

"THE MOBEDS, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE"

Ervad Burzin Peshotan Unwalla's Eye Opening Paper at the Houston-2000 Congress.

The Divine Stature of "the First Athravan", Asho Zarathushtra; The Magi Priests of Iran; The Mobeds of India Past, Present and Future.

[The following are the excerpts from a paper presented by Ervad Burzin Peshotan Unwalla, a Parsi Youth of 22 permanently residing in America before a keenly interested audience at the Houston Congress - 2000 under the auspices of North American Mobed Council. The Paper gives numerous references from the Avesta Scriptures and very ably sets out an account of the Parsi Priesthood ("Mobedi") in Iran and India, and its state at present, and narrates the virtues and psyche of ideal priesthood that can be adopted even today.

Burzin is the son of Ervad Peshotan Jehangirji Unwalla hailing from Udwada and settled in Houston. Peshotan's father Ervad Saheb Jehangirji was a disciple of Ustad Saheb Behramshah Shroff. Ustad Saheb had great affection for this silent and ardent disciple and his humour, and had rewarded him with many personal nirang's and miraculous help.

Ervad Peshotan had imbibed both, Kshnoom and humour from his father and so also has Burzin. His paper contains Khshnoomic interpretations of the Avesta passages. It was quite a sight for me seeing a 22 years Parsi Youth of America speaking Khshnoom and presenting numerous references from Avesta Scriptures. Whenever he referred to an Avesta passage, Peshotan recited it with his musical pronunciations and Burzin then presented its translation. He relies mostly on Ervad Saheb Phiroze Masani's translations from his book, "Zoroastrianism Ancient and Modern" (which is now reprinted by the Parsi Vegetarian and Temperance Society, Mumbai.)

The paper is divided in three parts. The first is about the Yazatic stature of Asho Zarathushtra; the second is about the Magi, the Iranian Priests of high spiritual levels; the third is about the Mobeds of India, past and present.]

Priesthood is a matter of spiritual stature, and not just a Worldly title.

The origins of all priesthoods can be traced to Asho Zarathushtra, who is described as the first Athravan in Fravardin Yasht (Kardeh 24). He is also described as Ahu and Ratu in the same Yashta - Khordeh 31, paragraph 152, which also gives a glimpses of the exalted position given to our Prophet. :-

"We attune ourselves with Zarathushtra the Ahu or Spiritual Master on the spiritual planes, and the Ratu or spiritual teacher on the physical planes. Having the best wisdom among the advancing ones, having the greatest "rae" or luster among the advancing ones, most worth of attunement among the advancing ones, who on account of the best holiness has been sent unto us at the most worthwhile of attunement and adoration for anyone among the advancing ones."

The following are some of the other scriptural references about Asho Zarathushtra:

Ashish Vang Yasht 18:

"There upon it was declared that he was Spitama Zarathushtra, the first of mankind who practiced the Staota of Asha Vahishta, who attuned himself with Amesha Spentas, in whose birth and advancement the waters and plants rejoiced, and in whose birth and growth the waters and plants flourished."

Fravardin Yasht 93, 94 :

"In whose birth and advancement the waters and plants rejoiced, and in whose birth and growth the waters and plants flourished, at whose birth and advancement the entire creation uttered forth its joy. - Bliss

that the athravan Spitama Zarathushtra is born for our sake. Henceforth shall the Mazdayasnian good law go on actively throughout the seven Keshvars. "

Gatha Ha 29.8 :

"He who has alone heard my canons and is known to me as such is Spitama Zarathushtra. He is willing to promulgate the duties and functions through Mazda for the sake of Asha."

Gatha Ha 51.12 :

"Spitama Zarathushtra who has furthest advanced as the messenger or prophet."

These references from the extant Avesta texts are quite adequate to give us a faint glimpse of the majestic personality of Zarathushtra, and his position as the most exalted soul with the highest spiritual unfoldment.

The khoreh or aura of Zarathushtra was said to be surpassing that of any other advancing soul. He was said to have reached the zenith of spiritual unfoldment (Uru-roast), and with all the spiritual powers thus unfolded. He was said to have been attuned with Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas, and in fact we could say that he was in tune with the entire creation. Such a soul was then destined to be the viceroy or spiritual representative of Ahura Mazda, Asha Vahishta or Sraosha, and in fact, if not going outside the scope of our topic on Zoroastrian priesthood, we could in fact have a lengthy discussion on the preparations taken for the advent of our prophet, by the earth many centuries before he was even born. With such a high and unique stature Zarathushtra was said to be willing only to carry out the will of Ahura Mazda - "Yatha ne anghat Yatha hvo vasat" - May it be so unto us as He wills it" - as said in Gatha Ha 29.4.

