

A GUIDE TO FUNERAL CEREMONIES AND PRAYERS

by Kersey H. Antia¹

Compilation of materials by Roshan Rivetna²

A step-by-step guide to funeral ceremonies, prayers, and customs for the departed as traditionally practiced in the 'old countries' of India and Iran, tailored for the North American diaspora.

Origins and explanations of ritual observances

Rituals for the dead reflect the prevailing philosophy, theology, even myths and cultural and historical heritage of a people.

Most of our present-day rituals reflect the later *Sasanian beliefs* about Ahriman: Ahriman is a destructive force, actively engaged during the '*gumezishn*' period (when good and evil are mixed, and frashokereti has not yet arrived) to oppose the creative and holy forces of Ahura Mazda. Since Ahura Mazda creates life, Ahriman actively tries to negate life, death thus being the *summum bonum* (the highest pinnacle) of his achievement.

Ahrimanic forces. As soon as life departs from the body, Ahrimanic forces *druje-nasus* invade the dead body and make it *riman* – polluted, diseased, infected. The more righteous a person, the more it will be subjected to the Ahrimanic onslaught as he opposed Ahriman by his choices while alive. Thus arose the *bar on touching* the dead body after the *sachkar* (ritual bath and preparation of the body) [see *Sachkar on* page 13], and keeping a distance away from it.

Gaomez (bull's urine), also called **taro** (Guj.) and **nirang** (consecrated bull's urine) are used frequently in Zarathushti purificatory rituals. They are believed to possess disinfecting properties that destroy the germs of impurity and disease, which might accompany a decomposing corpse, and fight the Ahrimanic forces of the *druje-nasus*. This practice comes from prehistoric times when taro was the only (or best) disinfectant known to man.

Avoiding facing North. In all the ceremonies and prayers, care should be

1 Copyright © 2005 by Kersey H. Antia, First published in [FEZANA JOURNAL - WINTER 2005](#). The information in this guide is compiled from various sources listed under "References on page 5", and especially from the new publication *Understanding and Practice of Obsequies* by Er. Jehan Bagli and Er. Adi Unwalla [see page 156].

2 **Gender references.** Please note that in this Guide, all references to the masculine (he, his, him ...) also pertain to the feminine (she, her ...).

taken that the body does not point to the North, nor should prayers be done facing the North; for this is where the unwelcome winter wind blows, and wherefrom come the Ahrimanic forces, and the marauding invaders of the past.

Avoiding pollution of nature. Even in death, we must refrain from polluting natural elements in the universe. The system of *dokhma* or Towers of Silence is designed for this very purpose, as it does not pollute any of the elements of nature, and is not expensive to maintain in the long run.

Menstrual laws. As the Vendidad conceives the menstruating woman as not being in perfect purity, it enjoins that women in that condition should not participate in rituals for the dead or any other rituals, or enter any sacred places. However, along with non-Zarathushtis, they may be allowed to view the body of a departed loved one, before the *sachkar* is done.

Avoiding contact with the corpse. The religious tenets about purity also govern our observances and practices, in regards to handling of the dead body, or for that matter, all dead objects. As cleanliness is next to Godliness, according to our scriptures, and as Ahriman is intent upon polluting God's creations in whichever way he can, strict rules were laid down to avoid any contact with the dead body.

Corpse-bearers. Two special cadres of corpse-bearers were created exclusively for this purpose: *nasesalars*, who participate in the funeral rituals, place the corpse on the *gehan* (iron bier) and carry the corpse inside the *dokhma*; and the *khandhias*, literally pall-bearers, who carry the corpse from the house to the vicinity of the *dokhma*. Iron is chosen for the bier because, unlike wood, it is a non-transmitter of infection. Both these cadres have to observe strict rules of hygiene and purity, and stay in seclusion, away from the populace, to avoid pollution or infection, until they have undergone a purificatory *baresnum* ritual of nine nights.

Such strict observances about purity and hygiene are sometimes difficult to practice, even in India, but many lives have been saved by our adherence to these purity rules over the years. It is a matter of historical record that Zarathushtis have suffered the least casualties during the various epidemics due to these practices.

