrian people have faced and overcome so we can all continue to practice good thoughts, good words, and good deeds and add to our rich culture. By participating in this trip I hoped to find an identity, a voice, a perspective, and, most of all, a way to contribute back to our community. As a leader in my local Zoroastrian community, other active members of my community and I have joined together to put on a summer camp for Zoroastrian youths that serves to empower this generation with the importance of unification regardless of their background be it Iranian or Parsi. RTR has given me the opportunity to share my experiences in India, in particular the many Zoroastrians we visited that are in great need of assistance. By sharing my experiences, I hope to empower the youth to bring change and stick together to advance the Zoroastrian community.

The friendships I gained from this journey will stand durably throughout our lives; the moments we shared throughout the RTR, and the challenges we faced spanning borders and countries have

PARISA PARSI, USA

created an unbreakable bond between us. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to explore my roots and my identity. Ultimately, the first step towards change is awareness, RTR provided us with first-hand knowledge that will promise change, unification, and a future for Zoroastrians worldwide.



Parisa Parsi, 24, is a Tech developer based out of San Francisco, California. A Bay Area native, Parisa attended UC Berkeley for Political Economics and Global Information Technology. During her free time Parisa and her fellow Zoroastrian leaders get together to put on a summer camp for youth at the local northern California Dare e mehr.



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SANAIRA MONDEGARIAN, USA

It was 2:20 am when I landed in Mumbai on 11 March 2016. As I began the first leg of my journey, which was the very long wait in customs, I was filled with trepidation and excitement at this strange airport called Chhatrapati Shivaji International—a name I was yet to learn how to pronounce properly. This was the beginning of my spring break in the US and the magnitude of the decision to travel to India had just hit me. I was here to rediscover my past.

India was to be an incredible learning experience for me and I cannot stress enough on how important it was for me to make this trip at the point in my life when I did. I was twenty years old and studying in the US. I was far away from everything that bound me to my culture. I had almost forgotten what it truly meant to be Zoroastrian. Participating as a Fellow on Return to Roots exposed me to everything that makes the Parsis such an important part of Indian history and society. More significantly, I was accompanied by young Zoroastrians from across the globe who were grappling with similar issues of how we related to our community and culture while living in the West. Through multiple bus rides and late night conversations in hotel rooms and airport lounges, I ended up making life-long friends. These are the people I still talk to on a daily basis and consider to be my Zoroastrian buddies to the very end. These are the people I keep in mind when making plans for Navroze and Khordad Sal in the US, because these are people I can relate to.

My family was incredibly eager for me to go on this trip when I got the opportunity and it made perfect sense for them to be. The Return to Roots Program has made many successful trips in the past and I was thrilled to be included as a Roots Fellow on their third trip. The general

scope of why RTR organizes these trips is for the sake of the Zoroastrian youth and I speak on behalf of the Zoroastrian youth when I say that they are doing a brilliant job of uniting us. RTR was only the first step of several journeys I will be taking, each of which will make me more involved in a community that I take such pride in being a part of.



Sanaira Mondegarian is an Environmental Sciences student at the State University of New York in Plattsburgh. She is fond of travel, great food and a good sense of bawa humour.

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FINDING MY ROOTS IN MY HOME COUNTRY

SHEHERAZAD PAVRI, INDIA

In March 2016, a group of young Zoroastrians from across the world convened in Mumbai to begin the third Return to Roots trip. I was intrigued to learn about why each of my fellow RTR companions decided to come on this trip and visit India. At the inaugural session we were introduced to each other and I found out a bit more about the people I would be spending the next ten days with learning about their Zoroastrian heritage and roots in my home country.

What became quite apparent were the common moments at Irani/Parsi institutions, such as, Britannia restaurant (photo below) that solidified many of the bonds among all of us. While the owner, Mr Boman Kohinoor, told us about his love for Her Majesty the Queen of England and brought out a life size cut out of Prince William with Kate, we filled our tummies with pulao and drank Raspberry soda, which inevitably brought out the “Parsi-panu” among us regardless of where in the world we were from.

The group’s visit to my alma mater, the Dadar Athornan Institute, was extremely important as it helped shed light on the deteriorating priestly class and the challenges we face in maintaining our sites of worship and priestly community in Mumbai, other parts of India, and abroad, as well. Given this situation, I was deeply touched to see my fellow participants being overwhelmed to see our Holy Fires. I was happy that they asked me lots of questions about the meanings behind our rituals and holy fires. It was truly heartening to see the genuine interest in our religion, especially by some participants who had never visited an Atash Behram before. One of the most rewarding aspects of the RTR was to see, as a young priest, were other young people interested in learning about our ancient religion.

Having grown up in India, especially in Mumbai, I soon realised that we Parsis have taken a lot for granted. Moreover, as a young priest I soon discovered that RTR is the perfect platform to make my community members aware of the good work being done by Zoroastrians across the diaspora and to get involved in an active, positive way rather than complaining about what we have not achieved or lost.

Being a Zoroastrian born and brought up in Mumbai, the places we visited were not new to me. Many of our experiences were humbling reminders of why service to our elderly is so important. We were all moved



Scrumptious Parsi Lunch at Britannia

during our visit to the Parsee General Hospital, where we interacted with the infirm; we were given time to speak with them and see the joy on their faces.

As we moved on to Gujarat and the knowledge of all we had been seeing, learning, and listening to gradually seeped into me, one thing became clear: our community in India, on the whole, has been pretty ignorant about these historic places, myself included. This was particularly evident seeing the condition of the Sanjan Dakhma—the earliest archaeological evidence of Zoroastrians in India.

Our visits to the Atash Behrams in Udwada, Navsari, and Surat was another display of the respect for our religion by my fellow participants, which was encouraging. One of the most intense experiences for us was our visit to the orphanages and infirmary in Surat..It instilled in me the will to reach out to the needy and deserving community members.

At the end of this programme, I'm glad to have made friends for life. I have been inspired to bring out the leader in me. I feel strongly that more Zoroastrians in India should be involved with RTR in the future. We have been pretty oblivious and have failed to really appreciate the history and contributions of our forefathers whilst enjoying the facilities of community institutions from the baugs that house many of us or medical and financial help for the needy. My main takeaway from this trip was that although the path ahead for our community may be difficult, it is only in collaboration with likeminded community members that we



Group in Surat Parsi Boys Orphanage

can gain the strength to develop mutual understandings and jointly work towards a common vision.

Sheherazad Pavri is an alumnus of the Dadar Athornan Institute. He graduated with a Bachelor's in Biotechnology from the University of Mumbai. Currently, he's working as an e-entrepreneur in parallel with performing his duties as a priest.

FINDING MY IDENTITY THROUGH RETURN TO ROOTS (RTR) 2016

SHIREEN PATEL, PAKISTAN

Living in Lahore as a Parsi, I recall my childhood growing up among other Parsi children in the community. Within a short span of time, most families migrated, leaving my siblings and me as the only children of the community in Lahore. With no other children left, we felt alone with the older generation that was also left behind.

The community has not had a mobed in almost two decades. Given the minute size of the community (less than 25 today) there were no religious classes, which meant we grew up with negligible knowledge about our religion. I grew up with a severe identity crisis, “naam na Parsi” (Parsi just by name) is what my siblings and I would call ourselves. Living in a majority Muslim country all my life meant I ended up knowing more about their religion than I did about mine.

My sister and I were fortunate enough to be a part of the RTR 2016 program. We heard about it from our cousin, who had been an earlier participant. We applied for the program as an opportunity for us to understand who we are and maybe put an end to our life long identity crisis. A month later, we landed in Mumbai along with 10 other participants who came from the USA, Canada, Iran, Australia, Pakistan, and, surprisingly for me, even from India.

Everything about the trip was a unique and memorable experience as it was all new to me. We travelled to Sanjan where Dr Rukhsana Nanji, our guide, told us stories about the struggles our ancestors went through to keep this religion alive. I read a simple quote by Jamsetji Tata at his memorial museum in Navsari which stated: **“If you cannot make it greater at least preserve it. Do not let things slide. Go on doing my work and increasing it, but if you cannot, do not lose what we have already done.”** A very simple yet strong message to remind us that who we are and what we have today is because of the hard work and dedication of our ancestors and that we should not only add to it but also preserve it.

Standing at the gates of Iran Shah Atash Behram in Udwada was surreal for me as I had always wished and dreamt of it. I stood with mixed emotions and goose bumps like never before. At the Dotivala bakery in Surat I had the best batasas I have ever had! We were given a tour of the bakery and demonstrations of how batasas are made. We also spent our time in places where we could interact with people of our community. Visits to the Parsi General Hospital, children’s orphanages and old people’s homes were overwhelming. I cannot forget the visit to the rural areas where we saw Zoroastrian families living below poverty line in the most unimaginable conditions. It was an eye opener for me, as I didn’t know that people from our community too lived in extremely poor and challenging conditions.

The Everlasting Flame exhibition was a very unique experience for me as it took me on a journey from the earliest days of Zoroastrianism to what and where it is today. I was in disbelief that there was an entire exhibition dedicated and committed to us, about us, and for us. I had never been in such a huge gathering with so many Zoroastrians under one roof exploring our history and culture together. My identity crisis vanished; a sense of belonging, and self-identity emerged, as I wandered deeper through the exhibition. It was the perfect end to a perfect trip as I walked away with a sense of pride in what I am.

RTR gives everyone a platform to come and gain knowledge from different sources and materials. The



information that was imparted to us varied from source to source. We were exposed to different people with different views, but we were not forced to follow, agree or believe in any one view. It was one and the same for us to gather and retain information as we wanted. Ideas, opinions, and thoughts were shared and it was up to each participant to choose and follow the ideas and paths that he/she liked. I also learned about the Parsi and Zoroastrian distinction, something I had no idea about, as for me it was one and the same.

What stood out the most for me from this entire experience was gaining my very first set of Parsi/ Zoroastrian friends, something I have never had before as I grew up isolated from my own community in



Group in the village in Gujarat

my country. I felt lucky to have met all these wonderful people and be able to experience this trip with them. This group has been the highlight of my trip and I can personally call them my own friends thanks to RTR!

I have gained memories for a lifetime, learnt how to do the Kusti properly, a better sense of identity, connection to my roots, more knowledge about my religion and our forefathers. It helps participants like me, who come with little or no knowledge, to learn about their religion and ancestors. The organizers of the trip deserve full credit for all the dedication and hard work they put in to ensure participants have a safe, comfortable, and most importantly, a successful learning experience.

The Return to Roots program truly allows young Zoroastrians from all over the world to connect with their religious and cultural identity. When I went on this tour, I came with a strong identity crisis, but I left with a better understanding and a stronger sense of identity and belonging. Even though I got more information than I could grasp, I left with more knowledge than I had arrived with. I want to keep going back to India and reconnecting with my roots and gain a deeper understanding with time.

