

# USHAO

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## IN PRAISE OF THE RADIANT SUN



forces would devastate all which exists.”

The Yashts are a collection of twenty-one hymns invoking a specific Zarathushti divinity or concept. The word yasht comes from an Avestan term meaning "worship by praise". These untitled hymns of praise were assigned titles centuries after Zarathushtra lived and, therefore, bear the Middle Persian forms of the divinities' names rather than Avestan names. For example, Khorshed Yasht instead of Hvarekshaeta, (radiant sun) in Avesta. The Khorshed Yasht contains seven verses and is a benediction to the Sun. It proclaims: “When the Sun rises, the land created by Ahura Mazda becomes purified. If the Sun were not to rise, evil

There is no debating that our planet is part of the solar system in which we truly depend upon the sun to maintain life. Without the sun, there would be no life on earth. It would be a cold, barren planet. Without its light, there would be pitch black darkness as all forms of atmospheric light like moonlight and starlight are reflections of the sun. Without the warmth of the sun, the temperatures would drop till life as we know it could not be maintained. Plants would die because they need the sun for photosynthesis, which produces energy. This would start a chain reaction that would kill off animals and humans who depend on plants for food. Medical and mental health professionals recognize the value of the sun in maintaining the well being of people. Vitamin D is called the ‘sunshine vitamin’ because exposure to the sun is needed for it to be created in the body. Vitamin D deficiency may lead to impaired bone mineralization, and bone softening. Studies have also shown the link between lack of exposure to the sun and depression, cognitive function, and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Science has now proved that what we recite in the Khorshed Yasht is fact and that the ancient Persians were correct in appreciating the vital role of the sun in our lives. \*\*

### Sources:

- Illustration: Detail from *Psychedelic Sun* by Valerie Waters
- David Mrazek, M.D *It's a SAD time of year*. Nov. 17, 2008. [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

## Winter Wonderland

When it snows, ain't it thrilling,  
Though your nose gets a chilling  
We'll frolic and play, the Eskimo way,  
Walking in a winter wonderland.

Richard B. Smith



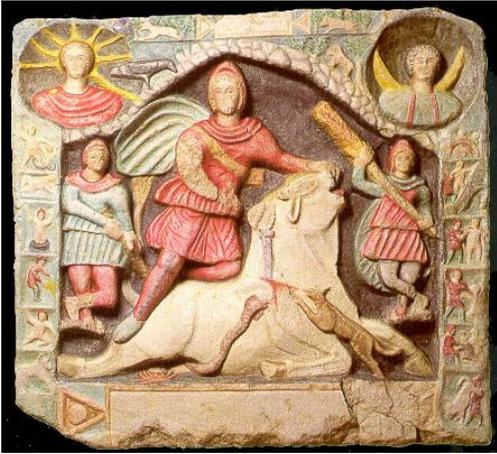
## BIRTH OF THE SUN OR SON OF GOD?



Christmas is celebrated the world over on December 25 as the birthday of Jesus Christ. Yet clues in the Bible tells us that December 25 is an unlikely date for Christ's birth. Judea, the region in which he was born, now Palestine, is very cold in December. Roman administrators would not have issued a decree for people to go to the city of their fathers to register for taxes during the season when Judea was generally impassable. Also, according to the Bible, the shepherds were in the fields at the time of his birth, which means it could not be in winter as they are in the fields early in March until early October. In fact, the early Christian church did not celebrate Christ's birth. It wasn't until A.D. 440 that the church officially proclaimed December 25 as the birthday of Christ. At that time, Romans celebrated the winter solstice as the birthday of the sun god, Mithras. Some scholars believe the church chose the date of this pagan celebration to boost the flagging interest among the followers of Christianity as they were already used to celebrating on this date. The church also chose Sunday (sun day) as the day of worship.

Many people trace Mithras, the sun god that the Romans idolized to Persia. Although Mithra was definitely a pre-Zarathushti deity, the version of the Mithras as a god and Mithraism as his cult are not related to Zarathushti scriptures. Mithra is not mentioned by name in the Gathas, the oldest texts attributed to Zarathushtra himself. Mithra also does not appear by name in the Yasna Haptanghaiti, a

seven-verse section of the Yasna liturgy that is linguistically as old as the Gathas. Nor was Mithra the divinity of the Sun in Zarathushti scripture (or in Vedic scripture either). The sun was *Hvare khshaeta* (literally "radiant sun", later known as Khorshed in Middle Persian). Mithra was the divinity associated with contracts and oaths. It was believed that if you reneged on a contract or an oath, you would be struck down with lameness or blindness by Mithra. In addition to being the divinity of contracts, Mithra was also a judicial figure, an all-seeing protector of Truth, and the guardian of cattle, and the harvest.