Paiwand. As the body is taken in procession to the *dokhma* the mourners are enjoined to walk in pairs holding a handkerchief as a *paiwand* (connection) between them, as two are supposed to hold off the onslaught of Ahriman better than one. The corpse-bearers are required to hold the *paiwand* too, as also the priests performing the funerary prayers. The injunction of always having a pair holding a *paiwand* (and never a lone person) in all these funeral rituals may also signify mutual assistance and strength in togetherness in fighting evil.

Sagdid ('seen by a dog')- A male dog, preferably 'four-eyed' (one with a white mark between the eyes) is brought in to view the corpse before its disposal, at the turn of each *gah*. In very ancient times, this was one of the

ways to confirm that the person was really dead, as the dog has a sixth sense³ to discern it.

In the Pahlavi *Bundahishn*, the dog is regarded as the companion of Sarosh Yazad, protecting his master, just as Sarosh Yazad protects the soul of the departed during the night. Both play an important part in our funerary ceremonies, and a portion of the food offering at the Satum prayers is set aside ('*kootra-no-book*') and fed to a dog. So important was the role of the dog, that when two priests or laymen are not available for the funeral ceremony, one person can perform the ceremony by forming a paiwand with a dog.

Sagdid served a vital function in ancient times, but in our modern times, we have better ways to ascertain if the person is dead and therefore, the practice of sagdid is hardly practiced or practicable in western countries.

Dietary restrictions. According to the Pahlavi books *Shayast la Shayast* and *Saddar*, we should not eat meat and should not cook at home until after the chahrum, possibly because *druje-nasus* may infect meat, as suggested by the *Rivayet Kama Vohra*. The practice of eating meat on the fourth day is observed by Parsis and Iranis.

Although we find no such injunction in the Avestan literature, the Pahlavi books dictate that a *gospand* (goat or sheep) be sacrificed and its fat offered to the fire of fire temples and to the hearth fire [*Rististan* by S. B. Bharucha, pp. 420-450]. This practice was discontinued by the Parsis around the nineteenth century, and they influenced the Iranis to do the same. Today it seems hard to believe that such a practice ever existed, but it must have had some rationale behind it, such as perhaps that the fat of the animal sacrificed for the soul of the departed symbolically represented the soul of the departed that has now merged with the divine forces.

Geti Kharid ceremonies. Some scholars believe this practice, of eating meat at the *chahrum*, originated from the injunction in the Patet to perform '*sedosh geto-farid*,' which some misread as '*geti-kharid*' literally 'purchasing the material world' or 'purchasing a place in heaven' by having priests perform essential ceremonies for someone while he/she is still alive. Obviously, there is no connection, at least doctrinally, between eating meat on the chahrum day and geti-kharid ceremonies, nor do I personally believe that performing geti-kharid ceremonies while still living on this earth (*geti*) could ever be in consonance with the fundamental teachings of our prophet.

Jorani Kriya. While Iranians and Kadmi Parsis do not observe *Jorani Kriya*, that is, ceremonies for the deceased as well as his/her living spouse, for which little evidence exists in the Avestan or Pahlavi literature, Parsis have

3 Sagdid may appear as an anachronism in our times, but I directed a US Pentagon project in 1969-70 to train dogs to find mines, tripwires and tunnels for Viet Nam soldiers and these dogs saved many a life. CBS News even found it worthwhile then to run a 5-minute segment about it on CBS.

been observing it, ostensibly on the belief that the soul of the living spouse will once again meet the deceased soul after his death. Many scholars believe this is not in consonance with our scriptures. It is hardly practiced, even in the old countries, especially when there is a paucity of priests, and there is no way to have it done. Moreover, as a widow or widower was allowed to remarry if they so wish, the logic behind such a practice is quite suspect.

Zindeh Ravan ceremonies. Believing in the efficacy of death ceremonies and to ensure their performance after death, some Zarathushtis choose to have all the requisite death ceremonies performed in advance, while they are still alive. These ‘Zindeh Ravan’ (‘alive soul’) ceremonies can be performed for all death rituals except those done in the presence of the body – primarily the Gehsama (Paydust) ceremony. Any roz may be selected as the roz of death, and all ceremonies performed accordingly. This practice is very old and mentioned in the Rivayats, but is rarely practiced nowadays.