Shireen Patel was born, raised, and lives in Lahore, Pakistan. With an undergraduate degree in Business Administration, she works in the corporate sector. Shireen is an avid traveller which led her to India to participate in the Return to Roots Program.

In The News

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL ADVANCED INVESTIGATOR AWARD OF EURO 2.5 MILLION TO PROF ALMUT HINTZE FOR

THE MULTIMEDIA YASNA PROJECT (MUYA)

Zoroastrianism at SOAS University of London, has been awarded a European Research Council (ERC) Advanced Investigator Grant of just under €2.5 million (ca. £2 million) to investigate the Yasna, the core ritual of the Zoroastrian religion. The five-year project '**The Multimedia Yasna**' (**MUYA**), led by Almut Hintze, will film a performance of the Yasna ritual, transcribe the words which the priests recite, and examine their meaning and how they relate to the ritual actions and to the tradition of the manuscripts.



The project, which will start in October 2016, provides positions for three post-doctoral researchers and three doctoral students. The project will produce an interactive film of the full Yasna ritual to be published on-line. The film will make the words which the priests utter available to the observer in both aural and visual form in the form of sub-titles that run simultaneously with the spoken

word and the visible ritual performance. The film will form the basis of further investigation and provide data for philological editions of parts of the Yasna. The editions will be based on the manuscripts and provide an English translation, commentary and glossary. In doing so, the project will adapt to the Avesta digital technology that has been developed for an ongoing edition of the Greek New Testament at the Universities of Birmingham, Münster and Trier.

Close collaboration with the Zoroastrian community is at the heart of the Multimedia Project. It will collaborate with the Dadar Athornan Institute in Mumbai, whose principal, Dr Ramiyar Karanjia, is the project's lead Indian collaborator. The project is supported by an international informal Advisory Group composed of Zoroastrian representatives from North America (Dolly Dastoor, Aban Rustomji, Ervad Gustad Panthaki, Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli), from Iran (Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary, Professor Ketayoun Mazdapour), from India (Dastur Dr Firoze M. Kotwal, Shernaz Cama), and from Europe (Malcolm Deboo, ZTFE, and Shahpur Captain, WZO). The function of the Advisory Group is to support the project with advice on practical matters and assist with the dissemination of its results.

The Zoroastrian community is grateful to Prof Hintze for her continuous interest, deep study and promoting visibility of the Zoroastrian Religion.



Young students learning the Yasna recitation



Priestly precinct for training priests



In The News

THE EVERLASTING FLAME IN NEW DELHI

DR JENNY ROSE

March 19th 2016 marked the inauguration in New Delhi of the groundbreaking exhibition ***"The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination."*** This exhibition was originally installed at the Brunei Gallery of SOAS (University of London) between October and December 2013, and was re-instated at the National Museum of India (NMI), to run until May 29th. It owes its inception to Dr. Sarah Stewart of SOAS, who was the chief curator of both presentations.

The NMI exhibition was inaugurated by Dr. Najma Heptulla, the Honorable Minister for Minority Affairs in India. Shri Rakesh Garg, Secretary of Minority Affairs, read a message from India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which paid tribute to the Zoroastrian community for their contribution to the country. Other speakers included Baroness Tessa Blackstone, Chair of the British Library Trust, and Baroness Valerie Ann Amos, Director of SOAS. All the dignitaries on the dais were presented with copies of *The Zoroastrian Flame: Exploring Religion, History and Tradition*, ed. Alan Williams, Sarah Stewart and Almut Hintze (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016). This companion volume to the original exhibition catalogue contains papers presented by scholars at the conference to launch that event in London. The New Delhi exhibition was also launched with an international conference, organized by the NMI, Parzor and the Ministry for Minority Affairs, entitled ***"Zoroastrianism in The New Millennium."*** The five consecutive panels included speakers from the UK, USA, Canada, Iran, Czech Republic, Russia and Australia, as well as several panel chairs and presenters from India.

As the first SOAS exhibition ever to go on tour, the Delhi presentation incorporated most of the original artifacts, including some pieces that had been restored with the aid of the Bombay Parsi Punchayat, others sponsored by individual donations (such as the huge glass reproduction of the façade of the west staircase of the palace of Darius



Arda Viraf Nameh 1742, Surat. National Museum: 54.16/2 folio 55r

The Reward of the obedient wife.

at Persepolis), and many printed documents on loan from the British Library. The NMI event displayed 29 manuscripts from the British Library, marking the first time that the latter institution had lent any original items to the former. Ursula Sims-Williams, one of the key curators of the exhibition introduced a late 18th century illustrated *Arda Viraf Nameh* from the John Rylands Library to the conference participants, and noted that it was complemented in this new exhibition with a slightly earlier edition from the NMI's own collection. The NMI also displayed one of its *Shahnameh* manuscripts within the exhibition.



The Combat of Rustam, "Blue Hall", Panjikent, The State Hermitage Museum Collection SA 16223

In The News

Some new artifacts enhanced the impact of the show. These included Achaemenid and Sasanian silver objects from the National Museum of Iran, representing the first collaboration between that institution and the NMI, and some Sasanian-style textiles from the Victoria and Albert Museum. Also new to the exhibition were several important objects from the British Museum, including two from the Oxus Treasure (a gold votive plaque and a silver statue, each with a bearded man holding *barsom*), several Kushan coins, and a 13th century reliquary casket depicting the *magi* wearing 'Parthian dress' on Sogdian wall paintings discovered at Panjikent. These two scenes show the Iranian hero Rustam fighting an enemy (either a warrior or a demon), with his son, Faramarz, before an enthroned king. The addition of these murals, alongside the Sogdian fragment of a story of Rustam from the British Library collection, are a reminder that the champion was apparently held in particular esteem by the Sogdians.

The exhibition was also positively impacted by donations from other institutions and individuals in India, including some paintings in both the Parsi Salon and the enlarged Fire Temple, the front of which is modeled on one of the oldest fire temples in Mumbai, constructed by Manekji Navroji Sett. These quintessentially Parsi additions, alongside other new elements, subtly altered the tenor of the New Delhi exhibition, which, although it echoed the format and flow of that at SOAS, nonetheless had its own impressive substance and shape.

Photographs courtesy the author
For more details about the exhibition visit

<http://unescoparzor.com/>



ParZor

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To
The FEZANA Committee
FEZANA

Dear Dolly

I write on behalf of the Curators and Organisers of the *Threads of Continuity: Zoroastrian Life and Culture* to thank you sincerely for the help we have received from your Institution. The magnificent panel of demographic data from your archives added greatly to our story of the history and spread of Zoroastrianism across the world and has been much appreciated. The kind donation of a replica of the Cyrus Cylinder added to our section on Iran and I will be writing to Afted Mistry and the UN NGO Committee today to thank them as well.

It is estimated that about 80,000 people visited the **Everlasting Flame International Programme** and we have had very good coverage in the national and international media.

I have a copy of the Compendium brought out on this occasion for FEZANA, and I hope you will enjoy going through it. We would be grateful if our thanks and this present of the book could be brought to the notice of your Committee. We can reach it to New York by July and if you can give us an address there, it can be posted to FEZANA. If on the other hand you have anyone visiting Bombay, who can carry a 3 kg book, it would be good to know!

With warm regards,

Shernaz Cama

Dr. Shernaz Cama
Director, UNESCO Parzor

PARZOR FOUNDATION

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In The News

THE PATH WE CHOOSE

INAUGURATION OF NEW YORK DAR-E-MEHR ON 26 MARCH 2016.

FORMAL ADDRESS BY ASTAD CLUBWALA, PRESIDENT, ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF GREATER NEW YORK (ZAGNY) AND THE DEVITRE FAMILY NAVJOTE

Planning for this event has been quite involved and my thanks to the various Committees – many of whose members have been sleep deprived for the last couple of weeks. So, it was only late last night that I had to figure out what I was going to say today.

I have been mulling over something in my mind for quite a while, but never got around to expressing it strongly, especially in public. So for better or worse, I've decided to GO FOR IT.

What would historians say about the Zarathushti Religion a century from now or two centuries from now?

We are at a cross road. We have been grappling with the fact of declining numbers and quite frankly, it's pure mathematics. If the trend of the last few decades continues the answer is obvious. The debate has also been going on for decades with extremely strong opinions on either side.

The world evolves with time, the planets evolve over time, nature also evolves - and so do religions. We, Zarathushtis, are admired by others, quite frankly for our thoughts, words and deeds. Other non-Zarathushtis are concerned about our dwindling numbers and in India, we are considered an asset worth preserving. We are particularly known for our adapt-

ability.

I have a dilemma, because I have two diametrically opposing views.

I am not a scholar of Religion – far from it. However, I do possess a “good mind”. Well, some may dispute that – but mainly! I look at this issue in very simplistic terms. In terms of an innocent child.

We all teach our children while they are growing up – to share. To share toys, to share books, to share food with those who are hungry, to share empathy for those in need. We **are** the religion of the Good Mind. We are taught to share everything. So why is it that we cannot share our highest asset – the religion of Ahura Mazda?

Now, on the other hand, I also have another viewpoint. I also have the highest respect for those who know our religion best – our priestly class and our respected scholars. They are knowledgeable about the details of our religion. And, I will **always** defer to them on religious matters.

So I am genuinely caught in the middle. Between my personal “liberal” views and my tremendous respect for those that have the “traditional” or “orthodox” views.

So perhaps, what we need is a balanced approach – a genuine serious meeting of the minds. A



conclave, comprised of a broad spectrum of people – The priestly class, the scholars and also laymen. And, a combination of people with the traditional views, with liberal views and those with moderate views.

And the selection of these people could be limited to two simple criteria:

- (1) Complete respect for views different from your own; and
- (2) Should be able to answer “yes” to the following question:

“If it meant the perpetuation of our Religion, would you be willing to move from your strongly held beliefs, in the spirit of compromise.”

After all what do we have to lose? We are running out of time. If we continue on the current path and do nothing, the historians will write about the “**extinct** Zarathushti religion.”

***Just some food for thought.
Thank you.***

In The News



DEVITRE FAMILY NAVJOTE

From left to right Persis Devitre, Ellora Devitre, Jai Somani, Leyla Somani, Amalya Devitre, Kaiya Devitre, Samiyatara Bajaj, and Isha Bajaj. It was a lovely event and the Zarathushti community is fortunate to have 8 additions!

On the same lines of Astad Clubwala's statements, the Navjote ceremonies of 8 children (grandchildren and nieces) of the Devitre family was performed by Ervad Khushru Madon, Panthaki of the Colaba Agiary, at the Taj Village in Goa with 7 other priests from Mumbai. The children were from India, US, Singapore and China. Even though one parent of each child was of the non-Zarathushti faith, the children were invested into the Zoroastrian religion without discrimination, thus adding to the much needed Zoroastrian population.

This demonstrates that we can expand our community without fear or favor.