How, when or why Mithra became the divinity of the Sun is uncertain, but is commonly attributed to a conflation with Babylonian Shamash, who – in addition to being a Sun god – was a judicial figure like Mithra. In the Hellenistic era (i.e. in Seleucid and Parthian reigns in Persia), Mithra also seems to have been conflated with the Greek god, Apollo, who – like Mithra – was an all-seeing divinity of the truth. The name of the Persian god Mithra, adapted into Greek as Mithras, was linked to a new and distinctive mythology and system of belief very different from Zarathushti ideology. This cult later began to be referred to as Mithraism, or sometimes Roman Mithraism. Mithras-worship in the Roman Empire was characterized by images of the Mithra slaughtering a bull. Other images of Mithras depict the birth of Mithras from a rock, thus giving credence to the juxtaposition of Christ and his virgin birth with Mithraic mythology. The cult of Mithra was popular with Roman soldiers. To the Romans, Mithra was known as “Deus Sol Invictus” or Unconquered Sun God. Mithras worship was very secretive, perhaps due to Christian persecution, and temples of Mithras (Mithraeums) were sunk below ground, windowless, and very distinctive in their inner architecture. Luther H. Martin (cited in *Mithraic Mysteries*) wrote: "Apart from the name of the god himself, in other words, Mithraism seems to have developed largely in and is, therefore, best understood from the context of Roman culture." According to Martin, Roman Mithraism came to an end with the anti-pagan decrees of the Christian emperor Theodosius during the last decade of the 4th century as Christianity, with the force of the Roman church behind it, became more mainstream and widespread. At some of the mithraeums which have been found below churches, for example the Santa Prisca mithraeum and the San Clemente mithraeum, the ground plan of the church above was made in a way to symbolize Christianity's domination of Mithraism. Although Mithraism is distinctive from Zarathushti ideology, it was easy for the Greeks and Romans to trace the roots of it to Persia because they celebrated the winter solstice, likely in pre-Zarathushti and even proto-Indo-European times, which means it dates to thousands of years ago. It was first known as Shab-e-Cheleh, but later interchangeably got to be known as Shab-e-Yalda. Yalda is a Syric word meaning birth. Massoumeh Price explains, “It is not clear when and how the world "Yalda" entered the Persian language. The massive persecution of early Christians in Rome brought many Christian refugees into the Sassanid Empire and it is very likely that these Christians introduced and popularized "Yalda" in Iran. Gradually "Shab e Yalda" and "Shab e Cheleh" became synonymous and the two are used interchangeably. With the conquest of Islam the religious significance of the ancient Persian festivals was lost. Today "Shab e Cheleh" is merely a social occasion, when family and friends get together for fun and merriment. Different kinds of dried fruits, nuts, seeds and fresh winter fruits are consumed. The

presence of dried and fresh fruits is reminiscence of the ancient feasts to celebrate and pray to the deities to ensure the protection of the winter crops.”

Shab-e-Yalda (night of Yalda) has great significance in the Persian calendar as it is considered the eve of the birth of the Sun, symbolizing light, goodness and strength on earth, which ultimately defeats the long, dark night and the triumph of the victory of good over evil, of light over darkness. Medes and Persians brought this festival with them into their new lands, including the Near East, where they eventually encountered Romans, who could hardly have missed this common solstice motif celebrated worldwide in numerous ways. The seed of the Christmas celebration may therefore have been Persian. However, the origins do not matter as we understand the concept of these holidays is a time of joy and celebration, of thanksgiving for life, peace, and family whether it is Shab-e-Yalda or Christmas. \*\*



Source

- Massoumeh Price. *Yalda: Significance of winter solstice in Persian culture*. December 8, 1999 The Iranian
- *Mithra: The Pagan Christ* by Acharya S/D.M. Murdock <http://www.truthbeknown.com/mithra.htm>
- *Mithraic Mysteries*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mithraic\\_mysteries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mithraic_mysteries)