Ceremonies in disuse. While the extant Avesta does not mention any ceremonies for the departed, other than the ones detailed in this guide, and for that matter any ceremonies other than those practiced by present-day Zarathushtis, later Pahlavi scriptures refer to **Sadosh Ceremonies** – ceremonies for three days [*Rististan*, pp. 389 - 391] whose observance seems to have become extinct by now.

It is not compulsory to have priests conduct *Nirangdin*, *Hama Yasht*, *Vendidad*, *Faresta*, and *Jashan* ceremonies for the deceased. It is interesting to observe that one of the greatest scholars of our religion and of our religious ceremonies, Dr. Sir J. J. Mody, instructed his family not to perform Vendidad ceremonies, or Dhoop Nirang, or Siroza on the Chhamsi [*Jame Jamshed Weekly*, February 20, 2000, p. 3].

While the **Gahambar ceremony** is not compulsory, participation in it is highly endorsed by the Gahambar Afrin, and it is a highly meritorious deed to have it performed if one can afford it, as it has contributed significantly over the centuries to communal unity.

Ceremonies in India and Iran. While most of the Parsi ceremonies were similar to those observed by Iranians until the 1800s and early 1900s, as revealed in the Rivayats, various factors have led to some divergence thereafter. The inner liturgies, such as Yazeshne and Vendidad are no longer performed in Iran, and according to my inquiries with the high priest in Tehran in 2003, even the Baj ceremony as that performed in Iran is not the same as that in India. However, if we consider the vicissitudes they have suffered over the centuries, their devotion to the religion and ancestor- worship is no less than that of the Parsis.

It behooves us to maintain as much of our funerary traditions in the new world (and the old, of course) as is possible versus what is not possible, which indeed is the title of a Pahlavi book *Shayast la Shayast*, exhorting us to do the

same when we could not carry out all our observances after the Arab invasion.

The invasion of modernity has made worse onslaught on our practices and traditions, but we should observe and preserve as much as possible. They are worth preserving, because symbolically as well as theologically, they were designed to represent man's role in the cosmic battle against evil, and ultimately bring about frashokereti by always aligning oneself with Ahura Mazda and avoiding Ahrimanic ways.

While this is not the place to go into the details of Sasanian dualism versus Gathic (ethical) dualism, suffice to say the former are intrinsically woven into the fabric of our customs and prayers for the deceased souls, making us participants in the ceaseless cosmic struggle in this life as well as in afterlife.

References

[1] Bagli, Er, Jehan and Unwalla, Er. Adi. *Understanding and Practice of Obsequies*, sponsored by NAMC, FEZANA and the Bapasola family, 343 p., 2006. An excellent handbook on death rituals, adapted for the North American diaspora [see announcement on page 156].

[2] Birdy, Er. Jal and Parsi-Zarathushti volunteers of Southern California. *A Guide to Funeral Services for parsi-Zarathushtis in Southern California*. 1993. General guidelines for North America.

[2] Kanga, Er. Maneck Furdoonji. *Khordeh Avesta*. Bombay Parsi Punchayet, 1993. In English, translated from the classic *Khordeh Avesta Ba Mayeni* (in Gujarati) by Kavasji Kanga, contains prayers in Roman script with translations in English. This and other valuable books have been scanned and placed on www.avesta.org by Er. Soli Dastur [page 152],

[3] Minochehr-Homji, Dastur N. D. *Chicago Lecture Series Notes*, Zoroastrian Association of Chicago, 1984. Audio tapes and compilation of notes from series of 40 lectures.

[4] Minochehr-Homji, Dastur N. D. *My Prayer Guide No. 2. To The Fravashis*, Union Press, Mumbai, 140 p., 1984. Afringans and Afrins, Sarosh nu Patru and Ys. 26, with text and free interpretation in English.

[5] Minochehr-Homji, Dastur N. D. *My Prayer Guide No. 3. My Life's Companion*, Union Press, Mumbai, 140 p., 1984. The Ahunavaiti Gatha, with text in Roman script with free interpretation in English.