Fezana Journal acknowledges Anahita Kavarana for her write up on the Navjote

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NORTH AMERICAN MOBEDS' COUNCIL, Marlton, NJ 14-15 May 2016



The Annual General Meeting of the Mobeds' Council of North America was held in Marlton, New Jersey, hosted by the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey

The Officers for 2016-17 year

President	Arda Minocherhomji	(CA)
Vice President	Tehemton Mirza,	(Ontario)
Secretary	Gev Karkaria	(Quebec)
Treasurer	Xerxes Madon	(Ontario)

STANDING: (From Left to Right): Pervez Patel (NY); Rohinton Madon (NJ); Nozer Kotwal (Toronto); Rohinton Dadina (NY); Adil Masani (PA); Noshir Karanjia (NJ); Tehemton Mirza (London, Ontario); Jehangir Madon - (NJ) Khushroo Bharda (Toronto), Minocher Dadachanji (PA.) Xerxes Madon (Toronto).; **SITTING:** (From left to Right) Behram Panthaki (MD); Jehan Bagli (Toronto); Kobad Zarolia (Toronto); Adi Unwalla (NJ) Arda Minocherhomji. CA.

Congratulations to the newly elected Mobeds and wish them success to move the community forward along the path of Asha

In The News

HONORING TRADITION.

TANAZ PAREKH

Come December when non-resident Parsis from all over the world flock to Bombay for the season of weddings and navjotes. Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy Agiary at Colaba, probably the most popular venue for these celebrations, is bedecked with an array of beautiful flowers and fairy lights for all such occasions, and the success of the function is judged mostly by the enjoyment factor with music, masti (fun), dance, and of course the traditional *patra nu bhonu*!



Dasturji JamaspAsa performing the navjote of Simone Todywala

Simone Todywala's navjote celebration December 2015 at the Colaba Agiary scored a full ten (and more!), on all the above counts. The decor was exquisite, all-pink to suit the young princess's taste, from the table settings and exotic flower arrangements to the host family's personal attire! Even the bathroom accessories were beautifully laid out to match that theme! Tanaz Godiwalla's mouth watering 10-course dinner was talked about much after the festivities ended, along with the special candy and dessert buffet, with the most fabulous desserts and exotic candies, all in pink, specially created by Simone's Kaki, Harsha Heeramanek, as well as the superb entertainment, which included a Miami style Tango dance, by two professional Tango dancers from France and India.

But the most endearing feature of the evening, went much beyond these details, which Lyla and Sam Todywala of Miami, had meticulously planned months in advance for their darling daughter Simone's navjote.

Keen on honouring a tradition which was started over 45 years ago, the family wanted High Priest Dasturji JamaspAsa to initiate Simone into the Zoroastrian fold. But Dasturji was expected to be in London on the expected date. The family's sentiment had its roots in events spanning 45 years. In December 1970, Dasturji Jamasp Asa had performed Simone's mother, Lyla's (nee Bativala) navjote in Mumbai at the same Colaba Agiary, then in January 1996, he performed Lyla and Sam's wedding at the Colaba Agiary, and then again, on December 26, 2006, he performed the navjote of their two boys, Zane and Stefan, at the beautiful Colaba Agiary. The family wanted more than anything else, that the tradition continues for their youngest member, Simone.

Tradition won! Dasturji Jamasp Asa, who is keeping indifferent health and who was in London till the day before the navjote, returned to Mumbai, the morning of Simone's Navjote, to perform her ceremony on December 30th 2015 at the Colaba Agiary. For the family, Dasturji's presence and participation in this auspicious event, was far more rewarding than all the accolades they received for hosting such a beautiful and stunning function!

In The News

NOROOZ AT THE WHITE HOUSE

For the second year the White House hosted a Norooz celebration, which was held on April 6, 2016. Invitations and registration were required to attend. Over 200 people, including **Dr. Zarir Khademian M.D., Ph.D. of ZAMWI**, attended from

across the US, they were primarily Iranian-Americans from Michigan and California and a few from countries that celebrate Norooz (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, etc.). The event marked a vital turn in the United States' recognition of Iranian history and the contributions of the Iranian civilization to the world.



Dr. Zarir Khademian, of ZAMWI, stands in front of a gorgeous Haft Seen table, with the image of Ms. Obama's invitation.

can celebrate America's cultural diversity. Her comments are on YouTube, the link to the transcript is at the end of this article. The guest list included leaders from the tech sector, physicians, artists, and other dignitaries.

She also thanked several White House staff members who are Iranian-Americans which includes a personal aide to the President. It seems from the articles I have read that five women in particular have been instrumental in bringing the Norooz Celebration to the White House.

The event included a beautiful haft seen table, the Silk Road Dancers, a classical musical performance, and an Iranian meal. Guests (after cleared by inside security) were free to walk through the east wing and take pictures and mingle.

The link to the transcript:
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/06/remarks-first-lady-annual-nowruz-celebration>

Anne Khademian



First Lady, Michelle Obama

In The News

FEZANA at the High Level World Summit on the Information Society

Garshasb Soroosh and Andrew Kesselman, MD, from RAD-AID International at the UN headquarters in New York - 15-16 December 2015

RADAID representatives and delegates Andrew Kesselman MD, and Gary Soroosh had the opportunity to attend the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10) high level meeting at the United Nations. This event marked a decade since the original summit and reviewed the ongoing developments in internet governance. It focused on the expanding role of information communication technologies and addressed obstacles to access and education worldwide.

At the meeting they learned that inspite of great strides, over 4 billion people lack access to internet services. An even larger proportion of females lack access to information communication technologies. Rural areas and poorer countries lack the infrastructure and incentives to drive broadband access into these regions. These disparities were striking and emphasize the need for not only greater access but improved education on these services and platforms. The RADAID informatics initiative has established successful projects at two sites within the last year.

Using access and education as the pillars for the implementation projects, RADAID are able to extend solutions used extensively in the developing world to new sites in poor and resource limited countries. Greater future endeavors with Merge Healthcare, an IBM company partnered with RAD-AID, is anticipated throughout the global network.

A RAD-AID Conference will be held on **Saturday, November 5, 2016**. Due to RAD-AID's affiliation with the United Nations and WHO, the meeting will be held at the **WHO Headquarters in Washington DC** at the Pan American Health Organization Building.

Presentations and discussion panels will include projects on global radiology from Nicaragua, Tanzania, South Africa, Laos, Nepal, Jamaica, Nigeria, India, Haiti, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Malawi,

Ghana, and much more. This is a great opportunity to meet people and join RAD-AID's teams serving across the globe. RAD-AID Chapter members, or those interested in forming a chapter, should attend the RAD-AID Chapters Round Table Meeting November 6th in DC. CME and CE for physicians & technologists will be available for this meeting Please register early because the 2015 conference was 100% booked 2-3 months ahead of the meeting. Questions about the meeting can be emailed to Gary Soroosh, RAD-AID Conference Manager, at gsoroosh@rad-aid.org.

Garshasb Soroosh

Conference Manager, RAD-AID International
Garshasb (Gary) Soroosh, an active member of the



Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington Inc., is an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park. He initiated the establishment of the RAD-AID chapter at the University of Maryland and now serves as the Conference Manager of the annual Global Health meeting of RAD-AID International, which will be held at the World Health Organization / Pan American Health Organization Headquarters in Washington D.C. on 5th and 6th November 2016.

He can be contacted at gsoroosh@rad-aid.org . To register for the meeting visit: www.rad-aid.org

In The News

ANDREW KESSELMAN, MD,
Director, RAD-AID Informatics



Dr. Andrew Kesselman, Chief Resident in Diagnostic Radiology at SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn, NY, will be a Fellow in Vascular and Interventional Radiology at Stanford University in 2016. Dr. Kesselman established the SUNY Downstate RAD-AID Chapter, initiated RAD-AID project development in the Philippines. He initiated a collaborative program on global health radiology educational case postings in multiple social media outlets.

As Director of RAD-AID Informatics, Dr. Kesselman is leading RAD-AID's design and implementation of radiology information technologies in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). RAD-AID's aim is to introduce and strengthen the use of radiology informatics in medically underserved regions of the world, such as Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS) and Radiology Information System (RIS) technologies to bridge digital clinical images, radiology reports, and patient data. If you would like to be involved in RAD-AID Informatics, please contact Dr. Kesselman at info@rad-aid.org. In the photos Dr Kesselman and Garshasb Soroosh are seen seated in the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) section of the United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York City, NY, during the High-Level World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Resolution contained in A/70/125 was adopted on 16 December 2015

Click below to read:

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95735.pdf>

BOURDAIN EXPLORES KAIRASP LASHKARI'S RESTAURANT FOR CNN'S 'PARTS UNKNOWN'

"Electric" is the word for chef Kaiser Lashkari's buoyant Pakistani cuisine where the ambience is simple and the flavors are over the moon. Here you can sample some of the meaty regional specialties of the chef's homeland. From Nehari to shredded Resha Gosht to a definitive goat biryani, Lashkari never stops fiddling and perfecting. Alison Cook, Houston Chronicle food critic, has him on her best Houston restaurants list.



*Kairasp Lashkari, Anthony Bourdain and
Azra Lashkari*

It was no secret that **Anthony Bourdain** was in Houston filming for "*Parts Unknown*." When you think of Houston's food scene what comes to mind is barbecue, Texmex, and, burgers. However, Bourdain as the outspoken chef and culinary adventurer on the Travel Channel and CNN experiences food in different cultures and in different ways. So, does he think there's a symbiotic relationship between a vibrant arts and a thriving restaurant scene? What did Bourdain eat at Lashkari's restaurant? Lamb biryani, chicken hara masala, steak tikka, hunter's beef and garlic nan with Shiner Bock Beer. Seven hours of filming took place, and we will probably have to wait month in the Bourdain-narrated spotlight on CNN's 'Part Unknown'. Keep tuned!

In The News

A TALENTED ZARTHUSHTI ACTIVIST ARTIST KAYHAN IRANI GOES TO THE WHITE HOUSE AS CHAMPION OF CHANGE

On Wednesday, May 4th, the White House recognized ten individuals from across the country as “**White House Champions of Change for Asian American and Pacific Islander Art and Storytelling.**” **Kayhan Irani of Jackson Heights, New York, was one of the 10 Champions of Change** who was selected for her leadership and tireless work to raise the visibility of diverse AAPI experiences and create dialogue around issues the community faces.

Kayhan Irani is an Emmy Award-winning writer for her 2010 **WE ARE NEW YORK**, 9 episode broadcast TV drama, a social engagement tool; for immigrant New Yorkers. Kayhan is a socially engaged artist, and a Theater of the Oppressed trainer and facilitator. She designs and directs socially engaged arts projects for community-based organizations, government agencies, and international NGOs. She facilitates workshops and trainings nationally and internationally in Afghanistan, India, and Iraq. Her published work includes *Telling Stories to Change the World*; *Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community Make Social Justice Claims* (2008).

