

Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago
proudly hosts
2017 Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ) Conference
supported by
Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA)
and
World Zoroastrian Organization
at the
Arbab Rustom Guiv Dar-e-Mehr, 8615 Meadowbrook Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527,
on
Friday November 3 – Sunday November 5, 2017

The *Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ)* is an initiative to promote study and scholarship of the Religion of Zarathushtra. The mission of the Society is to revive the tradition of scholarship within our community among *athornans* and *behdins* alike, and to promote interaction among academicians, theologians (priests), educationists, lay scholars and practitioners of Zoroastrianism, through roundtable discussions, conferences and publications. The aim is to make SSZ a prestigious organization on par with scholarly organizations of other faith communities, and merit affiliation with international bodies such as the American Academy of Religions.

SSZ Conferences have been held each year since 2006, when noted scholars and students present their research papers. To encourage Zoroastrian studies within the community, these SSZ conferences also include sessions delivered by community members, especially the next-generation. Persons/Associations interested in the mission and vision of the Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism, are invited to host future Conferences in their areas. SSZ will provide assistance as needed. The organizers enjoy complete autonomy in regard to programming and organizing the Conference.

All community members, students, scholars and members of interfaith communities are invited and encouraged to participate. You will no doubt be enriched, your presence gives support to the speakers, and your feedback is invaluable so that future research efforts may be directed in a constructive manner for the benefit of both the academicians as well as the community.

Registration. Suggested donation is \$10. This will include refreshments on Friday and breakfast, lunch and refreshments on Saturday. You can register for 1, 2 or all 3 days. ***Please RSVP (for Friday, Saturday and Sunday separately) by October 25, 2017*** to Zarin Karanjia (630-739-2720, zarin.karanjia@yahoo.com). For program information contact Rohinton Rivetna (630-248 4387, rivetna@aol.com) or Rayomand Ravji (630 589 6631, rayomand.ravji@gmail.com).

For full program, speaker profiles and abstracts, visit www.s-s-z.org or www.zamc.org.

PROGRAM

FRIDAY November 3, 2017

7:00 to 9:00 pm ZAC monthly Humbandagi, followed by a Potluck Buffet Reception for community members to “Meet and Greet” our distinguished speakers and guests.

SATURDAY November 4, 2017

8:30 Registration and Breakfast

9:00 *Benediction – Mobedyar Boman Damkevala*
Monajat – Mani Rao
Welcome – ZAC President and Conference Emcee Ervad Rayomand Ravji
Introduction to SSZ – Rohinton Rivetna

Morning Session - Session Chair Jamshed Engineer

9:30 *Time to revisit the Gathas, and The Mazdayasni calendar – Fariborz Rahnmoon*

10:30 *Coffee break*

10:45 *In search of Zarathushti Kurds – Fariborz Rahnmoon*

11:15 *Achaemenid Art and Artisans: A tactile exploration of the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis–
Dr. Kiersten Neumann*

12:00 *An Overview of the Avesta.org website – Joseph Peterson*

Luncheon

12:30 *Lunch, Awards, Videos on Zoroastrianism.*

Afternoon Session - Session Chair Jamshed Rivetna

1:30 *Live your prayers – Ervad Tehemton Mirza*

2:15 *Basics of the Gathas; and The Gathas: Not primitive ritualism, not pre-modern
rationalism, but poetic ethico-mystical mentalism – Prof. Martin Schwartz*

3:45 *Coffee break*

4:15 *Panel discussion on the Gathas: Dastur Kersey Antia and all Speakers, with Next
Generation Panelists Khursheed Ichaporia, Rayomand Ravji, Cyrus Rivetna, Kamal
Saher
and Pervin Taleyarkhan*

5:15 *Networking with hors-d'oeuvres and drinks.*

SUNDAY November 5, 2017

10:00 *Roundtable Discussion with Speakers, Mobeds and Community members.*

12:00 *Lunch. We will go Dutch at “The Patio” (7440 S. Kingery (Rte 83), Darien, IL).*

1:30 *Car-pool to visit The Oriental Institute (www.oi.uchicago.edu).*

*“Zarathushtra was an incomparable poetic genius, the likes of whose mind the world has not
since known. The more I study his work (which is now in effect my only scholarly
preoccupation) the more I am in awe, and I hope to live and share and make broadly accessible
(as much as possible) my insights into his astounding intellectual intricacies, and the patent
proof thereof.”*
- Professor Martin Schwartz.