[6] Kuka, Irach Sorabji. *Essential Ceremonies - Death and Post-Death*. 2003. Details all the essential death and post-death ceremonies, especially those based upon the recommendations of a scholarly committee appointed for that purpose in 1922 – the Mumbai-ni-Zarathoshti Jashan Committee, comprised of the most learned Parsi scholars of the day. The Committee

submitted their considered opinions to the then Athoman Mandal for their approval, and printed this booklet in 1923. Ervad Kuka has rejuvenated this report for the guidance of future generations, and its guidelines are also followed for the most part in this guide.

[7] Modi, Jivanji Jamshedji. *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*. Union Press, Mumbai. 2nd. Ed. 475 p., 1986. In-depth description of all the death rituals, as practiced in India in his times.

[8] Motafram, Er. R. R. *Four-Day Death Ceremonies of a Zoroastrian* (including Gehsama), based on *Gujrelaan Zarthoshti ni Chaar Divas ni Kriyaa* (in Gujarati) by the late Er. Dinshaw Cavasji Sidhva. 77 p., 1986. A description of the four-day ceremonies as observed in India; and the Gehsama prayers (Ahunavad Gatha) in full, in the Roman script.

[9] Panthaky, Er. Rustomji Noshirwan. *Zoroastrian Ceremonial Prayers*. Regal Press, Toronto, 79 p. Jashan ceremony, Afringan and Satum in Roman script.

[10] Peterson, Joseph. Website www.avesta.org. Contains a wealth of information on Zarathushti scriptures, texts with translations and rituals.

GEHSARNA PRAYERS ON AUDIO CASSETTE

WZO Trust has prepared an audio cassette of the Gehsama prayers recited by Er. Kersi Bhada of Cama Baug. To order a copy contact Mr. Dinshaw Tamboly at beedee-at-bom3.vsnl.net.in, tel: 91-22-2281 3718.

PRAYER BOOKS

The prayers mentioned in these articles may be found in most *Khordeh Avesta* prayer books and notably in Er. Kanga's *Khordeh Avesta* which has been scanned and placed on www.avesta.org by Er. Soli Dastur [page 152].

Resources

[1] FEZANA Member Associations and Small Groups are listed at www.fezana.org and in each issue of FEZANA Journal.

Companion FEZANA Journals

[1] Ichaporla, Pallan, Ed. "Journey of the Avesta." *FEZANA Journal*, Winter 1998. Historical review of the entire corpus of Zarathushti religious literature.

[2] Antia, Kersey, H. and Rivetna, Roshan, Eds. "Prayer in the Zarathushti Religion." *FEZANA Journal*, Fall 1999. Comprehensive prayer guide, with suggested prayers for all occasions.

[3] Manekshaw, Sarosh J. H., Ed. “Treasures from the Avesta: Our Daily Prayers,” *FEZANA Journal*, Summer 2003. Guide to the content and devotional uses of daily prayers and rituals.

[4] Choksy, Jamsheed K, Ed. “Treasures from the Avesta: Niyayishns and Yashts.” *FEZANA Journal*, Summer 2004. Contents and devotional uses of Niyayishns and Yashts.

[5] Ichaporia, Pallan R., Ed. “Treasures from the Avesta: Yasna, Visperad and Vendidad.” *FEZANA Journal*, Summer 2005. Introduction to Inner (or High, or ‘Pav Mahal’) liturgical ceremonies.

OVERVIEW OF CEREMONIES (FOR NORTH AMERICA)

Day 1 (Monday). The Zarathushti day (roz) is computed from sunrise to the next dawn. Thus if a person passes away after midnight and before dawn, say on a Tuesday, the roz of his death is recorded as the previous day – Monday.

- **Sachkar.** Purificatory bath and preparation of the body – should preferably be done in the same or next gah after death, in the funeral home or at home.
- **Sarosh-nu-Patroo** should be done after sunset (Aiwisruthrem gah), at the darbe mehr⁴

Day 2 (Tuesday)

- **The Paydust.** *Gehsarna* prayers are done at the funeral home in daylight hours (Havan, Rapithwan or Uzirehn gah); followed by the *sezdo* when family and friends pay their last respects. The body is taken by hearse in a motorcade to the crematorium or cemetery.
- **Sarosh-nu-Patroo.** After sunset (in Aiwisruthrem gah) at the darbe mehr.