## SPREADING THE WORD

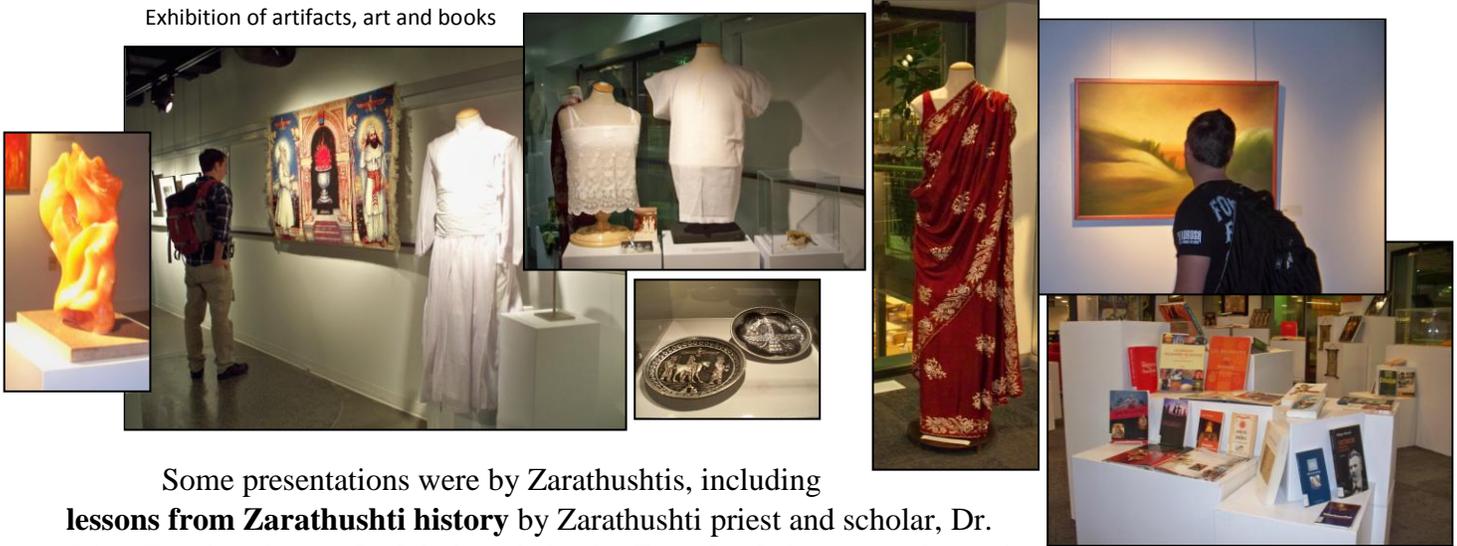
For four days this Fall (7 - 10 November 2011) a community college in Quebec City, Canada was filled with images, sounds and tastes of Zarathushti culture, history, and religion. For the last ten years, Cegep de Sainte Foy has organized conferences on various religions and belief systems to inculcate “tolerance, amitié et fraternité” amongst its students. In 2011, they invited the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec (ZAQ) to partner with them in organizing a conference. The four days were jam-packed with exhibitions, presentations, cultural events, and discussions on Zarathushti history and religion.

Many of the presentations were by faculty of Quebec-based universities, such as **funeral rites of Parsis** by Marcelle Saindon, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies Laval University, Quebec; a brief **overview of ancient Iran** by Jacques Desautels, Emeritus Professor at the Faculty of Education, Laval University; and a **discussion on Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Thus Spake Zarathushtra”** by Pascal Ouellet, Professor of Philosophy, Cegep De Levis-lauzon, Quebec.



Ervad Gev Karkaria, Dr. Jehan Bagli, and Dolly Dastoor at the opening ceremony.

Exhibition of artifacts, art and books



Some presentations were by Zarathushtis, including **lessons from Zarathushti history** by Zarathushti priest and scholar, Dr. Jehan Bagli; **aging and Alzheimer's in the Zarathushti community** and around the world by Dr. Dolly Dastoor, McGill University, Montreal; and a presentation on **Zarathushti rituals and ceremonies**, by Ervad Gev Karkaria.

Two international presenters took time from their busy schedules to share their experiences and knowledge. Dr. Khosro Khazai (Pardis), European Centre for Zoroastrian Studies, Brussels, spoke about **Zarathushti heritage**, and Tenaz Dubash, a New York-based documentary filmmaker presented her film **“In the Footsteps of our Forefathers”** (2000), which traces the journey of thirty-four young Zarathushtis from the USA, Britain and Canada, including Tenaz, on their trip to Iran. The closing presentation was by Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, who used themes from her book **“Discovering Ashavan”** to illustrate Zarathushtra's universal message of *humata, hukhta* and *hvarshta*.

