

USHAO

Electronic Edition
Volume 2, No. 1 * Spring 2010

Zarathushtra, Lord of Mankind

Mah Farvardin, Roj Khordad (March 26) celebrates the birth of Asho Zarathushtra



Bed of Roses – FMD [Inspired by the legend of baby Zarathushtra's miraculous survival in a fire]

Thou, Ahura Mazda, hast made Zarathushtra the lord and overseer over mankind. Like unto the radiant and glorious Tishtrya he is the beacon-light on the horizon of life and lights our path leading to thee. He is the embodiment of truth, righteousness and goodness on earth.

Zarathushtra is the polar star of man's searchings. He is the light of man's life. He is a constant radiating source of ennobling influence. He radiates the atmosphere of peace and joy, hope and life all around by his immortal teachings. He is like a rock to which man can cling in the shipwreck of his life. He is the consummation in this world of righteousness that is shadowed by wickedness. He is the

realized ideal of perfection in this world of imperfection. He is the fulfillment and complement of creation, the beginning and end of life. He is mankind's supremest and sublimest standard and norm for all time. To see Zarathushtra in spirit is to see thee, Ahura Mazda. To know him is to know thee. To understand him is to understand thee. To follow him is to follow thee. To be like him is to be like thee.

I will assimilate Zarathushtra's teachings into my life. I will live devoted to him. I will make him my example in life. I will keep his sublime image engraved upon my mind. With Zarathushtra as my guiding spirit, sustaining energy, and driving will, fearlessly and courageously will I face whatever befalls and betides me. Manfully onward will I march under his banner, without flinching or faltering from stage to stage on my life's journey. In his steps will I plant my footmarks and walk the ground over which walked his blessed feet. I will live after him. I will make him my constant companion, that he, Zarathushtra, my prophet, my friend, my guardian, my guide, may be my hope, my light, my life, Ahura Mazda. **

Source:

Homage Unto Ahura Mazda. Dastur Dr. Maneckji Dhalla Karachi: Dastur Dr. Dhalla Memorial Institute. 1970.

I Meant To Do My Work Today

**I meant to do my work today,
But a brown bird sang in the apple tree,
And a butterfly flitted across the field,
And all the leaves were calling me.**

**And the wind went sighing over the land,
Tossing the grasses to and fro,
And a rainbow held out its shining hand--
So what could I do but laugh and go?**

Richard Le Gallienne



NoRoоз on PBS

Transcription of an interview on Public Broadcasting Services

KIM LAWTON, guest anchor on Public Broadcasting Services: On our calendar this week, Bahais and Zarathushtis prepare for their New Year, called Norooz, which occurs at the spring equinox. The Zarathushti faith began in ancient Persia, now Iran. Estimates vary widely, but some claim that only as few as 115,000 Zarathushtis remain, most in India but also in Iran, Europe, and North America. To learn more about how Zarathushti Americans celebrate Norooz, we visited the Aidun family in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Zarathushtiism teaches that people should do good to help their one God in his cosmic struggle with the power of evil. We visited a Zarathushti family of Iranian-Americans, the Aiduns, in Gaithersburg, Maryland.



FARZAD AIDUN (*hugging his children*): Happy Norooz! Norooz is celebrated at the precise moment that spring arrives.

The Prophet Zoroaster's message was very universal, centered around the tenets of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

The Haft Seen table [photo on the left] is central to the Norooz celebration. "Seen" is one of the letters of the alphabet. Items beginning with the letter "seen" are traditionally put on the table.

(Chanting the Ashem Vohu — prayers).

There's a misconception amongst many that, you know, Zarathushtis are fire worshippers. Traditionally, it's customary to pray in front of the fire or pray towards a light source. Light is very significant in the Zarathushti religion, and it's a sign of knowledge and wisdom.

(To his son): Now look in the mirror... We offer the mirror. It's essentially a sign of light. You look in mirror and you get some rosewater, which is very aromatic. You also get to see yourself and how you look at the beginning of the year.