Day 3 (Wednesday)

- **Uthamna.** Usually in the afternoon (in Uzirehn gah) at the darbe mehr.
- **Memorial service** with eulogies and a collection of charitable donations in memory of the deceased, may follow the Uthamna.
- **Sarosh-nu-Patroo.** After sunset (in Aiwisruthrem gah) at the darbe mehr.

4 If darbe mehr is not available, ceremonies may be done at home. Inner liturgies can only be done in fire temples in India or Iran.

<p>Day 4 (Thursday)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pachhli Ratnu Uthamnu</i> just before dawn (Ushahin gah) at the darbe mehr. • <i>Chahrum</i>. Right at sunrise, at the darbe mehr.
<p>Day 10 (next Wednesday)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dasmu</i> prayers are done at the darbe mehr.
<p>Monthly anniversaries, on the roz of death, every month for one year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Masiso</i> prayers are done on the roz of death (31st day), at the darbe mehr. <i>Siroza</i> prayers are done on the 30th day, called the <i>disi</i> by Parsis. • <i>Bamsi</i> prayers are done at the darbe mehr, on the 2nd month anniversary (61st day or start of the 3rd month) on the roz of death. • <i>Chhamsi</i> prayers are done at the darbe mehr, on the 6-month anniversary (181st day or start of the 7th month) on the roz of death. Siroza prayers are done on the 180th day, called the <i>disi</i> by Parsis.
<p>Yearly anniversaries, on the roz and mah of death</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Varsi</i> prayers are done on the roz-mah of death (366th day), at the darbe mehr. Siroza prayers are done on the 365th day, called the <i>disi</i> by Parsis.
<p>(Fravardian) Fravardin Mah & Fravardin Roz – Day of Remembrance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayers are offered at the dokhma or cemetery or darbe mehr.
<p>The last ten (or five) days of the year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The last ten (or five) days of the year are observed as <i>Fravardegan</i> or <i>Muktad</i> (by the Parsis) and <i>Panjeh</i> (by Iranians), and devoted to offering lyers and venerating the fravashis of departed souls.

Funeral and Other Ceremonies in Mumbai

Several agiaries in India offer facilities to perform ceremonies in remembrance of the departed: Pav Mahal ceremonies (Ijashni or Yasna, Baj, Vendidad), death ceremonies, Muktad, Jashans, Maachi and other ceremonies. Some contacts are given below:

[1] Sethna Agiary (Tardeo) or the Manekjee Naorojee Sett Agiary (Fort). Contact trustee R. J. Vakil at 91 22 2284 5603, rjvakil@yahoo. co.uk) [also see

p READ 112]

[2] Athoman Madressa, 651 Firdausi Road, Parsi Colony, Dadar, Mumbai 400 014. Contact principal Er. Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia at ramiyark-at-hotmail.com.

[3] CamaBaug agiary in Mumbai. Contact Er. Keki Ravji in Mumbai, at 91 22 2495 2848 or Er. Jamshed Ravji in Chicago at 630 663 1716.

[4] Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy Agiary, Colaba. Contact Er. Palanji P. Dastoor, Pilot Bunder Road, Colaba, Mumbai 400 005 at 91 22 2215 1909, zdarbari-at-yahoo.com.

[5] Iranshah Atashbehram, Udvada. Contact Er. Zarir Dastoor, Eruch Baug, Udvada RR Station, Udvada, Gujerat State, India, at 91 260 2340 190 or cell: 91 98254 24251, zarukh-at-rediffmail.com.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Passing of a loved one is a tragic moment. Some planning and preparation ahead of time will assist family members of the deceased to cope with the bereavement with dignity and tranquility. It is recommended that all families keep the following information readily accessible, and make some important decisions ahead of time:

- Name and telephone number of *family physician* and local *hospital*.
- Name and telephone number of the nearest *Zarathushti Association*.
- Name and telephone number of one or more *mobeds/mobedyars* who will be available to perform the ceremonies.
- Name, telephone number, address and directions to your selected *funeral home*. You may wish to visit the funeral home beforehand, and review the facilities and costs. Some *crematoria* and *cemeteries* also have rooms/chapels offering similar facilities. Some Associations have arrangements with specific funeral homes/crematoria/cemeteries to allow appropriate facilities for our needs, and pre-negotiated costs for basic services, to include the following:
 - Take the body from the place where death occurred, to the funeral home.
 - Obtain copies of the death certificate, with the doctor's signature; and register the death with the appropriate authorities.
 - Obtain the burial or cremation permit from the Health Department.
 - Provide guidance for announcement in the local newspaper.
 - Transport the body by hearse from the funeral home to the crematorium or burial ground.

- Embalming of the body. This is not needed, since we strive to dispose off the body as soon as possible, in one or two days at most.

- Provide the casket. The mode of disposal will have a bearing on the selection of the casket. It is recommended that an elaborately expensive casket be avoided. The casket costs \$650 and higher.

- Other points of discussion with the funeral home may include: permission to keep an oil lamp near the casket and kindle a fire with sukhad loban; for family members to do the *sachkar* (cleansing and preparation of the body); and for family members to stay by the body, if they so wish.

Funeral home costs may run from \$3,000 to \$4,000 plus the cost of the casket.

- Make your choice and notify your relatives (possibly in your will) about your ***preferred mode of disposal*** [see [FEZANA JOURNAL Winter 2005 page 78](#)] in North America: burial or cremation. On rare occasions, the body of Parsi Zarathushtis have been flown to Mumbai for dokhmenashini, after special arrangements with the airlines, Doongerwadi and the Bombay Parsi Punchayet [see Resources section above on p. 5]. For information contact Er. Jal Birdy in California (jalnb-at-comcast.net). There have also been a few cases of departed loved ones being shipped to Iran for burial at a Zarathushti aramgah. For information contact Mehrborzin Soroushian in California (mazda-at-san.rr.com).

- Keep the name, telephone number, address and directions to the ***crematorium or cemetery*** readily accessible. You may wish to visit beforehand, and review the facilities and costs, and select the type of headstone/monument if you wish to have one. Some Associations have made prior arrangements with a crematorium, and purchased plots in a cemetery. If you opt for cremation, you may request the ashes to be handed to your relatives in an urn; or buried in a family plot or half-plot or community plot in the cemetery; or scattered in a garden or over a certain area or in the ocean, per your wishes if permitted by local regulations. If you opt for burial, you may wish to request a cement-lined box, to avoid polluting the earth and water.

- You may wish to consider having all death ceremonies – Baj, Muktdar or full death ceremonies for 5 or 10 or more years, performed in India, on a ***pre-paid plan*** [see above] that some agiaries in India and Dadar Madressa offer.

- Keep ready a ***set of clothes for the sachkar***, to include: a sudreh, kushti; a white cap, white shirt or dagli and white pants (for men) or a white scarf or *mathabanoo*, white blouse and long skirt or petticoat (for women); and a white bedsheet. Only white, and used (but washed and clean) and not new clothes are to be used. Using new clothes for the dead body is an unnecessary waste, and a punishable sin [*Vendidad* VIII, 23-25],

- Keep ready a ***shlav***, a set of new white clothes including sudreh, kushti,

cap, white shirt, trousers, socks and (in the old days) a *jama* and *pichhori* (priestly white robe and sash) which will be consecrated during the *Chahrum* ceremonies, and then given to the priest, to the poor, or to the family of the deceased.

- If a person has *no progeny*, he should clearly, while still alive, entrust a member of his family or a friend with the responsibility to observe all religious ceremonies after his death, to ensure his smooth passage to the other world. Up until the early 20th century, a junior relative was adopted at the Uthamna ceremony, to ensure the observance of all future ritual obligations. (In the 1920s, Naval Tata was adopted for a similar role for Sir Ratan Tata, however, a decade or two later, when his brother Sir Dorab Tata also died childless, this custom was not followed through, as far as I know).