In the Yazashney we are able to see further that Zarathushtra is described and invoked as a Yazata. He is referred to as the rank of Amesha-Spenta in Khordad Yasht. In Fravadin Yasht it is stated that Amesha-Spentas accepted him, with love and devotion, as the Lord and leader of the earth, the one who can lead the earth and its humanity towards the immortal existence. It is stated in Tir Yasht that Zarathushtra has been nominated and appointed by Ahura Mazda as the Lord of mankind, and that neither Angramino nor evil spirit, nor any evil man is capable of killing him.

Gatha Ha 29.6 especially testifies to the unparalleled exceptional position of Zoroaster :

"Thereupon the omniscient beneficent Ahura Mazda clearly declared that neither Ahu nor Ratu for the mere sake of holiness is known to him. Hence the creator has molded thee indeed as a progress-rendering farmer."

This section is said to convey a good deal of mystic meaning. Ahura Mazda in this paragraph openly states that no other "Ahu" or "Ratu" perfectly attuned with Ashoi is in His cognizance except Zarathushtra. It is for this inner underlying deep import that Ahura Mazda further declares that Zarathushtra has been addressed as progress-renderer (Fshuyantaecha); It is Zarathushtra alone whose teachings are said to enable the soul to go along its journey across the "Chinvato-paretu" or the bridge like link between the visible and the invisible worlds, through the portal gate of "Dadar-i-gehan", which is the opening entrance into the six Keshvars - Vourubarshti, Vourujershti, Arejahi, Savahi, Fradadafshu and Vidadafshu through the realms of the Adar-i-Mino-Karko or the unseen active fire energy.

In the same sense, Zarathushtra is mentioned as a spiritual farmer (Vastryicha), for he is verily the sower of the tree of knowledge, its preserver, tender and nourisher, the reaper of its fruit and the giver thereof to the other souls who are aspiring after "Ushta" or immortal bliss.

This was the grand undertaking and office of Zarathushtra. Entrusted upon him, by Ahura Mazda, as being a "Fshuyant" and "Vastra."

WHO WERE THE 'MAGI'

Now coming back to Zoroastrian priesthood, the priests of the past were known as the Magi. The term

'Magi' is the Latin plural of 'Magus', derived from Magnus (great). It is the literal rendering of Magnus in Persian which is a translation of the Avestic 'Magavan' from 'Mas', meaning sublime personage, or more literally a protector of moral and spiritual greatness. The pahlavi renderings are sometimes Magih meaning person of spiritual and moral excellence and sometimes Magih meaning person of spiritual and moral excellence and sometimes 'Magopat' master of divine exaltation, which has given the Persian word 'Mopat' or 'Mobed'. The Avestan word 'Athravan' means protector of the Spiritual Fire. Another Avestic term 'Aethra-paiti' means protector of the Spiritual Fire or another Avestic term 'Aethra-paiti' means Master of the spiritual fire for which Pahlavi gives 'Asrun' or 'Aepat' which in Persian becomes 'Ervad'. What is important to remember here is that 'Magavan' or 'Magopat' or 'Maga' refers to the highest class of priests who used to preserve their Spiritual Worth and Greatness by a practical life of purity.

We find that the 'Magavan' or the 'Magus' are referred to in the Gathas, the Yasna and the Vendidad.

Gatha Ha 33-7; 51-15; 51-16; 51-11; 46-14; 29-11; 53-7.

These seven references from the Gathas indicate that the concrete 'Magavan' and the abstract 'Maga' are spoken of in the Gathas. One may object to these translations on a linguistic basis, but we can emphatically say that no Avesta philologist can dare challenge the use of at least the concrete 'Magavan' in Gatha 51.15 and in Gatha 33.7. Gatha 33.7, Zarathushtra himself is regarded as one of the Magavan or Magi. This proves that 'Magus' is the highest designation for a person advanced in purity and spiritual development. This is the first and original meaning of 'Magavan' occurring in the Avesta.

We have already stated that 'Magavan' is the highest grade in Zoroastrian priesthood. There are in all eight grades through which a Zoroastrian priest has to pass or to one of which the 'Athravan' may belong. The general term Athravan has eight classes - in order of their merits:

1. Fraberetar - the bringer - (Avesta: "fra"=forth, forward + "bere"= to carry) whose function it is to keep ready and to bring all requirements in the higher rituals in accordance with the cannons of Zoroastrian teachings. He has to know about the preparations and requisites of all ritual apparatus.