She is currently producing *Documented cIRCA 86: Immigration Reform Turns Thirty*, a multimedia oral history and public engagement project that celebrates the lives and accomplishments of immigrants who found a pathway to legalization through the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

The event was live streamed on the White House website at www.whitehouse.gov/live



Champions of Change for Asian American and Pacific Islander Art & Storytelling

 Hina Wong-Kalu	 Quang Do	 Kayhan Irani	 Tanzila Ahmed	 Jenny Yang
 Fawzia Mirza	 Grace Lin	 Selu Alofipo	 Leslie Hsu Oh	 Jason Fong

Tune in Wednesday, May 4
2pm ET
whitehouse.gov/live
#WHChamps
#MyAAPIStory

Rustom M. Ghadiali Elected President of Inter-Religious Organisation Singapore

Rustom M. Ghadiali of the Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Singapore has been elected as the incoming President of the Inter-Religions Organization (IRO) of Singapore. Russi (as he is affectionately called by one and all) has been a champion of the interfaith movement in Singapore and has represented the Zoroastrian faith at all levels, not only in Singapore but all over the world.

The Inter-Religious Organization, Singapore (IRO) was founded in 1949 and registered on 18 March 1949. Since its humble beginnings, IRO has worked quietly to promote peace and religious harmony in Singapore.

With the passage of time IRO organized more activities in line with its objectives and participated in local and international forums to learn more about what is being done in the region to promote religious harmony. It networked with organizations like the World Council on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and the Asian Council on Religion and Peace (ACRP).

Congratulations Russi on this achievement



In The News

AMOR MEHTA, MD OF COMMUNITY MEDICAL CENTER NAMED PHYSICIAN OF THE YEAR AT NJBIZ'S HEALTHCARE HERO AWARDS | BARNABAS HEALTH

Dr Amor Mehta, MD, Medical Director, Comprehensive Adult & Pediatric Epilepsy Center and Video EEG Monitoring Program of the Level 3 Epilepsy Center at the Jay and Linda Grunin Neuroscience Institute at Community Medical Center, has been named Physician of the Year at NJBIZ's 10th annual Healthcare Heroes Awards Program.

Dr. Mehta was honored at the awards breakfast and ceremony on June 21 at The Palace at Somerset Park in Somerset .NJ. The awards recognize individuals and organizations that are making a significant impact on the quality of health care in New Jersey. Dr. Mehta, along with other award winners, was chosen by an independent panel of judges. He won this award over 4 finalists who were in medicine for 20 years and with many accomplishments in their careers

Dr Mehta writes "The simple philosophy of living a life of "good thoughts, good words and good deeds" as a secular Zoroastrian serves as the template for how I lead my life. I've developed my own personal altruism through my life practices and through the observation of my mother, a physician, and my father, a retired engineer/entrepreneur who has always led his life as a kind humanist.

Through my training in epileptology under the mentorship of the world renowned epilepsy expert, Dr. Orrin Devinsky – medical director of the Comprehensive Epilepsy Center at New York University Medical Center, I became very confident in managing patients of all ages with epileptic disorders many of who have poor quality of life because of their epilepsy. Epilepsy is a disorder of the brain where people have a tendency to have recurrent, unprovoked seizures. Epilepsy, can have dramatic changes in their personalities, their behaviors, their cognitive function and their overall sense of well-being."

After 2 years of fellowship training in Epilepsy at NYU, Dr Mehtas was invited to build and develop an epilepsy program in Toms River, NJ at Community Medical Center – the largest hospital in Ocean County, NJ (near the New Jersey Shore). There was a huge demand for an epileptologist to bring expert



epilepsy care to the region as many patients had to travel 50+ miles to their closest Epilepsy Center – either in North NJ, New York City or Philadelphia.

In August 2013 under Dr Mehta's leadership, a very specialized Epilepsy program was developed which was quickly accredited by the National Association of Epilepsy Centers (NAEC) as a top-notch "Level 3" comprehensive epilepsy center, the forefront of Epilepsy Care.

Dr. Mehta understands the importance of teamwork, frequently offering his staff educational sessions to provide them with the most up-to-date information on the diagnosis, treatment of care of patients with epilepsy and seizure disorders. Focusing on the importance and goal of lessening the symptoms of these neurological disorders, Dr. Mehta strives to treat his patients in the same manner he lives his life – practicing good thoughts, good words and good deeds. He strives to educate all his patients about the nature of their disorder and what to expect as all patients he believes should know something about their disorder for them to be compliant with their treatments and allow for a more positive quality of life.

Congratulations Dr Mehta, the community is proud of you.

Editor, FEZANA JOURNAL

SOS Call for Zoroastrianism



If a man sits atop the chest of his brother and slits his throat you will call the man a merciless murderer for the fratricide. What would you call a man who stands bestride his religion wilfully throttling it to see that it cannot survive? That is what married Zoroastrian couples are doing who bring up only one child, with the direct effect of reducing the Zoroastrian population by half for each passing generation. Unfortunately, statistically the prospect is even more bleak, with some couples remaining childless, and a fairly larger group marrying outside the religion. A priest from Mumbai gave out the statistically counted figure for marriage outside our religion to be high as fifty percent. He was speaking for Bharat population of Zoroastrians .

A minor point put forward against bringing up larger families by Pakistani Zoroastrians is the low standard of education which makes it difficult for the new generation to adjust in a competitive world. This is rubbish !! With a computer at hand, and even with a basic smattering knowledge of scanning the website, the whole world's knowledge is at your finger tips.

A more general excuse given by our women bearing fewer children is generally: the higher cost of living. In answer to this objection one may point out to other religious groups happily surviving with as many as five or six children per couple. Can our Zoroastrians not bring up at least three children per couple?

We need to educate the community to follow a system of wise economy to counter the effect of the higher cost of living. We must also avoid waste through large weddings and birthday parties. We now witness sumptuous funeral charam dinners where even liquor is freely served. Unfortunately, when one rich person shows lavishness, the poor neighbour with the me-too-syndrome finds it necessary to follow through emulation.

We need to convert our community into a vigorous virile society away from the system of decadence into which it has fallen. Thus instead of encouraging skills in fancy art and painting, we must draw our youth to manual skills of household repairs and maintenance through basic lessons in masonry, carpentry, plumbing and in simple electrical repairs.

May I suggest too we return to a joint family system of life, and take also the following other steps:

1. To go for early marriages
2. For childless couples with child -bearing age to visit infertility clinics for advice

If a royal family built a fine palace and in their old age find they have no prince or princess to inherit it, it would be a sad case for them. But towards such a sad ending our Zoroastrian community is leading to for all our resourceful wealth, our housing estates, recreating centres and hospitals, there may soon be no prince or princess to inherit. Such a sad ending would not only be sad, but knowing wilful madness.

Aspi F. Daruwala Karachi, Pakistan.

Personal Profiles

FINANCE IS AN EXHILARATING FIELD

Mr. Minoo R. Shroff

Management Accountant and Business Economist

In an Interview with Yazdi Tantra, vice president Zoroastrian Co-operative Bank

I graduated with a degree in science before deciding I wanted to switch to commerce and economics. The change of heart, which occurred in 1948, kick started a career founded on proactiveness, out-of-the-box problem solving and trust.

Through it all, I was fortunate to be blessed with a Parsi heritage which lent a distinct advantage to my efforts.

I remember, for instance, the first time I called on former Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai, as president of the All India Manufacturers Organization. He asked whether I was a Parsi or a Gujarati. When I told him that I was a “Parsi Shroff,” he smiled and responded, “I have a very high regard for your community.”

To most international bankers, a Zoroastrian is certainly considered a better risk. This is an enviable advantage we have and one which we must faithfully protect with honest and fair dealings.

My career has allowed me to learn several such important lessons over a number of decades. Among them is also the importance of building trust and confidence with bankers and lenders, which I realized early on.

I began my career at NELCO, working first as an accounts assistant and then as a cost accountant for three years. I then joined Hindustan Electric Co. Ltd. as their finance secretary before working for a

decade with a leading trading company that imported large volumes of tractors.

In that company, where the Bank of India was our lead banker, at one point I volunteered to prepare a funds flow statement for a Rs.1 crore facility in 1958. Being unfamiliar with these statements, my managers were puzzled — apparently they had never asked for any such projection, nor had any been submitted to them. The matter went up to senior management with a note that I was trying to confuse them! The general manager, however, took a positive view and said the bank should welcome my proposal. They commended our initiative and asked officials to prevail upon other clients to do likewise.

Around that time, I was also able to pursue academic activities. I was a part-time lecturer at VJTI in 1957 and became active in the Bombay Management Association. The association's president and vice president encouraged me to conduct residential courses in finance on my own, which not only perked up my confidence but also raised my profile in corporate circles. I learned that what professional peers and senior managers share in informal discussions are rarely stated in public, making networking critical.

In 1966, I became the president of the Bombay Management Association and was invited to become



Personal Profiles

a consultant to a few companies. I became a part-time financial adviser to the J.K. Group. My responsibilities included advising on new projects and raising funds from banks and institutions in India, abroad and from the capital market. This involved networking with finance professionals in different cultures and I learned how important familiarity with local practices and social norms can be when arranging financing.

In the 1970s, I was appointed chairman of a shipping company floated by the Group. This involved constant travelling overseas to negotiate loans on the best terms. The lending banks insisted on sovereign guarantees which our government was unwilling to provide, but we were able to prevail upon lending banks to accept State Bank of India guarantees.

I experienced a valuable example of the benefit of “prompt payment” around this time. J.K. Tyres had a large loan from the U.S. Exim Bank that was guaranteed by Citibank, with a first installment due on March 31, 1978. By an oversight, the installment wasn’t paid on time, was deemed a default and a claim for payment was made on Citibank. We managed to send a letter confirming the repayment of the entire loan personally to a Citibank VP who had been highly cynical of India; it was to reach him on April 1. When I called on him on April 2, he was pleasantly surprised. It reestablished our credibility. The VP then asked Exim Bank to overlook the technical slip and the matter was resolved.

In the 1980s, I was appointed the Chairman of the Indian Advisory Committee of the Standard Chartered Bank. My association in India and frequent trips to their headquarters in London further sharpened my knowledge of international banking.

During the mid-90s, several large groups were arranging finance in the U.S. market through Global Depository Receipts and I was deputed to lead a team. We visited about 10 international financial centers and the issue was fully subscribed. It was a fascinating experience to face volleys of questions from brokers and investors.

Outside of the workplace, I’ve been actively involved in public life for the last three decades, serving as past president or chairman of organizations which include the All India Manufacturers’ Organization and the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. I’ve also been fortunate to have been awarded *The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon* by the

Emperor of Japan for outstanding contribution in promoting business and friendship with Japan in 2000.

Currently, I remain engaged in roles which include chairman of the Leslie Sawhny Programme of Training for Democracy and immediate past global president of the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce.