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY UPON THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

It is common practice among Zarathushtis for everyone to recite **Ashem Vohu**, as soon as we hear of someone's passing away. When death is imminent, Zarathushti relatives and friends should remain close to the loved one and sit by his bed. The head should be covered with a cap/scarf and **Ashem Vohu** should be recited continuously in the ears of the dying person. Hadokht Nask [52.1, para 4] exhorts that praying Ashem Vohu gives courage to the urvan. Hadokht Nask [XXI.31] advises us to recite the whole **Patet Pashemani** (a prayer for the atonement for one's sins) [see note on *patet*, page 25] in his ears, failing which to recite **Ashem Vohu** continuously until the sachkar is done. A *divo* (oil lamp) or candle is lit and kept burning where the body was placed, at least for four days until the Chahrum is over, for it is believed that the soul of the deceased hovers around the place for the first three days and nights, and the divo gives courage to the soul and solace to the living [*Rististan*, pp. 102-104]. A fire may be maintained in an afargan, fed with fragrant sandalwood and frankincense.

Flowers. Flowers may be sent to the family of the deceased, to be placed at the Uthamna and Chahrum ceremonies (i.e. after the body has been disposed). Placing flowers or wreaths on the casket or on the body during the Paydust, is not a Zarathushti custom and is to be avoided, because they can catch the virus or infection from the dead body. Many families request that a donation be made to their favorite charity, in lieu of flowers, which is highly advisable, and thoroughly Zarathushti in spirit.

Memorial service. A memorial service may be held following the Uthamna ceremony, when friends and relatives may be invited to deliver their eulogies and remembrances of the departed, though this is not our usual custom. However, this is a good occasion to revive our old custom of collecting

donations for a worthy cause, in memory of the deceased.

At home, a divo is kept burning continuously and a few fresh flowers placed near the deceased person's bed for at least ten days and longer if possible. His worldly possessions are left untouched and certainly not disposed off, for a month or more, lest the soul still be attached to them. If the funeral ceremony is performed in the home, the place where the body was laid is not used for at least ten days in winter or thirty days in summer, after which it is purified with the help of nirang.

Dietary restrictions. Until the Chahrum, relatives of the deceased do not eat any form of meat, although eggs and fish are allowed [see above page 3]. Traditionally no food is cooked in the house. Relatives and friends may send food for the bereaved family.

Grieving. Excessive grieving for the departed should be avoided; every effort should, rather be made through prayer and through good thoughts, words and deeds to assist the soul in its journey towards the twin rewards of *haurvata* (perfection) and *amerata* (immortality). Prolonged mourning is discouraged in our religion, as it ties down the soul to this earth, and obstructs his progress in the other world. Iranians have an age-old custom to stop mourning after thirty days, a custom very much in accordance with the spirit of our religion. It is neither good for us or for the soul of the deceased to keep mourning unceasingly, as we have to submit to the will of God, as the Gathas instruct us, and as such mourning deviates us from bringing about frashokereti, because our own time is so short on this earth to bring it about.

First steps. Among the first steps to be taken by the relatives are:

- Contact the nearest *Zoroastrian Association* and the *selected mobed or mobeds* to plan the 4-day ceremonies, and to inform community members. Some associations have set up a "telephone calling tree" system to inform members of the sad news, and the date, place and time of the various ceremonies.

- It is important to find out if the departed has left any instructions by way of a will, or otherwise, regarding his wishes for the *mode of disposal*. Contact the selected *funeral home* and make arrangements to transport the body from the place of death to the funeral home. Alternatively, the body may be given the ritual bath (sachkar) at home, and taken directly to the crematorium or the cemetery if a place is available there for performing the Gehsarna.

- **Death Certificate.** This is an important document that should be obtained promptly. If the death occurs in a hospital, the certificate will be issued readily there. In the event the demise occurred at home, the first thing to do is to call the family physician. If the doctor is not available the nearest hospital should be contacted to report the death. In the case of accident, suicide or homicide an autopsy may be required.