PROFILES AND ABSTRACTS

DASTUR Dr. KERSEY H. ANTIA is high priest of the Zarathushti community in Chicago since 1977, and has served as an honorary priest for over half a century. A fully-ordained priest with the Best Boy medal and the Prefect Medal from the the M.F.Cama Athornan Institute in Mumbai, Dr. Antia studied religion and Avesta-Pahlavi under Dasturji Dabu, Mirza and other learned priests, and has won essay prizes from K.R. Cama Oriental Institute and other institutions since 1956, and

Avesta-Pahlavi scholarships in college. He has lectured widely and is author of numerous papers on religion and psychology. A clinical and management psychologist in private solo practice in Illinois, he is also affiliated with several hospitals. He is listed in several Who's Who and included in Outstanding Religious Personalities and Scholars of the 20th Century and others.

JAMSHED 'JIM' ENGINEER co-chairs FEZANA's Public Relations committee and is a board member of the Zoroastrian association of Chicago. Jim has served as a guest editor, writer and founding youth editor of the FEZANA Journal. He most recently led marketing efforts for the 15th Zoroastrian Games in Chicago. Jim also serves as a founding director of NextGenNow, where he worked with his peers to foster inter-generational, unity, and leadership incubation through: panel discussions at congresses; articles in journals; focus groups; social media engagement; and in contributing thought leadership to strategic planning efforts. Professionally, Jim is an award-winning public relations professional serving emerging, high-innovation clients in the cybersecurity industry since 1999. Jim is a Managing Partner at Naperville, Illinois-based Rainmaker Growth Partners (www.rainmakergrowth.com), where he parlays more than 20 years of technology public relations and marketing expertise.

KHURSHEED ICHAPORIA holds an MBA and MS in Biology. Having worked in the Biotech and food industry as well as the University of Rochester, Khursheed currently teaches Biology, Microbiology and Anatomy and Physiology at local community colleges. She has a great enthusiasm for everything "Parsipano" and wants to be involved in any activity which engages Parsi kids and youth.

PROF. OLGA LOUCHAKOVA-SCHWARTZ, M.D., Ph.D., is Professor Emerita of Psychology and Comparative Religion at the former Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, and a clinical faculty member at the Dept. of Public Health Sciences, School of Medicine, University of California at Davis. She is an internationally known public speaker and author with more than 100 papers and book chapters in translational and cognitive sciences, phenomenological philosophy, and spirituality. Her chief research interests are in the effects of religious experience, meditation, and various religious practices as determinants of socio-behavioral health in global migration. Professor Louchakova-Schwartz is an associate editor for the Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology of the American Psychological Association, and Founding President of the Society for the Phenomenology of Religious Experience.

Abstract:

The Vohu Manah of Migration: Toward a theological anthropology of the Gathas

Distinct from the sciences which treat objectively given causes and properties of the natural world, research in theological anthropology examines the human subject in light of his/her relations to the Deity, as understood in different religious traditions. This paper will submit a theological anthropological examination of the aspects of Ahura Mazda which have double representation in the Gathic corpus (as translated, researched, and interpreted by Martin Schwartz). By double representation we mean a situation in which the aspects of the Deity function also as the aspects of the human mind and/or behavior which are necessary for the entry into the house of Ahura Mazda after death. We will view such aspects as empirical possibilities available through the faculty of discrimination, Avestan *vi ci-*. A phenomenological analysis will be applied to demonstrate that self-cultivation of *vohu manah*, or *asha*, along with other such properties, positively impacts mental health and the structure of personality. Finally, we will examine how such properties contribute to creativity and vitality of (im)migrants, and to the enhancement of endangered cultural groups (e.g. Zoroastrians).

ERVAD TEHEMTON F. MIRZA. Following rigorous religious training at the M.F. Cama Athornan Institute, Tehemton was ordained Navar and Maratab at Udvarda Atashbehram. His professional career took him from Mumbai to Iran to Indonesia and he finally settled in London, Ontario Canada where he and his wife Zenobia own and operate a CPA practice. As a Mobed, Tehemton volunteers religious and spiritual services to Zoroastrians in South Western Ontario and Michigan. In addition to being a recreational pilot and a marathoner, Tehemton has published articles on Zoroastrianism in North American publications and spoken on Zoroastrian topics at Zoroastrian associations throughout North America. Tehemton currently serves as Vice President of North American Mobeds Council.

Abstract:

Live your Prayers

Zoroastrianism is a way of life. Zoroastrians are expected not to just say or chant their prayers, but to understand them, learn from them and, most importantly, live them. Time tested instructions of happy and prosperous life are preserved in Zoroastrian prayers. Discover this ancient treasure of wisdom in basic Zoroastrian prayers and apply them to your present-day life.