Majority of the presentations were in French. Many of the Zarathushtis attending were conversant with French as they live in Quebec, and Dr. Sam Cooper, a bi-lingual retired scientist, was there as a volunteer interpreter for those who did not speak French.

Although the planned events were heavily attended and received favorable reviews, the true success of the conference was the many informal opportunities to interact with students. “Hi! Nice to meet you!” were one-hour sessions where the visiting Zarathushtis visited classrooms and answered questions. As the number of Zarathushtis attending the conference changed from day to day according to their work and time commitments, each of these sessions was unique depending on the interest of the students and on the people answering the questions. For instance, at one of the sessions, Zareen and Phiroze Austin brought their wedding



Dr. Sam Cooper, Dr. Khosro Khazai Pardis, and Daniel Gignac debate a point of interest.



Dr. Sam Cooper and Farishta Dinshaw chat with some students over dinner.

album to show the students photographs of the various rituals and ceremonies, while another session was devoted to questions about the afterlife and the concept of heaven and hell. Other opportunities to interact with students included sharing cookies from an Iranian bakery with them as well as tours of an exhibition of artifacts, books and calligraphy collected by ZAQ from their members that were displayed outside the library. Approximately 20 students and their teachers attended each time and Zarathushti volunteers answered their questions. Besides the artifacts, paintings by local artists Parvin Farzaneh and Firooza Aubry were also displayed. Firooza Aubry was present at the preview of exhibition, and got a chance to discuss her works with the visitors. She said later, "I found the organization [of the Conference] fantastic, the collaboration with Cegep St Foy excellent, the students/participants really committed and the Zoroastrian religion showcased in a truly commendable manner. For me the highlight was the vernissage [preview], particularly the presentation by Daniel Gignac. Everything was great: the atmosphere, the snacks, the participants." A more one-on-one opportunity to interact with students took place on Wednesday, 9 November 2011 at a community dinner where two to three Zarathushti volunteers were placed at each table to answer questions and, in true Zarathushti fashion, eat, drink, and be merry. The evening also featured a performance by singer, Rofida Koboli, and composer, Sheida Gharchedaghi and a buffet of Iranian delicacies. There were other cultural performances throughout the week. According to Dr. Sam Cooper, "The traditional and folklore Iranian dance troupe, Khorshid Khanum, of Montreal impressed the spectators with their charm and talent at the opening ceremony."

Adi Bharucha, another regular attendee, said, "I was impressed by the structure of various presentations on religion and its concept, Persian history, culture, religious and social rituals, and by the excellent and knowledgeable participants. In general the audience became aware about Zoroastrianism in

such a short time." The conference would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Professor Daniel Gignac and his incredible team of volunteers, as well as the Zarathushti community of Quebec. Not only did ZAQ, under the leadership of president Faranak Firoozi, spend a year collaborating with the college to put up the conference, but a contingent of approximately 20 Zarathushtis took time off from work to present or attend the conference. At the end of the four days, it was clear that the college had succeeded in spreading the message of friendship, fellowship and tolerance. \*\*



ZAQ President, Faranak Firoozi invites students to try Iranian cookies.



Dolly Dastoor and Adi Bharucha recite prayers.

Report and photographs by Farishta Dinshaw

## BE THE CHANGE

The new year that begins on January 1 according to the Gregorian calendar more than any other new year is the one on which people make resolutions to change their lifestyle. Traditionally, New Year's

Day is styled as the ideal time to start a new phase in your life and the time when you must make your all important new year's resolution. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world" so the steps to do something about the missing pieces in our lives have to begin with making changes in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Often, New Year's resolutions are about taking on new behaviors, but here is a brief list of some resolutions that focus on stopping old behavior patterns.

## THOUGHTS

1. **Stop berating yourself for old mistakes.** – We may love the wrong person and cry about the wrong things, but no matter how things go wrong, one thing is for sure, mistakes help us find the person and things that are right for us. We all make mistakes, have struggles, and even regret things in our past. But you are not your mistakes, you are not your struggles, and you are here NOW with the power to shape your day and your future. Every single thing that has ever happened in your life is preparing you for a moment that is yet to come.
2. **Stop thinking you're not ready.** – Nobody ever feels 100% ready when an opportunity arises. Because most great opportunities in life force us to grow beyond our comfort zones, which means we won't feel totally comfortable at first.
3. **Stop holding grudges.** – Don't live your life with hate in your heart. You will end up hurting yourself more than the people you hate. Forgiveness is not saying, "What you did to me is okay." It is saying, "I'm not going to let what you did to me ruin my happiness forever." Forgiveness is the answer... let go, find peace, liberate yourself! And remember, forgiveness is not just for other people, it's for you too. If you must, forgive yourself, move on and try to do better next time.



