

SIGNIFICANCE OF BEHAMAN AMESHASPAND IN ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

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**“At toe ube haurvaoscha Kharethaai aa ameratataaoscha”
(Yasna Ha 34, para 11)**

Then Khordaad and Amardaad (Water & Vegetation) both are for your diet

1. In the Zoroastrian Religion, Ahuramazda is our Supreme Lord. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient and the Creator of this Universe.
2. The Prophet Zarathushtra has developed in the scriptures (which sare in the Avesta language), a unique concept of what is known as the Amesha Spentas. They are the spiritual entities (angels) of Ahuramazda himself. They are seven in number (including Ahuramazda, and they constitute the names of the first seven of the total of 30 days of a month of the Parsi Calendar, and the names of 7 months out of 12 in the year.

Each of these seven Amesha Spentas represents a divine and spirutal virtue, and simultaneously presides over one of the natural creations in this world, as mentioned in Table:-

TABLE			
Avesta	Phalvi	Spiritual Creation	Material Creation
1. Aura Mazda	Ohrmazd (Hormazd)	All creations	Mankind
2. Vohu Manah	Vohuman (Bahman)	Good Mind	Animals
3. Asha Vahishta	Arivahisht (Ardibehesht)	Divine Law	Fire
4. Khshathra Vairya	Khshatrivar (Shahrevar)	Divine Kingdom	Metals
5. Spenta Armaiti	Spandarmad (Aspandarmad)	Holy Devotion	Earth
6. Hauvatat	Khvardat (Khordad)	Perfection, Wholesomeness	Waters

7. Ameretat (Amardad)	Amardad	Immortality	Vegetation
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This is being done in order to understand each quality and each creation, which is of Ahuramazda himself, through the proper focus on each of the Amesha Spentas.

3. Accordingly, the Amesha Spenta second in order is known by the Avesta name "Vohu Mana" (later form "Bahman"), and it means "good mind" . Thus "Vohu Mana" represents the divine quality of the "power of mind" (i.e. intelligence, wisdom, etc.) which is a special gift to mankind among all other creatures. Simultaneously the natural creation of 'animal kingdom' is being placed under the care of this 'Vohu Mana'. Thus, whoever kills the living animals destroys his own power of mind (which is the central seat of all human endeavours). Moreover, this "Vohu Mana" is considered to be the Lord of the Heaven (i.e. in charge of the Heaven). In other words, Heaven is also considered to be the finer state of the mind. It is said in the scriptures, that when a man dies, there would be judgment over his soul on the dawn of the fourth day, and the soul goes to heaven or hell as the case may be. At that time, if a soul were to pass the judgment, it would be received in the Heaven by the Vohu Mana Himself. Therefore those who are cruel to dumb and innocent animals in this world would not only displease Vohu Mana, but they would be debarred from his realm of Heaven. This itself indicates that killing and cruelty towards the animals is considered as a grievous sin (leading towards hell) and which would affect one's own soul towards its spiritual progress.

4. It is also mentioned in the scriptures that all the seven Amesha Spentas are in Unison in thought, words and deeds. Accordingly, one who displeases Vohu Mana through killing and cruelty towards the animals would obviously displease the Creator Aura Mazda Himself, and thereby indicating oneself to be on the wrong side of the Nature.

5. According to Zoroastrian scriptures, there are corresponding evil demonic entities which oppose these Amesha Spentas. Thus 'Angra Mainyu' (or 'Ahriman') is the archdevil opposed to Ahuramazda, and Aeshman (demon of anger) as opposed to 'Vohu Mana', along with 'akoman' (evil mind) and 'Taromaiti' (having crooked thoughts). It is therefore very obvious from the divine arrangement that only kindness towards animals would strengthen the forces of 'Vohu Mana'. Otherwise anger, hate and evil thought-force would rule the world, as is the case at present.