Dr. KIERSTEN NEUMANN is curator and research associate at The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, having received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. She specializes in Mesopotamian visual culture and built environments, with a focus on sensory experience, ritualized practice, and cultural modes of viewing and representation. She is currently working on a book project that explores the sensory experience of the Neo-Assyrian temple; this builds upon her dissertation, which was awarded The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq Donny George Youkhana Dissertation Prize for the best U.S. doctoral dissertation on ancient Iraq. She is the organizer and chair of the session “Senses and Sensibility in the Near East” at the American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting. Kiersten also curated the special exhibition at the Oriental Institute Museum, entitled “Persepolis: Images of an Empire” (Oct. 2015–Sept. 2017), and in October 2016, traveled to Iran as a second host for the Oriental Institute’s Ancient Land of Persia travel program; these experiences that have inspired her to delve deeper into the role of the senses in Achaemenid art and architecture.

Abstract:

Achaemenid Art and Artisans: A tactile exploration of the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis

Praise of the masterfully carved scenes of stairway reliefs of Darius I’s Apadana at Persepolis resounds in scholarship, from discussions of imperial might and propaganda, to dressed bodies and gestures, cultural groups and identity, skilled craftsmen and artistic forms. Much of this dialogue depends on the visual, on the image that meets the viewer’s eye—this very expression betrays the typical first level of interaction with the reliefs. Yet to delve deeper into these details is to access elements of additional revelatory senses, including that of touch. The effort with which the tactile is articulated in the Apadana reliefs demonstrates something beyond pure artistry; it suggests an intentionality to express through this work of art cultural and socio-political concepts and codes of the Achaemenid court—for example, the message of hierarchy embedded in a tribute bearer’s grasp of an animal’s coat; the statement of pride and honor communicated through the delicate cupping of a vessel. What is more, tool marks and maker’s marks reinforce the physical boundary of the relief as material object, and, with respect to the maker’s marks, the intentionality of the craftsmen to record the contribution of their own skillful touch. Yet as viewers, people become conscious of their distance from such tactile interactions, igniting in them the desire to touch the relief, to become active participants in this sensory exchange. Through such considerations of tactility, we can access modes of communication and levels of engagement related to these reliefs that are less often explored.

JOSEPH PETERSON has been studying religious texts for decades. After years of collecting and digitizing rare texts for his own research, in 1995 he created the avesta.org website to share them with a wider audience. It has enjoyed an amazing popularity, with over 10 thousand document requests per day. He has translated many religious and esoteric texts, and loves trying to unravel their often complex relationships and influences. Peterson has a degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Minnesota, where he also studied various languages and religions. He lives near Rochester Minnesota.

Abstract:

The avesta.org web site was created over 20 years. Joseph Peterson will talk about the original motivation for creating the site, its history, the demographics of its many users, and some of the surprises encountered during the years.

FARIBORZ RAHAMOON was born in Yazd; he was educated in a Catholic school in Bombay, which led him to research his own religion at an early age. He has a unique perspective on the Zarathushti religion and history, which is a result of over 40 years of research. He says; “the Zarathushti history that has come down

to us has been written by its adversaries over the last 2000 years and the Avesta has been deciphered and translated by scholars with preconceived Roman ideology thereby leading us astray.” His finding and views are available on his website. www.ancientiran.com. Lately, he is working on the “Mazda Yasni” calendar based on the “**Bundahishn**” that is recognized as “the Persian calendar from the 2nd millennium BCE that does not need any adjustment for 110,000 years”. You can check it out at <http://zarathushticalendar.com/>

Abstracts:

Time to visit the Gathas

Herodotus says; “The erection of statues, temples, and altars is not an accepted practice among the Persians and anyone who does such a thing is considered a fool, because, presumably, the Persian religion is not anthropomorphic like the Greek” According to the Roman historian Plutarch; Aristotle who was a tutor to Alexzander, told him; “If you destroy the Persians you will destroy one of the pillars of civilization, then we will rule the world.” He did and today the world believes in the Roman Anthropomorphic God, our sciences are dependent on Latin words, we believe in the Roman version of history, religion, and form of government. The Gathas that built the Pillar of the Persian Empire is today translated by those trained in the Roman system and so portray an anthropomorphic God in the Gathas. No doubt, of the many questions that Zarathushtra is supposed to have asked, not one of them is answered by that God.

The Mazdayasnie calendar

We used to have a Perfect Calendar which we lost, but the Bundahish explains how it was, in simple language. There are no codes or parables. It is based on pure science and our ancestors are known for their wisdom and science. Let’s recognize this, “That the Calendar cannot regulate nature, it is nature that can regulate the calendar.” We all agree that along the way, our present Calendars got messed up. So why argue, let’s understand what the Bundahish says and reconstruct it. As for the Souls of the departed that our dear Mobeds worry about, they are now part of the universe they now follow the clockwise precision in nature and not our three man-made calendars, none of which are synchronized with nature

In search of Zarathushti Kurds

While in Iran we decided to pay a visit to the Zarathushti Kurds and get to know them. We went to Marivan the Kurdish border town in Iran and from there crossed the Bashmahk border into Suleymania in Iraq. Kurdistan is a mountainous area with cities developed in lush valleys, entry to the valley is through narrow mountain passes, which has helped the Kurds preserve their language and culture in the safety of these cities. The Kurds are the ancient Madhs. Cyrus the Great’s mother was a Madh. They claim that Zarathushtra was a Kurd for he was a Magi and Magi were a tribe among the Madhs. They tie a shawl around their waist with 3 knots as part of their national dress. Unlike the Tajiks they did not come to the Zarathushtis to ask for permission to become Zarathushtis for they believe they are the original stock.