(Teaching his children at the kitchen table): Good thoughts, good words, good deeds. I believe in one God, Ahura Mazda. My God allows me to think and to choose what's right and wrong. "Asha" is the law of nature. And as long as you strive to always follow the path of Asha, to make sure that you're considering everything in the universe, you will make this world a better place for future generations to come. **

Source:

Video available on <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/march-13-2009/Zarathushti-new-year/2446/>
The photo of the Haft Seen table is also from the PBS website.

Eggs Around the World



An egg is a traditional symbol of rebirth. In days gone by the egg, due to its shape, was a symbol of the earth. For Zarathushtis, the egg is associated with Jamshedi NoRooz which is traditionally celebrated on 21 March, the day of the vernal equinox. At the vernal equinox, day and night are of equal length. After the equinox, days become longer. This is a return of life after the "dead of winter" and the official beginning of spring. Many animals, especially birds, begin their courtship and mating rituals during spring. Thanks to its obvious association with the beginning of life, on NoRooz we continue to decorate eggs as a symbol of spring and renewal.

Zarathushtis are not the only ones to associate eggs with new birth, fertility and the cycle of life. The egg has also been the basis of many ancient creation stories and spring festivals around the globe.

The tradition of eggs at Easter dates back to the early days of the church. The ban on eating eggs during the 46 days of Lent before Easter, established in the 9th century, is what made the egg so popular at Easter. The eggs were collected and saved and, once the fasting was over, were distributed to the servants and children, who generally enjoyed them in a huge Easter omelette. During the Middle Ages, egg throwing festivals were often held in churches. During these festivals, the priest would throw a hard

boiled egg to one of the assembled choir boys. The egg was then tossed from one choir boy to the next. The boy holding the egg when the clock struck noon was the winner and got to keep the egg.

The egg is also part of the Jewish Passover holiday that takes place in the Spring. The egg is placed on the Seder plate and is a symbol of sacrifice and loss, as well as the full cycle of life, and, therefore, hope and rebirth.

In China, red eggs are given out at the one month birthday of a new baby. It is customary to hold a Red Egg and Ginger Party at this time. Once again, the source seems to be the egg's role as a symbol of fertility and the beginning of life.

Have an egg-citing NoRooz!

Sources:

- Get Cracking. www.eggs.ca
- Mama Lisa's World Blog. www.mamalisa.com

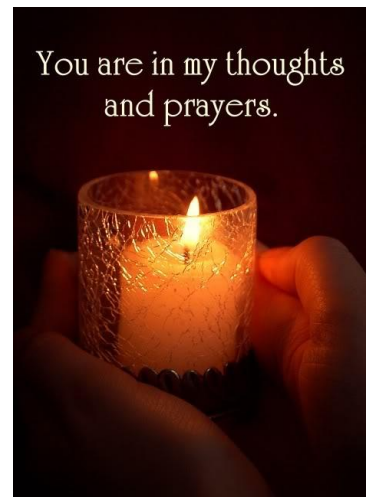
Renewing Your Spirit

Spring is the long-awaited change after a dark, cold winter. Seeds sprout, flowers bloom, and the sun warms the earth. There is a sense of renewal and new life all around. While winter is a time to conserve energy and reduce activity, spring is a time of regeneration, and a renewal of spirit — in more ways than one.

In ancient times, for the ten days before the NoRooz, consecrated food was set out to feed the spirits of the departed. These ten days are collectively referred to as Farvardigan. Among Persian Zarathushtis the ten days may be called “panjī”, while among Parsis the term “mukhtad” is commonly used.

Yasht.13:49 states, “We revere the righteous, good, powerful, beneficent Fravašis, who come to the families at the time of *Hamaspahmaedaem* [at the time of the vernal equinox] there they pass their life for 10 nights all round” (Translation by T.R. Sethna).