Lessons Learned from a Lifetime in Banking

- Build trust and confidence with bankers and lenders. It is critical to meet commitments on time and if for an unavoidable reason this isn’t possible, parties should be notified well in advance.
- While presenting projections and financial statements clearly state all assumptions on which these are based — favorable or otherwise. This facilitates prompt decisions and establishes trust.
- Keep your bankers informed periodically of major events affecting the operations of the company. Build up lines of communication at all levels.
- Bankers like borrowers to communicate both orally and in writing in the language which is familiar to them.
- Never posit to be cleverer than your lenders when negotiating with them, but be prepared to anticipate queries and respond adequately.
- Senior bankers rely more on character than collateral. The perception of character is built up by past conduct not only with bankers, but with associates, vendors, shareholders and employees.
- Zoroastrians command credibility and conviction with lenders because of a commendable record of fair conduct over generations. We have an edge over others, though we shouldn’t take it for granted.

M I L E S T O N E S

BIRTHS

Ori Zayn Kapadia, a boy, to Shyla Batliwalla and Danoosh Kapadia, grandson to Zarine and Neville Batliwalla (Hillsborough, CA) in San Francisco, CA on September 15, 2015.

Rohan Batliwalla Varma, a boy, to Zeena Batliwalla and Arjun Varma, grandson to Zarine and Neville Batliwalla (Hillsborough, CA) in San Francisco, CA on February 8, 2016.

Avina Behi, a girl, to Mandana Namdari and Ardeshtir Behi, Vancouver on February 9, 2016. (ZSBC)

Ryan Zain, a boy, to Zain Mavalwalla and Shiraz Italia in Richmond, BC on March 8, 2016.

Aiden Kapadia, a boy to Hanoz and Ferzin Kapadia, brother to Ella, grandson to Virqaf and Pouru Kapadia and Sarosh and Dilnawaz Bulsara in Ontario, on March 11, 2016 (ZSO).

Khursheed Mazda Turel, a girl to Debashree and Mazda Turel



sister to Meher, in Toronto, ONT, on March 30, 2016. (photo above)

Darius Austin, a boy, to Navroze and Lisa Austin, grandson to Guloo and Marzban Austin and Denise and Cyrus Yazdi in Montreal, QUE on April 19, 2016.

Freya Firdosh Daruwala, a girl, to Firdosh and Firozi Daruwala, granddaughter to Minoo and Hutokshi Daruwala (Seattle, WA) and Soli and Arnavaz Cooper (Mumbai, India) in Bellevue, WA on April 22, 2016.

Arya, a girl, to Shelley Saklatvala and Jean-Pierre Jardeleza, granddaughter to Jimmy and Zerene Saklatvala and Erlinda and Teodulfo Jardeleza in Montreal, QUE on April 30, 2016.

Dylan Belliappa, a boy to Rukshana (Bharucha) and Kamal Belliappa, grandson to Guloo and Yazdi Bharucha, in Toronto, on May 5, 2016. (ZSO)

Zain Versi, a boy to Natasha (Bhesania) and Bashir Versi, grandson to Sanobar and Kersi Bhesania (Toronto) and Farida and Moh Versi on May 9th 2016. (ZSO)

Finnegan Neville Keesmaat Dastoor, a boy to Tineke (Keesmaat) and Neville Dastoor, grandson to Sarosh and Noshir Dastoor and Patricia and Ike Keesmaat in Toronto, on June 13, 2016

Zyler Austin, a boy to Vanessa and Arshes Austin, brother to Zander, grandson to Guloo and Marzban Austin (London, Ont) and Mena and Ben Aradanas, in Toronto, on June 15, 2016.

Samuel Sielski, boy to Dr Jerita Johanna Dubash and Matthew Sielski, grandson to Marie Jo and Jimmy Dubash of Wellington, Florida and Deb and Tom Sielski, of Millersville, PA in Blacksburg, VA on June 17, 2016.

NAVJOTES

Kamyab Kotwal, son of Nairika and Tommy Cornett, grandson of Navroze and Mahabanoo Kotwal and Tom and Patti Cornett in Gainesville, GA on November 28, 2015.

Summer 2016



Ava Parekh, daughter of Chermeen and Yazdi Parekh (Hong Kong) sister of Sanaya, granddaughter of Mahrukh and Viraf Parekh (Hong Kong) and Diana and Ardeshtir Elavia (Irvine, CA) and great granddaughter of Ruby Majaina in Hong Kong on December 21, 2015. (photo above)

Simone Todywala, daughter of Sam and Lyla Todywala, sister of Zane and Stefan, granddaughter of Dhun and Jangoo Bativala and Minnie and Erach Todywala in Mumbai, India on December 30, 2015.

Cyrus Green, son of Rashne and Garrett Green and grandson of Pervin and Adi Davar - all of Falls Church, Va, on January 31, 2016. Navjote ceremony performed by Ervad Jimmy Antia.

Kierahn Karkaria, son of Abigail Dubiniecki and Ervad Zal Karkaria, grandson of Shirine and Ervad Gev Karkaria in Ottawa on June 18, 2016.

Dinshaw and Josephine Irani, son and daughter of Drs Natasha and Adel Irani, grandchildren of Dr Katie and late Dr Dinshaw Irani and Drs Dolly and Phiroz Dastoor, in Houston, on July 10, 2016. Navjote ceremony performed by Ervads Zubin and Jehan Dastoor, assisted by Ervads Zane Dastoor and Farokh Desai.

M I L E S T O N E S

WEDDINGS

Khushnuma Sabavala, daughter of Nozer and Daisy Sabavala to **Porus Mir**, son of Firuza and Tehmtan Mir in Mumbai, India on December 28, 2016. (MANASHNI)

Naomi Bhappu, daughter of Ken and Villi Bhappu to **Malcolm Irani**, son of Parinaz and Khodi Irani on May 7, 2016. (MANASHNI)

Delcina Wadia, daughter of Shernaz Shroff of Hayward to **Vincent Nigro** at San Jose Dar e Mehr on June 24, 2016

Nisha Engineer, daughter of Carl and Dina Engineer (San Carlos, CA) to **Christopher Johnson**, son of Sue and Richard Johnson in Palo Alto, CA on August 22, 2015.

DEATHS

Aspi Divecha, husband of Villy, father of Shaun, Narius, Neville and Daniel, brother of Kersi. Sami, Jal, on December 22, 2015. (ZSO)

Homi Mullan, husband of Mithoo Mullan, father of Viloo (Shavir) Bharucha, Burjis (Farzana) Mullan, grandfather of Zubin Bharucha and Kevan Mullan on December 26, 2015, (ZSO)

Gev Panthaki, husband of Zarin, brother of Sohrab, Dadi and late Dorab, uncle of Mahiyar (Mississauga) Farhad (Boston) Navaz Mehta (Mumbai) Pinaze Bharucha (Mumbai), on February 14, 2016, (ZSO)

Havovi Engineer, wife of late Noshir Engineer, mother of late Gulnar (Percy) Agboat, Shernaz Chan and Roxane Engineer, aunt to Julia Agboat, grandmother of Christina Agboat on March 22, 2016. (ZSO)

Nani Kapadia, husband of Roshan Kapadia, father of Farhad of Atlanta, GA and Sharokh (Diane) of Jacksonville FL. beloved grandfather of Nisha, Piper, Jillian and Josie all of Jacksonville, brother of Kersi

(Thrity) of St Catherine's, Pervez (Armaity) of London England, and late Noshir (Frane) of Edmonton, Alberta, in St Catherine's, Ontario on April 6, 2016. (ZSO)

Goolu Screwalla, sister of late Minoo and Belhi Screwalla (Mumbai, India) on April 7, 2016. (ZSO)

Mucca Bhesania, wife of late Framroze Bhesania, mother of Bapsy (Russi) Surti in Kolkata, India on April 9, 2016. (ZSO)

Pesi Jagus, husband of Dolly Jagus, father of Havovi Mehta Belair, grandfather of Vahishta on April 15, 2016. (ZSO)

Zal Nowsherwanji, husband of late Khorshed Nowsherwanji, father of Shanaz (Jal) Khodaiji and Kerman (Yasmin) Nowsherwanji, grandfather of Kurush, Huzaan, Zayaan, Huzyak, Paricheher and Parizad, grand father-in-law of Mona Nowsherwanji, Sheroy Mistry and Meherzad Elavia, great grandfather of Zara, Cyrus, Freya and Kyra in Mumbai, India on April 17, 2016. (ZSO)

Dinshah Bhada (93) husband of Perin, father of Kersi (Roxan) Bhada, Goolu Dinyar Lashkari, & Khurshid Percy Katila and grandfather of Karl Lashkari, Zenia Katila and Eric Bhada, in Antioch, CA on April 18 2016. (ZANT)

Dolat Ashkesh (Parsi), mother of Parichehr Fereidooni, Bahram, Fariborz and Farhad Parsi on April 25, 2016. (ZSO)

Minoo Dorabji Kanga, 75, husband of Dogdo Kanga, father of Darayus (Jasmine) Kanga and Anaita (Gordon) McIntyre, grandfather of Zara and Cyrus Kanga and Natasha and Desmond McIntyre, brother of Dinshaw (Armaity) Kanga in Mumbai (India) on April 30, 2016. (ZSO)

Dinoo (Coyajee) Jassawalla, 89, wife of Rustom Jal Jassawalla, mother of Cyrus (Betty) Jassawalla, Shernaz (Rustom) Billimoria, grandmother to Jennifer Hester,

Summer 2016

Neville and Eric Billimoria, in Houston, May 10, 2016. (MANASHNI)

Kersi Master, husband of Mani Master, father of Zubin (Khorshed) Patel on May 17, 2016. (ZSO)

Nina Rustom Wania, 87, wife of late Rustom Wania, mother of Jamsheed Wania (San Francisco, CA) and Scheherezade Zarkis Daroga (Cincinnati, OH), grandmother of Saira, Almithra and Sasha Daroga in Karachi, Pakistan on May 23, 2016.

Parin Homi Munshi, 87, wife of Homi Bhikhaji Munshi (Ahmedabad, India), mother of Tehnaz (Edul) Bamji (Freehold, NJ), Rita (Jamshed) Kapadia (Carlisle, MA), Vispi Munshi (Ahmedabad, India), grandmother of Zarina, Spenta Bamji, and Roshni, Cherag and Setareh Kapadia in Ahmedabad, India on May 25, 2016.

Jerroo Minoo Chothia (82), mother of Homi (Kathleen) Chothia of San Ramon and Darius (Jasmine) Chothia of Mumbai, grandmother of Brandon of San Francisco, on Mumbai, on May 25 2016. (ZANT)

Mehroo Printer, wife of late Keki Printer, mother of Kashmira John Callahan and Behroze Dinyar Panthakee on June 7, 2016 (ZSO)

Renate Nagarwalla (nee Ochs), wife of Pheroze, mother of Jehan, Gerritt (Stephanie) on June 9, 2016. (ZA- Chicago)

Erach Minoo Todywala, 91, husband of Minnie Todywala, father of Sam (Lyla) Todywala, grandfather of Zane, Stefan and Simone in Mumbai, India on June 13, 2016. (ZAF)

Behman Hormasji Irani 84, of Hounslow, Middlesex, husband of Dolly Irani, father of Anahita (Hoshedar) Tamboli, (Tampa), Marzban Irani (Catford, London) and Jal Irani, (Tampa) grandfather of Cyrus, Sarosh, Sanaya, Jasmyn, Zain and Riana, in Tampa, FL, on June 18, 2016.