ERVAD RAYOMAND RAVJI was ordained a Nâvar at the Cama Baug Agiary in Mumbai in 2002. He later returned to achieve a higher degree of priesthood, the Marutab. Rayomand received his Bachelor’s of Science (B.S.) in Psychology with a minor degree in chemistry- as a premedical student - at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Er. Ravji currently serves as President of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

CYRUS RIVETNA, founder and Principal at Rivetna Architects, Inc. has a deep interest in religious architecture. He has studied Zoroastrian Fire Temples in India and Iran, and now applies his research to designing structures that serve the needs of the North American congregation, while also allowing for practice of ancient, time-honored traditions of the faith – among them the Zoroastrian Center in Dallas, and the Atash Kadeh (under construction) in Houston, which leads the new trend in N. America to separate the social/communal spaces from the spiritual/religious, and allows for, in future, a continuously burning Fire, practice of inner liturgical rituals and ordination of mobeds.

JAMSHED RIVETNA has served as President of the Zoroastrian Association of North Texas and led the construction team for their new Zoroastrian Center in Dallas area. He has authored the popular navjote primer “*My First Zoroastrian Prayer Book.*” Professionally, Jamshed is Principal at *Ensoft Consulting* -- a firm that he founded in 2001, offering Consulting and Software Implementation services to the Maintenance and Facilities Management industries.

KAMAL SAHER holds a B.S. in Secondary Mathematics Education. She has taught at the middle and high school levels and worked in the field of educational publishing. Currently, she dedicates herself to her own children, spending many hours volunteering at their school.

PROF. MARTIN SCHWARTZ, who was trained for his Ph.D. at UC Berkeley as the last student of Walter B. Henning taught Iranian Studies and Sanskrit at Columbia from 1968-1970, and Iranian Studies at the University of California, from 1970 until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 2011. He has produced very many publications in all aspects of Iranian Studies, particularly Old Iranian and Middle Iranian texts and linguistics, including ground-breaking studies of Christian Sogdian, of Bactrian, and of Khwarezmian, but also seminal studies in the history of New/Classical Persian. He has written studies and surveys of pre-Islamic Iranian culture, especially Avestan, Achaemenid, and Sasanian Zoroastrianism, and also Manicheism. He has more and more been focusing on the Gathas, and is presently at work on two books on the subject, aspects of which he will share at this Conference

Abstracts:

Lecture 1. Basics of the Gathas

This lecture will be a general description of the Gathas--their poetic style, their content, and their importance for not only post-Gathic Zoroastrianism, but for religions and philosophies of the world. Reasons will be provided for dismissing the views of some scholars that the Gathas are concerned with a primitive materialistic ritualism, and also that Zarathushtra was not a real historical personage who was the single author of the Gathas. Rather (as supported by Lecture (2)), it will be indicated that Zarathushtra was an absolutely awesome innovative spiritual leader, intellectual, and poet.

Lecture 2. The Gathas: Not primitive ritualism, not pre-modern rationalism, but poetic ethico-mystical mentalism.

This lecture will summarize and provide examples for several of his foremost discoveries as pertains to the striking intricacies of his compositional style: a) concentric schemes for each individual poem; b) phonic encoding of the theology of the Gathas; c) the compositional mechanics whereby the individual poems were generated one after another; d) how Zarathushtra lampooned and lambasted the earlier hymn to *Haoma*.

PERVIN TALEYARKHAN holds a BS in chemical engineering and a JD with a concentration in intellectual property law. She is currently an in-house legal counsel with Whirlpool Corporation in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Outside of work, Pervin serves on the Editorial Board for the American Bar Association (ABA) IP Law Section's publication, *Landslide*. She is also the Editor-In-Chief of the ABA Young Lawyers Division's publication, *The Young Lawyer*, which is the flagship publication of the ABA Young Lawyers Division, the world's largest organization for young lawyers. In addition, Pervin was recently named a Young Lawyer Fellow by the ABA IP Law Section. She is actively involved in her local community in Michigan, which includes mentoring high school students to excel in innovation challenges in a broad range of disciplines.