The Yasht proclaims that the fravašis of the righteous come to the homes of their families for the dual purpose of enjoying being remembered by their loved ones, and receiving gifts of food and clothing as they would have if they had been living. Parsi traditions include saying prayers of remembrance and offering fruit, flowers, incense, wood and money to the visiting spirits who have returned to earth. The money is later donated to the *darbe meher* or to a charity in memory of the loved one. In Iran, children and some adults wrap themselves in shrouds to act out the visits of the spirits, and knock on doors to ask for treats. This tradition is similar to modern-day Halloween celebrated in the West.

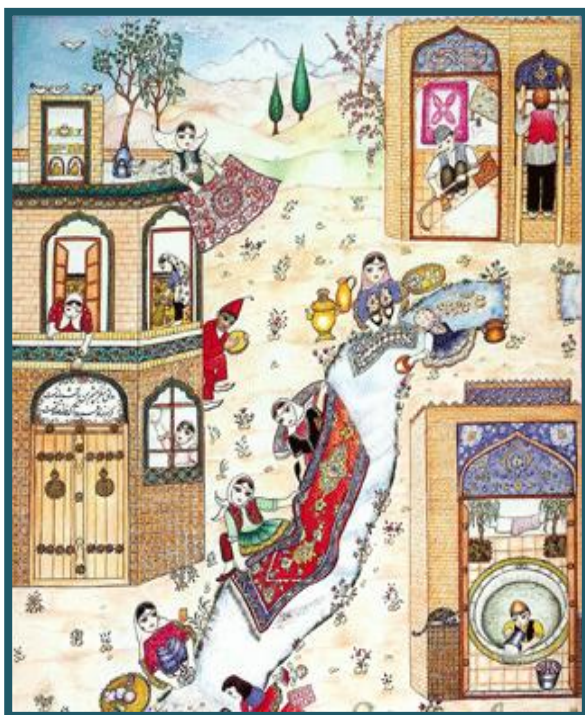


The Farvardigan days are also seen as a period of reflection, an opportunity to examine one's conscience and repent for past wrongs. It is also a time to forgive, both those who are living and those who have departed. According to the American Psychological Association, forgiveness is "the mental, and/or spiritual process of ceasing to feel resentment, indignation or anger against another person for a perceived offense, difference or mistake, or ceasing to demand punishment or restitution". Forgiveness does not mean that we dismiss or condone what someone did that was hurtful or wrong. It is about setting yourself free from the holds of the past, and you can do that by releasing the past so it no longer has control over your thoughts or the way you feel. Forgiveness is operating in the present where the hurt and anger no longer hold power. It ties in with the Zarathushti principle of *Fravarane* or free choice: *Astuye humatem mano, Astuye huktem vacho, Astuye hvarshtem shyaothnem*, or "I choose to think good thoughts, I choose to speak good words, I choose to do good deeds". The days before NoRooz are the ideal time to "choose" to let go the past hurts and look towards the future. After all, spring is about new beginnings. **

Source:

- Farishta Dinshaw. *Healing Power of Forgiveness*. HAMAZOR, Summer 2004, publication of World Zoroastrian Organization
- USHAO: Volume IV no. 12, February 2004. *Fravašis and Fravardégân*. Originally taken from the book *Man, Soul, Immortality In Zoroastrianism* by Faramroze A. Bode.

Shake-Up Your Home



Spring cleaning the home before NoRooz is called *Khaneh* (home or house) *Tekani* (shake-up). During the *Khaneh-Tekani*, all members of the home help and cooperate in thoroughly cleaning every nook and cranny of the home. Debris from the past is removed from within the home and detritus from the outside. Carpets and curtains are washed, silverware polished, and windows cleaned.