Matrimonials

Dasturji Peshotan Hormazdyar Mirza, 72, husband of Mahrookh, father of Aban and Darayus, brother of Meher (Khurshid) Dastur of Pittsburgh, Veera, Rohinton and late Jamshed, in Mumbai, on June 26, 2016.

Mehraban Jamasbian, 89 husband of i Morwarid Tirandazi, father of Farhang (Nasreen Meherazar)Iran,Shahnaz(Mehraban Tirandazi), Mumbai, grandfather of Farshid and Farin, brother of Gulcher Jamaspian-Atashband, Khodadad Jamaspian,(UK) and

Tahmineh Jamaspian-Kianpour, of Washington DC, in Mumbai, India on July 2, 2016.

Eruch Mahava, 86, husband of Mehru, father of Zenobia and Percy in Toronto on July 18, 2016.



FEZANA Journal will coordinate initial contacts between interested parties. We do not assume any responsibility for verifying credentials. Contact Roshan Rivetna at RRRivetna@aol.com.

Female, 46, 5' 2", slim, fair, MBA (UK) working with multinational in Dubai. Outgoing, warm, family oriented, with integrity and a good sense of humor. Enjoys reading, music, traveling, cooking, the gym, among other things. Interested in meeting a well educated, well settled professional. Willing to settle anywhere. Contact dashingdice@gmail.com. [F16.14].

Male, 24, B.Com, chartered accountant (India), Masters in International Economics and Finance (Brandeis, Boston), working at KPMG Boston. Loves dogs and Parsee cuisine, enjoys exploring new cultures and countries, sports (soccer, table-tennis, squash, volleyball, basketball and cricket). Contact rustomd@brandeis.edu. [M16.15].

Female, 27, born in India, BCOM from Pune University, and PGDHRM from Symbiosis Institute of Management studies. currently working in HR in Abu Dhabi. Willing to settle anywhere abroad. Contact parinaazdaruwalla@yahoo.com.in. [F16.16].

Male, 29, 5' 10', Masters in Industrial and Operations Engineering, Business analyst in Washington DC area. Contact shazaadmehta03@gmail.com. [M16.23].

Female, 35, good looking, from reputed, affluent Parsi family in Mumbai, MBA (Finance), working in Mumbai. Enjoys music, traveling and reading. Parents invite correspondence from well-placed family. Contact parsimatch@yahoo.com. [F16.27].

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.zoroastrianmatrimony.com Also try these matrimonial sites and services:
www.chaalokaajkariye.com
www.Matrimonial.Zoroastrianism.com
www.zoroastrians.net
www.TheParsiMatch.com
www.shaadi.com
www.ParsiMatrimony.com
www.ParsiShaadi.com
www.MatrimonialParsiZoroastrianism.com
 Mrs. Gool Banaji, Parel, Mumbai, goolpesi@gmail.com, tel: 91-22-2416 6120.

PLEASE SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS FOR MILESTONES TO MAHRUKH MOTAFRAM. TEL 425-961-0298

MAHRUKHM83@GMAIL.COM

Obituary

VADA DASTURJI PESHOTAN DASTUR HOMAZDYAR MIRZA NOVEMBER 1944-JUNE 2016 AGE 72

On Sunday June 26, 2016 Vada Dasturji Peshotan Dastur Homazdyar Mirza one of the two Vada Dasturjis of the Pak Iranshah Atashbehrām in Udvada, India passed away following complications after cancer surgery .

Born at Udvada in November 1944, to Dastur Hormazdyar Dasturji Kayoji Mirza and Manijeh Hormazdyar Mirza in a family of five children Dr. Peshotan Mirza acquired his priestly Education and Training at Seth Sorabji Manekji Damanwala Madressa, Udvada and The M.F. Cama Athornan Institute, Andheri. He was ordained in the Zoroastrian Priestly orders of Navar, Maratab and Samel; and performed higher liturgical services and 'Boi' ceremony of the Pak Iranshah Atashbehrām in Udvada, India.

He was appointed to the exalted position of Dastur (High-Priest) of Iranshah Atash Behram; Samast Anjuman, Udvada on 13th May 2004.

Dastur Dr Mirza obtained a doctorate in Chemistry from the University of Bombay and along with his University studies in Science he studied Avesta-Pahlavi and Iranian History at Sir J.J. Zarhosti Madressa and Mulla Firoze Madressa, Mumbai. He held the position of lecturer in Chemistry at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai; and a Development and Documentation Scientist at International Draxon Industries, Tehran, Iran. He retired from the post of General Manager- Technical Services in a Chemical manufacturing company in Mumbai. He then worked as a Technical Advisor to a chemical manufacturing company in Mumbai

He was a member of the Research Committee of The K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Mumbai, Trustee of the Athornan Mandal and Udvada Anjuman. He was a former member, Science and Technology Sub-committee, Bombay Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Dastur Dr Mirza attended and participated in Religious and Technical seminars and conferences, was an invited presenter to the World Conference on Spiritual Regeneration and Human Values, Bangalore, January 2003

and attended a conference of World Religions Dialogue and Symphony at Mahuva, Bhavnagar in 2009. A great orator he has lectured on



Zoroastrian Religious and Historical subjects in India, Singapore, Dubai, Karachi and Iran. He was a speaker at the 10WZC in Mumbai, 2013. Dr. Peshotan Mirza was a shining jewel of our community. A man of not only great virtue, sincerity and spirituality, but also of technical excellence. Till the end he served the community with integrity, scholarship and commitment.

On behalf of the North American Zoroastrian Community, **FEZANA JOURNAL** offers condolences to his wife Mahrookh, children Aban and Darayus, their families and friends of Vada Dasturji Mirza.

May his glorious soul find Garothman Behest, and may his family find solace in their hour of grief

Adapted from Parsi Khabar and FEZANA Journal Spring 2014 Vol 28, No 1, pg 59.

ZERBANOO GIFFORD: AN UNCENSORED LIFE

FARIDA MASTER

Published by Harper Collins India 2015

Price Rs 399 pages 223

ISBN 978-93-5177-636-9

Reviewed by Tanaz Bhathena

In the 1990s, Times of India columnist Bachi Karkaria described Zerbanoo Gifford as “An AK 47 with red nail polish,” after the latter single-handedly dissuaded a group of armed men from attacking a busload of passengers in Kashmir. The moment I read this particular passage at the beginning of Zerbanoo Gifford: An Uncensored Life, I was drawn in, curious to know more about the woman being described here.

With painstaking detail, New Zealand writer and biographer Farida Master uses this book to paint the picture of a vibrant feminist who not only lived life on her own terms but also went on to become the first Asian woman to be elected Liberal councillor in British politics.

Born in 1950, Zerbanoo Irani spent the first four years of her life in India with her paternal grandmother before moving to London, England, where her parents Bailey and Kitty had begun running a boutique hotel. From a young age, she was described as both friendly and headstrong, once running away from boarding school with a group of friends.

Zerbanoo's mischief, however, was counterbalanced with her strong sense of compassion for the poor. As a young girl, Zerbanoo collected £10 by selling hand-crafted flags and sent the money to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to help the poor children she saw in Poona. After she married outside the Zoroastrian faith against her father's wishes, Zerbanoo and her new husband, English law student Richard Gifford, experienced poverty for themselves, in an old house, not owning

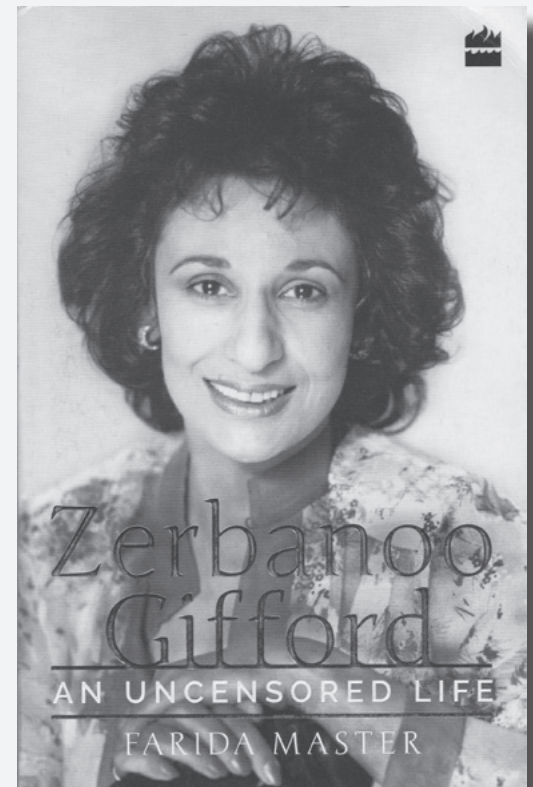
even a sofa, let alone a car, or a washing machine. Yet, in spite of facing difficulties herself, when money did come in, she always donated 10% of it to charity.

While many among her friends and family have remarked on Zerbanoo's innate charm and, in her father Bailey's words, “gift for making difficult people feel good about themselves, as they fulfilled her every wish,” things did not always come easy.

The author delves into Zerbanoo's first accidental brush with politics – an encounter with a group of Liberal party activists who wanted to tack a poster to a tree on Zerbanoo's property in 1981. Zerbanoo asked the politicians various probing questions about what the Liberals planned to do about childcare and public transport. As a young mother, Zerbanoo had written letters to local politicians in the past inquiring about affordable childcare, but had received no response. Surprised by her interest, the politicians suggested that Zerbanoo run for office herself.

The seed was planted and, in May 1982, after months of grassroots campaigning, which included facing racial slurs being thrown her way, and volunteering at homeless shelters, Zerbanoo was elected as the Liberal councillor of the Harrow Park constituency by a margin of five votes – the first non-white woman to ever win such an election.

This, in itself, was revolutionary in the early eighties when racism and sexism were predominant in British politics and earned Zerbanoo a great deal of popularity



in the media. However, the council itself was another story. Nicknamed “the thirteenth man” by her fellow councillors, Zerbanoo faced resistance during the first few meetings, where the Mayor of London once asked her if she knew English, where her early speeches were met with catcalls and other forms of rowdy behaviour. Zerbanoo's wit and sense of humour helped her a great deal, and so did her resilience in the face of discrimination.

With a focus on uplifting marginalized communities, Zerbanoo used her position to connect with people

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in power: from local community leaders to bureaucrats, diplomats and academics.

