

WHO WAS...? ARDAA-VEERAF

BY SILLOO MEHTA

We are all familiar with the last Zoroastrian dynasty in Iran - the Sassanian dynasty, whose founder was Shah Ardeshir - I - Paapakaan. He was a righteous ruler and a devout Mazdeyasnie Zarathoshti. His wish, will and pleasure was in reviving the lost glory of the Zarathoshti Daen. He wanted to fan the flame of faith in people who had discarded the faith and to come back into the religion of Zarathushtra.

One day, Shah Ardesheer sent for the holy Dastoor residing in his Kingdom, to his court. Some 40,000 Dastoor honored the royal proclamation to grace the occasion. They were all well versed in Zarathoshti lore and were pious priests. The Shah asked them to hold a meeting and submit to him, the names of some more pious ones.

They did so; a list of 4000 priests was given to the Shah. Since the list of 4000 was too long, they were asked to reduce. So from 4000 to 400 to 40 and then 40 to 7...which the Shah accepted. Then he sent a royal invitation to the 7 Dastoor to grace his presence. They were received by the King with great joy and dignity. The Shah addressed them: "I have only one desire in life, and that is to establish the lost glory of Iran once again and to declare the lofty Mazdeyasni Zarathoshti religion as the State religion. This Religion as we practice at present is not in its pristine form and it is now up to you that I and my people look forward to, for right guidance. Choose any **one** from among you to perform a miracle worthy of respect and remembrance, so that those who have gone astray may find faith and hope in the Religion once again. I am certain my people

shall find some means to retrace their steps on the right track again."

The seven Dastoor agreed to the Shah's request. Six of them unanimously chose Ardaa-Veeraf, (who was the seventh! and said: "O King this is the Dastoor you are looking for. He will fulfill your desire. He will perform a miracle that shall lend great prestige to our ancient Daen. We assure you O Shah, that in your kingdom a more holy person than this Saint Dastoor is never to be found. From his tender age of seven, he has renounced all the earthly joys and has remained fully in the Divine Ecstasy and the knowledge of Daen. We assure you that if you appoint him, you will be successful in your mission." Arda-Veeraf readily agreed to undertake the herculean task.

So it was arranged that Dastoor Arda-Veeraf would undertake astral projection into the other world. He would project his soul out of his physical body, conduct it into the next world, gather all facts and return back into his body on earth.

This news spread with lightning speed in the capital and to Ardaa-Veeraf's seven sisters. They were greatly perturbed. They sobbed and begged the Shah to change his mind and not let Arda-Veeraf perform this miracle. They were afraid that if anything should happen to their brother, they would not have anyone in the world to look after them.

Ardeshir Paapekaan consoled them and asked them to shun any doubt or fear. He was sure that Arda-Veeraf would return safely and that no harm would come to him because he was truly a saintly soul.

Thus Arda-Veeraf, on the appointed day, slowly walked towards a silver couch specially prepared for the occasion. He gently laid himself down on it. The other six Dastoor, chanting the sacred Manthra were slowly walking towards the silver couch too. One who led the others, held the cup of Haoma juice in his hand. The leading Dastoor handed the cup of juice to Arda-Veeraf, who sipped it in three draughts. Some moments later, he lost consciousness. At once, the six Dastoor cordoned off the silver couch...the soul of Arda-Veeraf had left the body. For seven days and seven nights, the six Dastoor chanted Avesta Manthra for the safe return of their pious colleague.

On the end of the seventh night, the Shah, the courtiers, the noble men, the Dastoor and all others who had assembled to witness the return of Arda-Veeraf's soul, became apprehensive and nervous. Would the soul of Arda-Veeraf come back into the body which lay still and dead on seven days and seven nights?

The first bright rays of the rising sun lit the sky. It was dawn. There was a stirring motion...a sure indication of the urvan of the Asho Dastoor entering the body. This was soon followed by the movements of the other limbs. Few moments later, Arda-Veeraf opened his eyes, and sat on the couch.

Shah Ardesheer was the first to greet him and then followed others. A great feast was prepared in his honor and then he began his tale: "The moment I completed taking the juice, I experienced the rapturous and ecstatic process of astral projection working swiftly within me. I found myself soaring up higher and higher into the region. Beyond the earthly plane...through regions, blissful and paradisaical which my tongue fails to describe. Then I caught sight of Sarosh Yazad who beckoned me towards him. I obeyed and went up to him, bowing most respectfully.

"O Arda-Veeraf," he said gently, "I am

happy to see you, but what can be the reason to desert your earthly abode before the span of your life is over?"

"O Asho Sarosh" I replied, "Shah Ardesheer desires to revive the glory of the Mazdeyasnie - Zarathoshti Daen. He has sent me to experience the state of Behesht and Dozakh so that his subjects may hear about it and return back to their religion."

Asho Sarosh then smiled. He caught my hand and said: "Arda-Veeraf, if your Manashni be pious. Take a step upwards!" I did so. Again he said, if your Gayashni be pious, take a step upwards"...and then "If your Kunashni be pious, take a step upward! I did so and soon we both were before the "Chinvat Bridge."

Then he narrated what exactly he saw and who all he met in a very interesting account which is known as ARDA-VEERAF NAMEH, the revelations of this pious Saint, which is in allegory. The message which Arda-Veeraf brought with him from Ahura Mazda was :-

"O Ardai-Veeraf! Say to the Mazdayasnans of the other world, that the way of piety is the only way, and that is the way of those of the primitive faith. The other ways are not the proper ways. Follow only the path of piety. Turn not from that path in prosperity or adversity or under any circumstances. Follow good thoughts, good words and good deeds. Continue in the same religion which Zoroaster has received from me and which Vishtasp has promulgated in the world. Follow the just law and keep away from the unjust one. Bear this in mind, that the cattle will be reduced to dust, the horses will be reduced to dust, the gold and silver will be reduced to dust and the body of men will be reduced to dust, but he alone will not be reduced to dust who praises piety and performs meritorious deeds in this world."

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