After the cleaning, fragrant plants such as hyacinths and tube roses are brought into the house to freshen the air. Some Zarathushtis in India burn sandalwood in a fire chalice [*afarghan*] and walk the chalice throughout the house daily, filling air in the house with the scent of sandalwood. In the same manner, Zarathushtis in Iran burn sweet-smelling herbs like wild rue and esfand. Some believe that the aromatic fumes help ward off evil spirits while welcoming the spirits of the departed during the Farvardigan Days [ten days before NoRooz].

Sarah Aguirre, a writer who specializes in helping families clean and organize their homes, offers these tips to involve the whole family.

- Make sure the assigned day has no prior engagements during the time period allotted for work. Check and recheck schedules and plan ahead. Don't accept excuses. Let everyone know that this is a family event and they are all strongly invited to be there.
- Turn off the ringers to your phones, and let extended family and friends know that you'll be unreachable that day. A distraction can cause the whole job to fall apart.
- Invite everyone to bring his or her favorite CD or cassette tape. Take turns playing each of the CD's or cassettes. To be fair pull names out of a hat to determine order.
- Have some good snacks and drinks on hand for break times. Choose your families' favorites. Having predetermined breaks can keep the family motivated to keep working.
- Make chores age appropriate. Do not expect children who are too young to participate in heavy cleaning and organizing. Have work that they can do available or create alternate activities that still help. Sorting safe items can be good for preschool and school age children. If some of your children are too young to participate consider having a trusted relative or friend take care of them during the cleanup.
- Plan a reward for when the job is finished. Take the family out to a movie and/or dinner. Or if you are all too tired from your hard work, order a pizza and rent a movie. You'll all be able to lounge on the couch basking in the knowledge of a job well done.

After spring cleaning, the home is ready for a fresh start to the new year. **

Sources:

- *Khaneh-Tekani*. www.heritageinstitute.com. Painting of *Khaneh-Tekani* also from the same site.
- Sarah Aguirre, *Tips for Family Clean Up Day*. www.about.com

Footprints on the Sands of Time

Reflections on the World Zoroastrian Congress, Dubai

As a first-time attendee to one of the 9th World Zoroastrian Congresses, I was in awe to be at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dubai, for four straight days [28th - 31st December 2009]. The efforts of Meher Bhesania and her motivated team were undoubtedly rewarding. The Congress with the theme “Unity through the sands of time” was definitely an inspiring, enlightening, enjoyable, and memorable experience, one to be cherished for years to come.

The Congress was Inspiring

In his keynote address, Lord Karan Billimoria said, “You must not be the best in the world, but you must be the best



for the world”. He spoke about his rise to success and his experiences on his first trip to England. He accepted that he is British, but said that he has not lost an ounce of true belonging to his roots. He went on to say “We are what we are because of what our Motherland has given us”. Most of his speech was targeted to the youth in the crowd. He stated that when he went to England, he was told that there was a glass ceiling for success owing to the fact that he was an expatriate. Now that he has attained stature in the world, he wanted to tell the youth that if one works very hard and knows the right people there is no glass ceiling. His key message was about “authentic leadership”. He said there is no real doctrine that dictates how leadership should be, but instead one should be noble and true to oneself and to others and lead them in the best way they know how. A piece of advice that I felt was most useful not only for the young minds wishing to build empires, but for all who strive for success: “Aspire and achieve against all odds with integrity”.

World Zoroastrian Congress awards were given in many fields including literature, community service, technology, engineering and medicine, but YELP - Youth Entrepreneur Leadership Program - showed that our youth were also “aspiring and achieving” . The program offered country-based teams of youth between ages of 23 to 35 years an opportunity to be ‘Future Responsible Leaders’. The winners were as follows:

1 st Prize	Team Iran	For initiating the first youth congress in Iran devoted to outstanding youth.
2 nd Prize	Team North America and Canada	For designing an online campaign similar to a job hunters’ forum to help the unemployed.
2 nd Prize	Team India	For creating <i>zfunds.org</i> , a site devoted to profiling trust funds for those who seek financial help for education in any field.
3 rd Prize	Team UK	For organizing a Fun Club in London. The Fun Club is designed to let youth teach other youngsters about our religion. They also initiated separate classes to teach the same to adults.
3 rd Prize	Team Dubai	For creating a Q&A forum linked to experts on various topics. The team basically relays the questions to the experts in the relevant field and then relays the answers back to those who asked them.
3 rd Prize	Team Australia	For organizing an online help forum.