Zerbanoo's rise in British politics did not come without a price. In a chapter, titled "Bully Boys," Master highlights a series of harrowing racial attacks and threats against Zerbanoo and her family in 1982 and later 1983 to dissuade her against running for office. After losing the 1983 general election in Hertsmere, Zerbanoo went public with her story. It created a sensation in the media, bringing to fore the various issues about race and gender that had, until then, been ignored or swept under the rug by other politicians.

As chair of the Community Relations Panel for the Liberal party in 1984 and the only female member of the panel, Zerbanoo wanted to bring more women onto the committee to shift the gender imbalance. When responses to the suggestion was met with dissent, Zerbanoo exercised the chair's prerogative and dissolved the committee, bringing new party members who wanted to contribute to party policy.

Determined to create a bigger platform for Asian women, in 1988, she wrote her first book, titled *The Golden Thread: Asian Experiences of Post-Raj Britain*, in which she interviewed over a hundred successful British-Asian women.

Zerbanoo believes there are three ways to change people's mindsets:

- 1) By legal measures
- 2) By writing and the power of story
- 3) By changing oneself and becoming a better person to set an example to change the world.

By the early 1990s, Zerbanoo had grown disillusioned with party politics. To other politicians, the empowerment of women and minorities were not important issues and they quietly began elbowing her out. Zerbanoo ran in the general elections three times, in 1983, 1987 and 1992, but never became MP. Several commentators, including the leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, agreed that Zerbanoo threatened her male

contemporaries who were unused to seeing strong women in politics. After more than fifteen years in politics, Zerbanoo decided to change and dedicate herself to projects that would pose greater challenges than any she faced in the political arena.

One of these projects was the formation of the ASHA foundation and build an intercultural, multi-faith centre where people could celebrate their differences and rejoice in their similarities. With plans to build a museum, faith gardens, a theatre and a resource centre for schools, Zerbanoo and the ASHA trustees secured land in North West London with a large deposit, all based on the promise of a grant of ten million pounds from Britain's Millenium Commission.

Yet, here too, racism reared its ugly head. Residents of the area where the centre was supposed to be built complained of traffic congestion problems that would be caused by Asian women driving large cars to Indian weddings at the ASHA centre. The Harrow Council and Millennium Commission unceremoniously withdrew their support, leaving Zerbanoo and her family in substantial debt.

Zerbanoo's husband, Richard, and her son, Mark decided to sue the government agency PACE and the Millennium Commission for reneging on the deal of the grant.

Zerbanoo's Zoroastrian faith also helped her a great deal during this dark phase of her life. She went on a pilgrimage to India to pay homage to the eight great Atash Behrams in Gujarat and Maharashtra. It was in the Wadia Fire Temple in Mumbai that Zerbanoo felt "an instant surge of divine energy. She had a vision of two beautiful guardian angels on either side, holding her gently." She knew then that the ASHA centre would be built somehow and decided not to lose hope.

Richard, remarked on the irony of losing the case against the Millennium Commission – the land that was denied to Zerbanoo on fears of Asian women clogging up the streets is now home to a crowded

development mini-apartments. In contrast, a different ASHA centre now resides in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, with beautiful architecture and tranquil gardens, beloved to local residents and a haven for thousands of young people living on the margins of society.

The focus of the biography is naturally on Zerbanoo, but the roles of various people close to her are also neatly highlighted: Her husband, Richard, without whose support a career in politics would not have been possible; her sons Alexander and Mark, who have successful careers of their own; her friend and mentor, Sohrab Godrej, who came to her aid at various points during her lifetime; and the trustees who now run the ASHA centre.

While written in a way that makes for straightforward, easy-reading, I wish the biography was arranged by chronology instead of theme and chapter as that would have led to less confusion about the various timelines in the book.

That said, Farida Master still manages to draw a fully-fleshed portrait of an extraordinary woman driven by her sense of compassion and social justice – a woman who left behind her mark not only through her various accomplishments, but also in the hearts of people whose lives she touched.

Tanaz Bhathena was born in Mumbai and raised in Riyadh, Jeddah and Toronto. Her short stories have been published in several literary journals and magazines. Her debut young adult novel, QALA ACADEMY, will be published by Farrar Straus Giroux / Macmillan in the fall of 2017.

JAMSETJEE JEJEEBHOOY OF BOMBAY – PARTNERSHIP AND PUBLIC CULTURE IN EMPIRE

Jesse S. Palsetia

(New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015),
ix + 209 pp., , Price: \$50 (hardcover) and \$13.54 (paperback)
ISBN 13:978-0-19-9459216

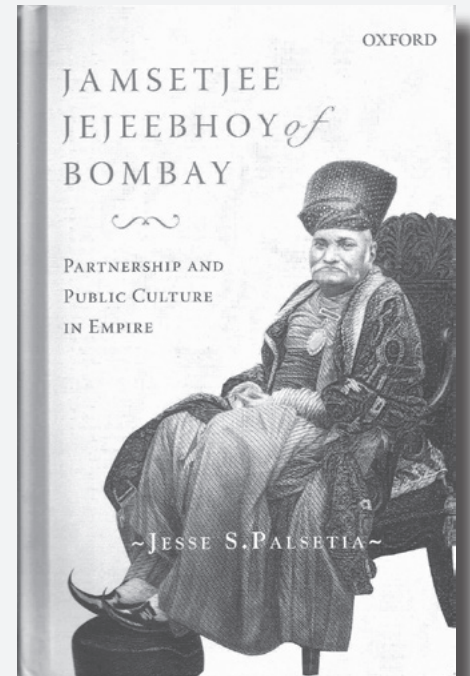
Reviewed by Dr. Ardeshir B. Damania (PhD), University of California, Davis.

Jesse S. Palsetia, the author of the book *Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy of Bombay – Partnership and Public Culture in Empire* is eminently qualified to write a biography of one of the most well-known Parsi Zoroastrian entrepreneur and philanthropist of the last century, and basically of Bombay, the then and still the business and finance capital of India. Jesse S. Palsetia is a historian of South Asia trained in the fields of ancient, medieval and modern India. He is a specialist on the Parsis (Zoroastrians) of India, the history of Bombay City, and examines topics relative to colonial-imperial interactions and ideologies. He teaches courses and supervises students in the area of South Asia, and the British Empire at the University of Guelph in Canada.

There is not a single inhabitant of the great megapolis of Bombay who has not heard of Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Bart. (15th July 1783 - 14th April 1859) and the great institutions he and his wife Lady Jamshetjee set up largely with funds from entirely their own purse. The book is divided into an Introduction and 6 chapters, each of which deals with progressive and different aspects of the great man's life. The book also includes a bibliography and a most useful index. The printers in New Delhi

have done an excellent job not only on the cover design, but also on the typeset and paper used in the book which deserves a place in any library or household that deals with the British colonial era and the history of the Parsis. The only other person, to my knowledge who comes close to the philanthropy of Sir JJ (as he is affectionately called by the people of Bombay) is Andrew Carnegie of the U.S.

In the book the author also immerses himself in the controversy about Sir JJ's birth. The people of Navsari, a town that is close to the west coast of India and renowned for being the birth-place of many a Parsi Sethia, consider Sir Jamsetjee as one of their own. The ancestral home where Sir Jamsetjee was born in 1783 has been renovated and transformed into a Memorial Museum to commemorate his 225th birth anniversary. This project has been undertaken by Sir J. J. Charity Fund and Sir J. J. Parsee Benevolent Institution. Navsari was the town originally established by Zoroastrian migrants who came by boat to India. Since many of them came from the town of Sari in Iran, they named their new abode Navsari (or New Sari). However, the other argument is that Sir Jamsetjee was born in Bombay. But it remains beyond doubt that



in the 1750s Navsari was a much more thriving and popular dwelling place of the Parsis than the Fort of Bombay. After the death of both of his parents in Navsari in 1799, Jamsetjee shifted himself to Bombay at a young age of sixteen.

Sir Jamsetjee's life-history reflects how prominent Parsis used certain aspects of colonial rule to further their own personal, political, and cultural interests. From humble beginnings in the city of dreams as a bottle merchant under the tutelage of his uncle Framji Nusserwanji, he rose step by step to prominence just as the colonial era also began to prosper with the trade with other countries including China. By the age of twenty, he had wooed and married Framji's daughter Avabai, and had no less than 10 children. But as were the conditions of mortality among the newborns in those times, out of



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these only three sons and one daughter lived past infancy.

The rise of Sir Jamsetjee's fortunes is linked to the rise of the fortunes of the Parsis in Bombay. Through clever manipulations, boldness in trading, and excellent business acumen, great fortunes were made in trading with China. Beginning with leasing smaller faster sea-going vessels for his trade, he progressed to ordering his own ships from various shipbuilders. By the 1850s his business activities slowed down but his personal reputation and influence continued to reach new heights with the funding of prodigious charitable institutions favoring the Parsis, the Bombay society by and large, as well as British and international causes. The knighthood and hereditary baronetcy conferred on him in 1857 by the Queen Victoria of England further enhanced his stature in Society and reputation of being the first well-known non-European to have been conferred such honor. At a feast given by Sir Jamsetjee and Lady Avabai to the prominent Parsis of Navsari, a souvenir spoon of pure gold was given to each guest. Two of the guests, thinking that the spoons were made of a less costly metal, went to a bazaar goldsmith the next morning, and were amazed to find out that the spoons were indeed made of gold!

The island of Salsette was not connected to Bombay as it is today. A creek of the Mithi River (also known as Mahim River) divided the two terrestrial lands and people travelling from Bandra to the Fort had to take a boat to get to the other side. During the monsoon months, there would be a lot of stormy

activity in the Arabian Sea and many a boat full of passengers were lost during such storms. However, when the British Government refused to build a causeway to connect the island of Salsette to Bombay, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy's wife, Lady Avabai paid for it entirely from her own funds with an agreement with the Government that no tolls for its use be levied on the public. Work on the Mahim Causeway started in 1841, but by the third year of construction the allocated funds ran out, which is when Lady Avabai once again came to the rescue with a sum of 50,000 rupees and the project was completed in 1845 and was named after her.