6. In the Parsi calendar, there is great significance about the month of Bahman with respect to vegetarianism, since Bahman Ameshaspand is the presiding angel over the animal kingdom. The Avesta term for Bahman is 'Vohu Manah', 'Good Mind'. Good Mind indicates the higher spiritual state of mind. According to the Zoroastrian religion then, the gift of mind is the best gift bestowed upon

mankind among all the creations from the Supreme God Aura Mazda, and it is because of this gift that Man is supposed to be the best among all the creations. Also for the same reason, Bahman Ameshaspand is given the second place immediately after Ahura Mazda in the spiritual hierarchy, and then follows in order Righteousness (Ardibehesht), Divine Kingdom (Shehrevard), Bountiful Armaiti (Spendarmad), Perfection (Khordad) and Immortality (Amardad) respectively. Thus if a person were to kill or get killed an animal and eat flesh, then it is like destroying his own mind and the higher mental faculty thereto and accordingly will remain in the demonic condition, and would not be able to progress further. For this very reason, then throughout the series, the precise couplets of Firdausi's epic Shahnameh have been quoted repeatedly to show that it is the arch-devil Ahriman himself who had introduced the food of flesh and meat for the very first time in this world through the evil King Zohak.

7. There are several members of the Parsi community even in present times, who though basically are non vegetarians, yet they abstain from non vegetarian diet for four particular days in every month (which are attributed to "Vohu Mana" and his co-workers). There are many who abstain from non vegetarian diet for a full month which is in the honour of "Vohu Mana". (This month is 11th in number of a Parsi calendar year). These days are called 'anrojas'. This abstinence is supposed to bring merit and propitiate "Vohu Mana" and it is a proof by itself to show that what they are doing otherwise is something not proper.

WHAT THEN COULD BE THE PROPER FOOD FOR MANKIND?

FROM THE VIEW POINT OF ANATOMY:

We eat food to nourish our body and to survive on this earth. We are not born on earth only to eat food. An English writer has said "**If anything is sacred the human body is sacred.**" Therefore, to maintain this sacred body, one should partake of only harmless vegetarian food, without flesh and blood. What then could be the right food for mankind? Thousands of species of animals live in this world. They include carnivorous and herbivorous types of animals too. Darwin's theory of evolution supports the view that anatomy of man is similar to that of a monkey especially man's intestines, stomach, jaw, etc. resemble to those of the Chimpanzee and the Ape. The diet of these monkeys consists of natural fruits and roots. So mankind's food also ought to be vegetarian. In another respect, all carnivorous animals drink water by licking with their tongues, whereas herbivorous animals are unable to drink water by licking. They drink water by sucking with their mouths. Similarly, if a person wants to drink water from a broad vessel on the table without using his hands, he will be able to drink by sucking water with the mouth, but will not be able to drink by licking like the carnivorous animals. Thus, from the viewpoint of anatomy, proper diet for mankind is vegetarian. This is the authentic proof.

FROM THE VIEW POINT OF LOGIC:

Some persons put forward the argument that our ancestors, kings, warriors, etc, used to eat meat; but what we ought to see is that what has been prescribed in our sacred Avestan literature. Nowhere, either directly or indirectly, is there any directive being given to eat meat in our entire Avestan literature; there are rather several references as to what type of food ought to be consumed by mankind; and how the innocent, domestic animals should be nurtured with love and affection. Another laughable argument put forth by advocates of non vegetarianism is that: "As the big fish eats the small ones, we must also similarly live in the world. That a strong well-built animal attacks and eats up a weak animal is the law of the jungle where only the tough ones have the right to live (survival of the fittest)". But for the intelligent mankind, the best path taught by Zarathushtra is:

Ushtaa Ahmaai, Yahmaai, Ushtaa kahmaaichit"

i.e. "Make others happy and you'll also be happy".

Hence, the ideal law for mankind is "life is to give and not to take."

FROM THE VIEW POINT OF HYGIENE:

Modern science now emphatically accepts that natural diet for mankind is vegetarian. Due to it, man's health is well maintained, and with temperance in eating, he can lead a long life without any illness or pain. According to Vendidad, any dead body (whether that of an animal or human) is considered putrid. Such dead body is attacked by millions of bacteria which cause the dead body to decay. Such bacteria can be very harmful to living beings. This process of decomposition is referred to as Druj-e-Nasush in the Religion, and hence when a Zoroastrian dies, then after a few hours (change of one geh) even the relatives are forbidden from touching the dead body from the viewpoint of hygiene. If a man then ingests putrid dead animal flesh in his stomach, is he not himself giving invitation to diseases? Does such a Zoroastrian indulge in the vanity of keeping the body pure and healthy by flouting the sacred Zoroastrian mandate especially the law of Vendidad? In the entire world the Parsis are the only community that acts according to nature's law of abstaining from touching the harmful dead body (Druj-e-Nasush) to avoid contact with putrid matter. This is visible even to the members of sister communities who visit the Doongerwadi to pay their last respects. The Parsis live longer than members of other communities as per statistical surveys taken in the past. This is entirely due to this discipline of maintaining health as directed by the tenets of Zoroastrianism. Modern science has not yet reached the stage of research findings that a dead body should not be touched for a few hours in order to preserve the health of the living.