*Forgiveness by Beth Budeshe*

## WORDS

1. **Stop complaining and feeling sorry for yourself.** – Life's curveballs are thrown for a reason – to shift your path in a direction that is meant for you. You may not see or understand everything the moment it happens, and it may be tough. But reflect back on those negative curveballs thrown at you in the past. You'll often see that eventually they led you to a better place, person, state of mind, or situation. So smile! Let everyone know that today you are a lot stronger than you were yesterday, and you will be.
2. **Stop wasting time explaining yourself to others.** – Your friends don't need it and your enemies won't believe it anyway. Just do what you know in your heart is right.
3. **Stop blaming others for your troubles.** – The extent to which you can achieve your dreams depends on the extent to which you take responsibility for your life. When you blame others for what you're going through, you deny responsibility – you give others power over that part of your life.

## DEEDS

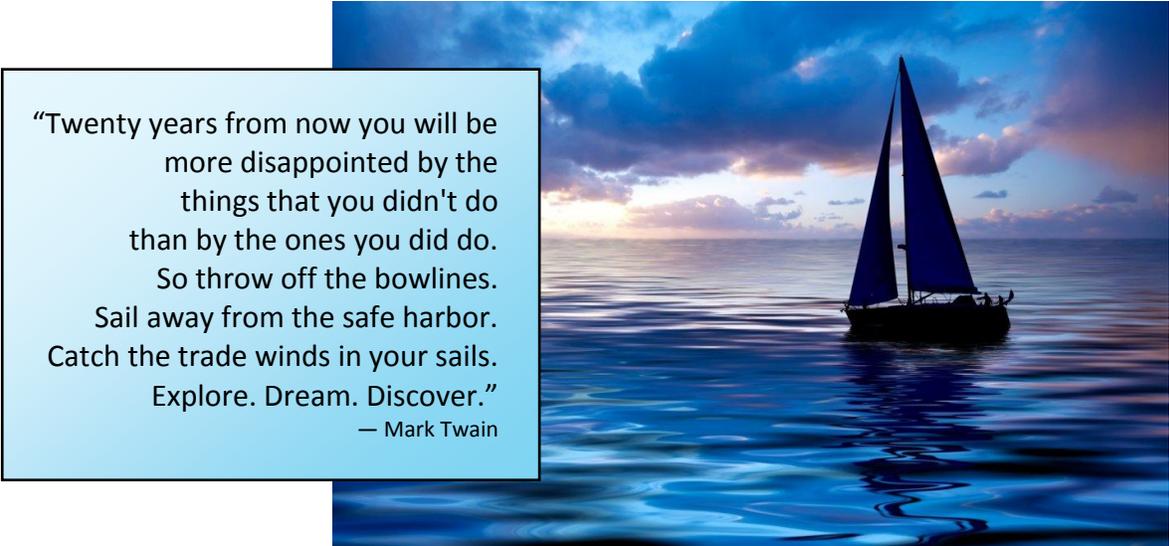
4. **Stop spending time with the wrong people.** – Life is too short to spend time with people who suck the happiness out of you. If someone wants you in their life, they'll make room for you. You shouldn't have to fight for a spot. Never, ever insist yourself to someone who continuously overlooks your worth. And remember, it's not the people that stand by your side when you're at your best, but the ones who stand beside you when you're at your worst that are your true friends.
5. **Stop being idle.** – Don't think too much or you'll create a problem that wasn't even there in the first place. Evaluate situations and take decisive action. You cannot change what you refuse to confront. Making progress involves risk. Period! You can't make it to second base with your foot on first.
6. **Stop doing the same things over and over without taking a break.** – The time to take a deep breath is when you don't have time for it. If you keep doing what you're doing, you'll keep getting what you're getting. Sometimes you need to distance yourself to see things clearly.

And above all:

**Stop being ungrateful.** – No matter how good or bad you have it, wake up each day thankful for your life. Someone somewhere else is desperately fighting for theirs. Instead of thinking about what you're missing, try thinking about what you have that everyone else is missing.\*\*

Source

- For the whole list refer to <http://www.marcandangel.com/2011/12/11/30-things-to-stop-doing-to-yourself/>



“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”  
— Mark Twain

*Ushao wishes its readers interesting journeys and new experiences in the New Year.*

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