Sir Jamsetjee's rise to power, fame and fortunes was not bereft of set-back; and serious setbacks they were more than twice. On February 17, 1803 a great fire broke out in the Fort area and he lost all his merchandise suffering a great financial loss in the process. Lesser men would have thrown in the hat and declared bankruptcy, but not Jamsetjee. He started again with what remained of his assets and was soon on the top once again. The second misfortune to befall Jamsetjee was during his fourth voyage to China aboard an English naval vessel named *Brunswick* that sailed from Bombay on June 30, 1805. On reaching the southern tip of Ceylon the *Brunswick* was met with two French man-of-war with a total of 130 cannons between the two. Unfortunately, the English vessel, although armed, was captured by a force of French ships and Jamsetjee was put in chains aboard the same ship. Under the French command the *Brunswick* sailed towards Mauritius and from there to the Cape of Good Hope

where it ran aground. The English Captain Grant made arrangements for Jamsetjee and other passengers to sail on a Danish ship bound for Calcutta. Having lost all his merchandise and let off with only his personal things, Jamsetjee had to pay an exorbitant sum to Captain Fasteau of the Danish ship with a promissory note on himself payable in Calcutta on arrival. Starving, cold, and living under horrible conditions on board the Danish vessel, Jamsetjee somehow made it to Calcutta. After a few weeks in Calcutta, Jamsetjee returned to Bombay to great amazement and joy of his young wife, Avabai, and friends and associates for they had given him up for dead! Captivity, severe financial losses, dangerous episodes at sea, had failed to cower down Jamsetjee and he set forth on his fifth and last voyage to China around 1807. At the young age of 25 Jamsetjee had already amassed a great fortune with his China trading. His munificence was not limited to Bombay and India. Jamsetjee made generous donations to help people wherever tragedy struck. Although Jamsetjee had suffered bitter pangs of hunger and captivity at the hands of the French on board the *Brunswick*, he sent 500 Pounds Sterling for the victims of floods in France in 1856. He donated large sums to the relief fund during the Irish famines on 1822 and 1845. Famines in Bengal in 1832 and the Deccan in 1833 also received donations from Jamsetjee's purse. The more money he made the more he gave away to various causes benefitting the poor. The greatness of Jamsetjee's philanthropy can be better understood and appreciated due to the fact that all his donations came from his own purse, and not from any company or corporation,

nor did he claim any tax exemptions on them.

There have been many other biographical books previously written about Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy. The most important of these is the one by Jehangir R.P. Mody titled *Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy – The First Indian Knight and Baronet* published in Bombay in 1959. Palsetia, it seems to me, has referred to this publication to some extent in writing his own book. There was also a paperback booklet published in 1855 listing the humongous charities set up by Sir Jamsetjee and his generous donations to worthy causes titled *Memorandum of the Life and Public Charities of Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy*. Jamsetjee's statues adorn all of the institutions he set up and among the Bombay greats on Veer Nariman Road. In a most recent work published in January 2016, *Three Merchants of Bombay - Business Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century* the author, Lakshmi Subramanian, tells the story of three intrepid merchants who traded out of Bombay in the nineteenth century, Tarwady Arjunjee, Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy and Premchand Roychand, who single-handedly establishing pioneering business empires based on trade in cotton and opium. Set against the backdrop of global and local economies undergoing rapid and unforeseen change and colonial intrigues, these stories stand as a microcosm for the history of indigenous capitalism in Western India and the courageous and risk-taking character that these pioneering businessmen possessed which, I might add, our Parsi Zoroastrian youth could emulate.

The great man breathed his last on April 15th at his Fort House at around 2 am. He was 75. He had been very weak and feeble for a couple of months. The news of his passing spread quickly world-wide and common people and Lords came to Hornby Row to pay their respects. All banks, Government offices, and businesses closed their doors immediately on that day. Jamshetjee Jejeebhoy was very much missed by all the inhabitants not only of Bombay, but also of India and beyond as tributes began to pour in from all over the world. The funeral procession from Fort to the Towers of Silence at Malabar Hill was jam packed with Parsis from all walks of life, from the poor to the wealthy. Charles Forjett, the police chief of Bombay and much beloved of the Parsis, kept the entire route clear of all traffic and made sure that, according to the custom of the time, no non-Parsi crossed the path of the procession. However, this did not prevent the Bombay populace from lining the streets from Church Gate Street to Dhobi Talao and from there to Chowpatty and the climb to Malabar Hill.

The book is very well researched with a detailed list of references and a useful index. I quite enjoyed reading this book and so will you. I am happy that the author has put Of Bombay" in the title. Sir Jamsetjee was 100% a product of Bombay and had a great influence on the city later on becoming the finance and business capital of India. Of all the books on Sir Jamsetjee that I have seen, this book by Palsetia has the best cover. The image of this great Parsi trader and philanthropist comes alive in minute details on the cover! I can actually visualize Jamsetjee

looking at me with benevolence and a hint of a smile as he is pictured sitting on an ornately carved ebony wooden chair. Every Parsi, and others as well, who want to learn about the life of great Parsi Sethias during the early part of the history of Bombay would find this book indispensable. Hardback or paperback it would be money well spent. The life of Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy was truly a life lived for others. A shining example to his heirs and no doubt also to many a successful Parsi entrepreneur who came after him.



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By Keki N Daruwalla

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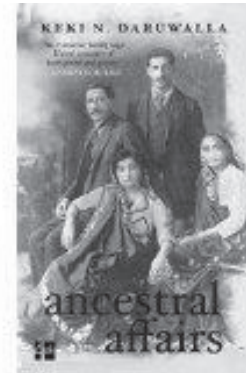
4th Estate Press (HarperCollins India), Noida, UP 201301, India (2015)

P-ISBN 978-93-5177-532-2

Reviewed by Jimmy Kumana, Houston, Texas (March 2016)

This book will appeal to those readers who are interested in the recent history of India during the 1930s to 1960s, and familiar with the traditional customs and of the Parsi community. The book is at its best when narrating the roller-coaster personal fortunes and emotional lives of the Bharucha family – as seen through the eyes of the father Saam and son Rohinton. What lends the book its authenticity is the historical accuracy of the events around which the story is woven. The author skillfully captures the evolving mores of the times, and transports the reader into the past, evoking a world that no longer exists except in the memories of those (like the reviewer) who lived through it. But the narrative is weak in some ways too. Mainly, a sufficient foundation has not been laid for readers who are not already familiar with the history of the times and with the distinctly unique Parsi sub-culture. As a consequence, the significance of certain dialog or actions by the protagonists, and many of the inside jokes, will be lost on such readers. Also, there are several annoying loose ends that the reader is expected to fill in through intimate knowledge of the background against which the story is being told. In other cases, it is not explained how the moral dilemmas faced by the main characters were resolved. The start of the book is rather

confusing, because new characters make their appearance without adequate context. The reviewer had to draw up a chart of the inter-relationships – boss, employee, relative, friend, etc – among these characters in order to understand the context of the dialog and follow the story line. Finally, since the events in the book unfold over a wide geographic expanse – mainly in modern-day Gujarat state (Rajkot, Junagadh, Verawal, Bulsar, Navsari, Medhar island), but also in various suburbs of Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur, Calcutta, Murree (now in Pakistan), and even London (England). It would have been helpful to include a map or two, with annotations regarding the significance of the place names to the story. For example, there are references to Highgate, Golder's Green, Rye, and other neighborhoods of London which add nuance and meaning to the story that would be lost on the reader not intimately familiar with London. But enough of nitpicking, and back to the good points. The story of this family contains important life lessons that are universally relevant. One that particularly struck the reviewer was almost slipped in as an aside, when Kavarana kaka (uncle, specifically father's brother) was explaining to Saam the origin of his family surname in his somewhat broken English:



"Deekra (son), ... they first belong to Surat, in olden days. But then Shivaji loot Surat two-three times. Much wealth there and no guns, that is like permanent invitation. Only Dutch and Englis (sic) factories had guns and Shivaji never went near them. Your family then shift to Bharuch on river Tapti Family name became Bharucha."

Throughout human history (and in the animal world as well) it has always been true that a lack of credible means to defend one's life/property/territory is an open invitation to rivals and predators to attack the weak and seize what is not theirs. However odious the idea, we would all do well to keep that in mind. There are many such gems of insight interspersed throughout the book; the reader should remain alert to them. All in all, a worthwhile read.

Jimmy Kumana came to the US in 1969 and holds a master's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Cincinnati. He takes a keen interest in the welfare of the worldwide Parsi community, and particularly in the preservation of its historical archives for the benefit of future generations.

ABCs OF ZOROASTRIANISM

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY ANAHEET GAZDER

32 pages in colour; Price \$15

ISBN : 978-0-692-59077-5 2016

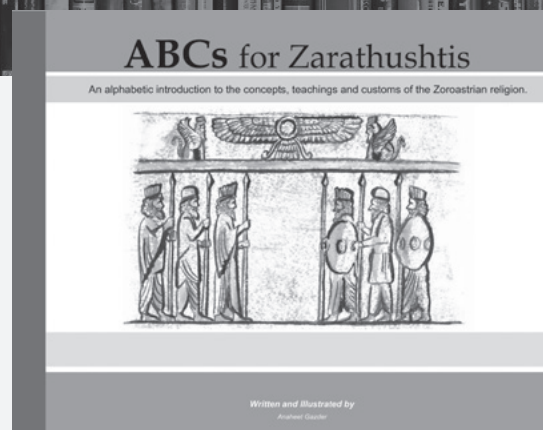
Purchased from www.abcsdorzarathushtis.com

This self published 32 page full color softcover book has been written and illustrated by Anaheet Gazdar over the past 6 years. She studied Illustration at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and has always been passionate about art. The idea for the book arose after seeing many examples of children's alphabetic books and it struck her that **A is for Ahura Mazda and Z is for Zarathushtra!** How simple a concept to explore an alphabetic book about our religion and customs!

The complex task was assigning an appropriate word(s) for each letter of the alphabet. Most writers stumble to find appropriate words for X, but Anaheet's biggest struggles were Q, B and W (and these words may be the strongest and are now her favorite!) Another challenge was presenting concepts so readers could comprehend all the information provided. She used terminology that was inclusive- words like Sudreh-push, Nowruz, Jashn so the book relates to all Zarathushtis.

The illustrations took the longest time to complete. Each has been painstakingly rendered in watercolor to ensure that illustrations on facing pages looked cohesive in terms of color. What started out as a book primarily for children soon transformed into a book every Zarathushti should have.

This small book is a welcome addition to all homes specially those with small children



"Rationalization in Zoroastrianism"

By Kersi Kabraji

PPs 50, Price Rs 400, ISBN 978-1-4828-5004-8 .

Printed in India by Manipal Technologies Ltd, Manipal

Order from Partridge India www.partridgepublishing.com/india

Reviewed by Ervad Gev Karkaria.

The book *"Rationalization in Zoroastrianism"* as written by Mr. Kersi Kabraji is a simple and comprehensive book aimed at educating our young generation of Zarthushtis, about Zoroastrian Philosophy. To explain the concepts of

(1) dualism (good & evil), (2) Monotheism, (belief in one God.)

(3) good thoughts, good words, good deeds (4) the six attributes of Ahura

Mazda, and (5) freedom of choice etc. to name a few. He has carefully chosen excerpts from various

well known authors and Gathic scholars and explained them in simple understandable language. What

struck me most was the size of the book. In just about 45 pages Kersi Kabraji has given an overview of

Zoroastrian philosophy as propagated by our prophet Zarthushtia. To a young mind, trying to understand

the basics of the subject as heavy as religious philosophy, a book this concise is less intimidating. The

book is useful to all, young and old, who want to acquire the basic knowledge of our religion. It clearly

highlights the simplicity of Zoroastrianism.



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