The Congress was Enlightening

Khojeste Mistri [a Trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat] delivered a speech on how we Parsis have separated our roots from our religion. He said that this was the outcome of intermarriages as well as moving abroad and not teaching our children about our heritage and tradition. I believe we are recognized as a trustworthy, “live and let live” kind of community, but that is not everything we stand for, and I think that was the point Mr. Mistri was trying to convey. “Keep your ethnicity”. He feels the Diaspora need to rekindle the lost link between tradition and our fine religion and truly believe in the ethnicity that makes us true Parsis. We can’t simply continue life on the belief of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, for there is no religion that preaches Bad Thoughts, Bad Words or Bad Deeds.

He moved on to say that the Diaspora has done well on the economic front, and, like the Tatas, the Godrejes, and the Udwadias, have made their names known worldwide as members of the Zarathushti community, but that is pretty much all the outside world is exposed to about us. He concluded by saying, “If we look after our community, the community will look after our religion”.

The Congress was Enjoyable



There were a lot of references to the symbolic sugar dissolving into milk as was proposed to the Maharajah at the time in Gujarat when the Persian Zarthushtis came to India. This reference was played out as a ballet performed to the music from Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*, showing the Zarthushtis coming to India by boat, and making Gujarat their new home. The audience was repeatedly entertained by Hormuzd Khambatta and his Dance Troupe referred to as “the Dancing Parsis” by the *Times of India*. On the first night, they performed to tunes from various musicals like *Mary Poppins*, *Grease*, and *Mama Mia* and on 31st December they performed a medley of Hindi film numbers to bring in the New Year. We were also entertained by actor and stand-up comedian Boman Irani with various jokes about Parsis and Zarthushtis in Iran leaving those who understood Gujarati in fits of laughter. However, surprisingly he began with a down to earth speech about Parsis in Bombay, and how we are perceived by others outside the community. He said, “We Parsis have a reputation. One that our forefathers built for us”. I felt this was important for me to include since many of us lose track of how we got to the fame, success, and most of all, fortune. The wealth our community holds today is because of the pillars our ancestors built, allowing outsiders to trust us in business endeavors as well as on a social platform.

The Congress was Memorable

The icing on the cake of the four day event was not the ballet, the dance troupe, Shayan Italia’s beautiful voice or even Boman Irani’s speech. Instead it was the morning when Nadir Godrej, [Managing Director, Godrej Industries] was asked to speak. He delivered a speech, that not only won him a standing ovation from his Parsi audience, but also from His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum [President of the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman of Dubai Airports and Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group]. His speech was a summary of our history, our progression from Iran to India and our current situation as Parsis in the economy. This was all delivered as a catchy, articulate and award-worthy poem. Not only was his poem well-written, but you could see that he was enjoying himself, you could see the magic as he spoke of his empire as well as others as his story unfolded. I would recommend that every one, even non-Parsis, listen to him speak. I cannot promise that his next speech will be one of rhyme, but he is a true joy to listen to just the same. It isn’t about what he says, but it is about how he says it.

Surrounded by successful, motivational, inspiring, not to mention rich, Parsis was a unique experience especially for the youth of our community. **

This report was written by Nasha P. Taraporewala who lives and studies in Dubai. The reflections and opinions expressed in this report are the personal views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of *e-Ushao*.



*The heights
by great men
reached and
kept were not
attained by
sudden flight,
but they,
while their
companions
slept, were
toiling
upwards in
the night.*

*From the “Spirit
of Enterprise” by
Nadir Godrej*