2. Aberetar - the water bringer - (Avesta: "ap" = water + "bere" = to carry) who has to be well versed about all the rules of keeping water ready for rituals. Water is said to play a very important part in all the higher rituals. He knows the procedure of drawing out pure water in the different Gahs of the day; he understands why water should not be drawn out of the well during the Aivisruthrem Gah, and he knows all rules regarding 'Pav' or purification of an object.

3. Asnatar - the ablutionist - (Avesta: "snaa" = to bathe) who knows everything about the various kinds of purification ceremonies and ablutions, some of which are to be found in the extant portions of the Vendidad. He must understand the entire process of the Bareshnoom ceremony, 'Karsh' or the magnetic circles in that ceremony, and the purification of a polluted person. He understands why only 'Gaomaeza' should be applied to the body of a person in the Bareshnoom and why water is not allowed for application.

4. Rathwishkar - the arranger - whose function it is to put in order and in their proper places all the apparatus required for the higher rituals.

5. Havanan - the squeezer - whose function is to know all about the Haoma ceremony, how to prepare Haoma, what are the various kinds - Para Haoma, Gaokerena Haoma, Haoma Frashmi, as well as, the efficacy of drinking Haoma.

6. Atarvakhsh - the fire continuer - whose duty it is to supervise the fire, which plays the central part in Zoroastrian rituals. He is well versed in all the knowledge about the various grades of Fire - the Dadgah, the Adaran and the Varharan, how to consecrate these fires as well as making new Fire Temples.

7. Zaotar - the invoker - the chief officiator in the Zoroastrian rituals. He is the master of Zoroastrian ceremonies and the first rate practical performer thereof. He has to recite the major portion in all the ceremonies and it is through him that the efficacy of Zoroastrian rituals is passed on to the unseen planes of the universe towards the Soul for whom the rituals are performed, whether living or departed.

8. Saroshavereza - the coworker of Sarosh - (Avesta: "Sraosha" = Sarosh + "Varez" = co-worker) He is the Grand worshipful Master of Zoroastrian priesthood who has passed through all the seven stages with a practical knowledge of the entire ritualism and law of Zoroastrian Religion, and on account of his purity he becomes the supervisor of Zoroastrian priesthood, rituals and of the entire Zoroastrian fold. He is the consulting Dasturan-Dastur or Grand Priest, able to answer any questions since he is in tune with Sraosha or a coworker with the greatest of all angels on account of the spiritual development within him through his high standard of Ashoi or Purity. He is the Highest Priest, and now falls under the class of 'Magavan' or 'Magus'. Thus in one sense the 'Magavan' is the holiest and highest personality in the Zoroastrian Priesthood - one who is known by the name Sraoshavereza, and who has passed through all the seven grades of Zoroastrian priesthood.

These eight classes shown are known by the general term Athravan, and hence we can say that there are eight grades or degrees of Athravan or priest taught in the Zoroastrian religion.

The Zoroastrian Religion mentions that the priestly craft was the toughest craft then. Today, those Athornan children who are unable to obtain any other vocation, are sent for becoming a priest - this being their last resort for earning their livelihood. In North America, if nothing else, we do it to simply carry out a family tradition and/or to assist with religious rituals within our local community.

In ancient Iran, the male Aathravan child had to qualify for the Navar test. He had to study the sacred Avesta scriptures under the guidance of a learned mobed. He had to memorize various Manthra - Scriptures and become thoroughly versed in performing the exerting rituals.

Navar does not indicate a mere rank or an entry into the priestly class. It is to be considered a spiritual exercise to strengthen the soul to fight against the evil and as a spiritual technique to acquire "Ashoi". In Iran, upon becoming such Navar the child was ordained as a new modeb into the Aathravan class. The child was then said to have been taken into the priestly craft and thus devoted his entire life in service of the Mazdayasni Zarathoshti Religion.

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THE MOBED, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

Gathic references and Evidence on the Efficacy of Kriyakaam.

Mockery of Navar Ceremony Does Not Make a Mobed.

by Ervad Burzin P. Unwalla

[Here is another youth speaking at Houston Congress. The first part of Ervad Burzin Peshotan Unwalla's paper was published in the last but one issue. He dealt with Asho Zarathushtra's Yazatic Stature; the priesthood called Magi or Magavan; the 8 classes of Ahravan, the Mobeds during the Empire days.