Dr. J.H. Kellogg, M.D., a scholar, says:

"To believe that a man who despite eating non-vegetarian food can be considered righteous is to consider a man covered with layers of mud as clean.

Bacteriologists clearly understand that the dust on the road is cleaner than a piece of flesh i.e. there are less bacteria in the dust on the street than in a corresponding pound of flesh.”

Many people have a false notion that man becomes weak by taking only vegetarian food and that there is reduction in strength but this idea is totally mistaken. Everyone knows how much strength grass eating animals like the ox, camel, horse, elephant possess. They have tremendous stamina to withstand the hardships, that they can run for miles on end to carry their owners to their destination.

The ‘Naso’ (putrid matter) of Living Creature that is Dead Flesh

When a person dies the process of decay starts immediately, and from the flesh, blood, pus and other parts of the decaying corpse, harmful bacteria and microbes start growing and multiply, and evil magnetic currents and foul smell emanate from them. Such a concept is known as the ‘druj-e-nasu’ in the Vendidad. After the life force is gone, the lifeless body passes through a process of disintegration. Hence, a Zoroastrian following the laws of righteousness cannot even touch that ‘nasa’. Such is the specific directive of our prophet. On this subject, the Vendidad is replete with references.

Welfare of animals, mercy, love, protection and nurture of animals is taught by the original Zoroastrian Law, and especially in Gatha 32-12 “Geush Morendan”, i.e. “slaughter of animals” is forbidden and Gatha 50.1 ‘Paseush-Thraata’ i.e. “protection of animals” are the two golden rules. For those who opine thoughtlessly that Asho Zarathushtra had recommended in the Gathas to eat meat. I appeal to them to give a careful thought on the above golden rules.

As a matter of fact, in Dinkard, which was written about 3000 years ago, it is stated –

“O ye men! You partake of a vegetarian diet so that you may have a long life.

- **Dinkard Book VI Prof. S. Shaked, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1979.”**

Plutarch remarks:

“How could man bear to see an important and defenceless creature slaughtered, skinned and cup up for food? How could he endure the sight of the convulsed limbs and muscles? How could he bear the smell arising from the dissection? Whence came it that he was not disgusted, and struck with horror, when he came to handle the bleeding flesh and clear away, the clotted blood and tumours from the wounds? We should, therefore, rather wonder at those who first indulged themselves in this horrible repast than at such as have humanely abstained from it”.

(“Fruits and Farinacea”, by John Smith)

Other Greek philosophers Diogenes and Cicero (as stated in the same book), while declaring their opinion sarcastically state as under:-

Diogenes observed that

“We might as well eat the flesh of men, as the flesh of other animals”.

And Cicero remarked that

“Man was destined to a better occupation than that of pursuing and cutting the throats of dumb creatures.”

Tolstoy observed that –

“Meat-eating is a survival of the greatest brutality; the change to vegetarianism is the first natural consequence of enlightenment.”

Pertinent question one has to ask himself is whether we should allow our stomach to be the graveyard of dead animals?

Cyrus the Great himself was a vegetarian:

Cyrus the Great (Kurushe Kabeer), the great Parsi ruler of Iran's Hakhamenian (Achaemenian) dynasty was himself a vegetarian from childhood. Not only that, in his disciplined army the brave courageous Parsi soldiers were raised on vegetarian diet since childhood. This great Parsi ruler was as generous and merciful as he was brave and courageous. He treated his conquered subjects with respect and dignity. This is historically well-known. He was the saviour of the Jews and in their sacred book “The Old Testament” he is referred to as ‘the anointed of the Lord’ and profusely praised. Such a great generous King Cyrus was a vegetarian. Just as in his heart he had love for humanity he showed the same kindness towards dumb animals. A scholar named John Smith renders an account about him as under:-