Burzin now switches over to the subject of : Kriyakaam in the Gatha, quoting Ha 28-10, 32-14, 33-7, 30-1; then to the laws of Staota Yasna and finally to the responsibility of the Mobeds.

It is enlivening to see the Parsi Youths taking interest in Ilm-e-Khshnoom the Master - Key to the box of confusing riddles generated by the G A C fossils, and the genuine authentic equipment to understand our Din and its spiritual Institutions and disciplines - **Editor.]**

Let us take a look at a few further references for rituals - The first from Gatha 28.10. In this passage the word "Erethweng" occurs. This word derives from the Sanskrit root ruthwan, which when translated, means simply the priest who performs the rituals. This passage refers to the effects of manthras through which the performing priest will reach his final spiritual goal.

Another passage, Gatha 32.14, states that kriyas or rituals are one of two types. One emanating from Spenamino and the other from Ganamino, and that the latter had burnt out the former which were Kriyas relating to Haoma. In this passage it goes on to show how this was stopped and prevented from continuing, by Asho Zarathustra.

In Gatha Ha 33.7 the word "Nema-Kraitish" is used which means prayers. The word is then followed by the word "Ratayo" which refers to the objects used in the Kriyas. Even further Gatha 33.3 contains the word "Draono", and refers to the Darun or bread-like object used in the Yasna and Baj rituals. What we are trying to convey here is that the Yasna or ritual is in-fact a doctrine taught in Gathas. Even if we say that only the Gathas are the original teachings of Zarathushtra Himself, then the doctrine of Yasna or ritual, therefore, has been given by the prophet himself. We today are unable to account for the traditional observance of our rituals because it is beyond our scope and efforts to explain anything that is related to the unseen worlds.

Take for instance the Geh Sarna, which is performed near the corpse of a Zoroastrian by two priests for nearly an hour. The recital consists of the first Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 28 to 34. Now logical reasoning would cause one to ponder why of all things is Ahunavaiti Gatha recited in the Geh Sarna ceremony. What could possibly be any sense in addressing a sermon on good thoughts, good words, and good deeds before a corpse, which has no brain to think, no tongue to speak, and most certainly no functioning hands to do anything with? The explanation of the Geh Sarna is based on the laws of Staota (colors produced by sound vibrations). The passage explains how the divine consciousness of the soul, which is said to be confused at the time of death, opens up. Its Band-Darosh goes on being lifted. Band-Darosh means the veil of unconsciousness, which befalls the soul at about the age of two years. This passage, Gatha 30.1, goes on to reveal how creation will reach its divine goal, and how to reach this goal the three divine subjects of Staotnacha Ahurai, Yesnaacha Vangha-ush Manangh-ho and Humaazandra Asha are to be learnt and achieved. Only after fully understanding this passage can we begin to fathom the very deep and highly spiritual meaning of the next passage, the very controversial, Gatha Ha 30.2.

In this same manner, all Zoroastrian ceremonies are based on the laws of nature. It is shown that Zarathushtra, who is described as the Mystic Speaker (Ramzgho), has revealed the laws of :

Zravan : the law of time.
Uru : the law of the evolution of the soul.
Staota : the law of vibrations.
Khastra : the law of divine electricity and magnetism within nature.
Kherenangh : the law of the aura-like emanation.
Manthra : the law of the efficacy of prayers.
Mithra : the law of thought energy.
Paitioget : the law of retribution.
Asha : the law of purity.

On these fundamental laws are based all Zoroastrian rituals. Let us enlarge to some extent upon the most fundamental law, the law of Staota.

"Vahishta Chithra Yazamaide Ya Staota Yasnya"

We attune ourselves with the most excellent laws of Staota Yasna (Visperad 23)

"Staota Yasniya Yazamaide Ya Data Angheush Pouruyehiya"

We are in tune with Staota Yasna, which are the laws of primary existence.

The word Staota occurs very frequently in all extant Avesta texts, and means simply praise or adoration (Avesta: "stu" = to praise), but a much deeper understanding of the word Staota conveys the meaning of very subtle sound vibrations. The most abstruse passages in the Avesta that we are unable to translate or explain, are rendered quite intelligible by this interpretation of the meaning of the word Staota and with which the entire Avesta is constructed.