“Cyrus who raised Persia from an obscure rude colony to one of the most powerful and splendid Empires the world ever saw who performed more extraordinary marches, fought more battles, won more extraordinary victories, and exhibited more personal prowess and bodily power of effort and endurance, than almost any other general that ever lived, subsisted from childhood, on the simplest and plainest diet of vegetable food and water, and the Persian soldiers who went with him through all his career of conquest and shared with him all his hardships, toils and dangers, and on whom, he always placed his main dependence in battles, and with whom he was able to march thousands of miles in an incredibly short time, and conquer armies of double the number of his own, were like himself, trained from childhood on bread, cresses and water and strictly adhered to the same simplicity of vegetable diet, throughout the whole of their

heroic course; without relaxing from the stern severity of their abstemiousness even in the hour of victory when the luxuries of captured cities lay in profusion around them.”

(“Fruits and Farinacea” by John Smith)

Our Mazdayasni brethren in Iran were at first vegetarians as stated above. But later on, when Semetic non-Aryan people, Assyrians and Babylonians conquered Iran, their non-veg diet affected the Iranians also, and as a result they turned to non-vegetarianism. When wise Dasturs viewed these changes with regret, they issued a directive. “O Mazdayasni Zarthostis! As per our religious tenets, you all revert to vegetarianism, if not, at least observe four days of abstinence from flesh food every month on Bahman, Mohor, Gosh and Ram Roj, as also whole of Bahman month, so that you may contribute a little to the growth of Bahman Ameshaspand’s creations.

History lends credence that the diet of religious leaders was and always ought to have been vegetarian, since their profession is meant for causing spiritual progress of themselves and the others. It is therefore essential to partake of such innocent diet to so as to keep both the body and the mind pure. Authentic writers such as the Greek philosophers, Pliny and Plutarch have written that the diet of Magi (Mobeds) of Iran was vegetarian.

In the Shah Nameh we find another reference about vegetarianism in the episode of the Sassanian emperor Khosrav Parviz. A very brave and courageous Iranian Commander-in-Chief named Bahram Chubin rebelled against him. Khosrav Parviz was a God revering emperor who used to recite Avesta prayers. In his prayers he requests God “If in this mutual conflict in Iran I were to be defeated, I should first be forewarned so that unnecessarily innocent Iranians may not get massacred and I would leave the throne and crown and make the fire temple my residence and recite your prayers and take no other diet except vegetables and milk”. But his fears turned out to be false and by the limitless giver, Dadar Hormuzd, this King Khosrav Parviz surprisingly triumphed over rebel Bahram. Khosrav Parviz urges thus:

“Parastar baasham ba atashkadeh
Nakhahum khuresh josh basher o tareh.”

i.e.

“I will be your admirer as a mobed in the
atash kadeh, and consume only milk and
vegetables for food and nothing else.”

This couplet clearly shows that the mobeds in order to preserve their purity of body and mind and control their tongue must partake of vegetarian diet only. Khosrav Parviz had the desire to pray in the fire temples. This King had the right

to toll the buoy in the fire temple. This shows that Kings of Sassanian and other dynasties were descended from Athornan ancestry.

Lawlessness and confusion spreads in the entire universe because of such sinful acts of men. The screaming and wailing by dumb animals about to die, and which would even tear the sky apart, fall on the deaf of these heartless murders and as a result of this, illness, miseries, mishaps, hardships, keep increasing in this world. One of the reasons for this is the curse of the innocent animals wailing at the time of their death who are daily slaughtered in the lakhs of numbers.

Kill not – for pity’s sake and lest ye slay the meanest thing upon its upward way.”
(Sir Edwin Arnold).

According to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, Bahman Ameshaspand was appointed by Dadaar Hormuzd to protect every animal, since he is the angel in charge of ‘gospands’ (‘gospand’ originally meant entire animal kingdom.)

In the end, I will appeal to my fellow Zoroastrians to ponder over what is written above and follow your conscience.

May Bahaman Ameshaspand bless the members of our Community with Vohu Mana (Good Mind) so that we may tread on the path of Righteousness so as to achieve Peace, Prosperity and Progress in our lives.

Atha Jamayat Yatha Afrinami

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