Yatha Ahu Vairyo, formed of 21 words, was composed according to the rhythmic laws of Staota. It is said to be in perfect harmony with Ahunavar or the universal musical Sound - "Naad" going on eternally. The Zoroastrian religion teaches us that the recital of Yatha Ahu Vairyo produces three kinds of colors corresponding to those of the Ahunavar. The first line ending with "Ashat Chit Hacha" produces the blue color corresponding to Asha Vahishta the 3rd Amshaspand. The second line with "Vangheush Dazda Manangho" creates the yellow color corresponding to Vohu Manangha the 2nd Amshaspand. Finally, the third line with its Khshathremcha gives rise to the red color of Amshaspand Khshathra Vairya. Thus, according to the understanding of the law of Staota, a reciter of Yatha Ahu Vairyo, has put him/herself in unison, in harmony with three Amshaspands.

Without the understanding of these fundamental laws we can not begin to comprehend the idea of the five subtle energies referred to in Aban Yasht as (Adu-frado, Vanthvo-frado, Gaetho-frado, Khshaeto-frado, Jantoo frado Danghu-frado). Without the understanding of these fundamental laws we cannot begin to comprehend the idea in which during the Yazashne ceremony an Energy Formulation (Kriya - no - fareshto) is generated and helps the Ruvaan in the next world. Many of us today seem to disregard our Zoroastrian rituals because we cannot understand the process underlying them when we simply study the grammatical and word for word renderings of the Avestan texts.

If we simply disregard such ceremonies or rituals, saying, that scientifically we are unable to comprehend these laws of vibrations and the concept that such rituals could have such effects in nature, my question to you is what scientific reasoning or explanation do we have for the survival of our consecrated nirang of nirangdin Kriya for a number of years. What scientific reasoning do we have to explain how priests 50-100 years before, have stated that they felt pleasant electric shocks or charges emanating through them during the performance of certain rituals. What scientific reasoning do we have to explain why after performing the Yazashne ceremony, while pouring the consecrated water into the well it has been stated that the water level in the well would rise to meet that of the one being poured in. **Seems that science is in fact knocking at the door of spiritual mysticism and is denied entry.**

THE FUTURE

It is no exaggeration to say that the survival of the Zarathoshti religion depends on the mobed or priests. At present however, the priests are ordained through half-baked Navar ceremonies and have no idea of the fact that the rituals have a spiritual effect in nature as well as within the priest himself. The priesthood carries with it a high responsibility to perform the Kriyas (rituals) with great precision and a sense of responsibility not only towards the community but also towards themselves. It is beyond the scope of today's presentation to give an account as to the special function of every ceremony that is prescribed in the tradition. It is obvious that the performance of the ceremonies is an act of heavy responsibility and any omitting or changing of ceremonies or deception invites stern reactions from nature on the mobeds. Yazashney Ha 11 actually narrates this reaction by way of a dialogue between the Haoma Fireshtey (an angel or angelic field) and the Mobed.

Till recently a mobed was required to memorise all the manthras to be recited during the ceremonies whilst undergoing the Navar ceremony. The two bareshnooms and the Yazashneys to be performed on the days preceding the Navar ceremony are intended to create certain pious energies within the boy who passes through the ceremony. Unfortunately the present-day Navars are just for a lack of a better term, make-believe ceremonies (a perfect eyewash - Ed.)

All this imposes heavy responsibility on the parents, the Mobeds ordaining the Navar ceremony and the newly made mobed. **It is necessary to have a proper organization and sanction for the Navar ceremony so that all and sundry do not become just the priest in name.** It is also essential that the meaning behind the Navar ceremony is taught to the boy. It is to be kept in mind that the prescribed rituals have the additional effect of drawing blessings on the community as well as the whole universe. **It needs to be emphasized that the survival of the community has depended on such blessings.** This shows what tremendous responsibility lies on the shoulders of a mobed. For about a thousand years in India the priests understood this heavy responsibility and therefore took great care to see that the ceremonies are performed with the prescribed precision. Not only that, but they were very particular to observe the laws of ashoi in leading their personal lives. The history of mobeds is full of instances wherein the priests gave much more importance to their personal responsibilities than their financial gains.

I am too young to make suggestions for bringing back such priesthood. It is for the elder Dasturs and mobeds and the members of the community to bring it back. Such priesthood is essential for the preservation of the community and would take the first step to eliminate the oft-repeated talks of extinction. It is not too late but as of now the future of the priesthood looks bleak. It is up to each priest sitting in this room to look within himself and ask how long our lack of understanding and knowledge of our religion will cause us to cheat the community from their rights to such spirituality.

(Excellent! Burzin! - Ed.)

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