• **Date, roz (day), mah (month) and time of death** should be noted. The roz of death is computed from sunrise to the next dawn. Thus, if a person passes away between midnight and dawn, say on Tuesday, January 3rd, the roz of his death is recorded as the previous day – Monday, January 2nd; although it may be recorded as Tuesday, January 3rd for secular purposes. There is a tradition, confirmed by the Rivayets, that if it is not known exactly when a person died (though this is highly unlikely in view of unprecedented advances in communication and medical technology) then Adar Mah and Fravardin Roz should be observed for all ritual purposes as his day of death. If a person dies during the Gatha days, monthly anniversaries should be performed on Fravardin Roz of every month or every 30 days. If news of the death is received many days later, all the missed ceremonies should be performed immediately in sequence in the appropriate gah, and then monthly and yearly anniversaries should be performed per the roz and mah of death. This is elaborated upon by R. Motafram [Ref. 8, pp. 27-30].

• **Ceremonies in India or Iran; Ceremonies at more than one place.** If there are no resources to perform religious ceremonies in the area, or if facilities are not adequate at the place of death, ceremonies may be done in the old country – India or Iran [see above], However, it is preferable that the ceremonies *not* be performed at more than one place. It runs contrary to the Zarathushti theology of simplicity and conservation in every thing we do. The Committee of Scholars [see page 26] also decried it; but it is done sometimes, e.g. children living far apart, may have Muktdads for their parents done separately. At times, in the case of illustrious souls, the Uthamna is held where the deceased was highly esteemed and sorely missed, but that is more for the benefit of the living than for the deceased.

SACHKAR RITUAL – PREPARATION OF THE BODY TO LIE IN STATE

The *sachkar ritual*, the last bath and preparation of the body to lie in state, is done by close relatives either at home (if the corpse is to be taken directly to the crematorium/cemetery) or at the selected funeral home. In the latter case, family members must bring the *clothes* for the sachkar, a *divo* and a small afargan with *sukhad* (sandalwood) and *loban* (frankincense) to the funeral home. The corpse is transported in a hearse to the funeral home, and placed in the cleansing room on a metal gurney.

Relatives performing the sachkar (males for male corpses and females for female corpses, where possible), must first do the **Padyab Kushti** and begin the **Baj of Sarosh** [see page 76]. While reciting **Yatha Ahu Vairyo**, the body is gently cleansed with warm water, and dried with a towel. It is then dressed in all-white clothes: a sudreh and pajama/skirt, the kushti (tied while reciting the

kushti prayers), a shirt/blouse and the head covered with a white cap or scarf. The scarf ends are tied under the chin leaving the ears open. The corpse is then placed in the casket, with hands crossed, the right one over the left, and covered with a white bedsheet, leaving only the face and the ears uncovered. Then they conclude the **Baj of Sarosh**. After the sachkar, contact with the body should be avoided, as it now begins to fall under the evil influence of *druje-nasus* [see page 1] and decomposition. After performing the sachkar ritual, family members should do the **Padyab Kushti**. ■

Traditionally, in the old country, the body is taken by hearse to a *bungli* (funerary building) located near the Towers of Silence. Close relatives stay at the *bungli* for the duration of the four-day ceremonies. The coipse is first cleansed with taro and then warm water. It is then clothed in *sudreh-kushti* (while reciting the kushti prayers) pajama and jama (long white robe) and wrapped with a bedsheet placed over three stone slabs. Two *nasesalars* (corpse bearers) take the **Baj of Sarosh** [see page 76], make a *paiwand* [see page 2] between them, and tie five strips of white cloth around the body at the neck, chest, waist, thighs and knees, while reciting **Yatha Ahu Vairyo**. They draw three circles with an iron nail around the place where the body is placed (to ritually contain the infections and impurities therein) and still holding the *paiwand*, leave the area and finish recital of the rest of the **Sarosh Baj**. This completes the sachkar. After the sachkar, no one except the *nasesalars* and *khandhias* should deal with the body. A male dog is then brought in to view the body after the sachkar and thereafter at the start of each *gah*. This is known as *sagdid* ('seen by the dog') [see page 2]. ■

PRAYER VIGIL

Prayer vigil. From the time of the sachkar through the ensuing days and nights, until the Chahrum, prayers are recited continuously, but the paucity of *mobeds* has made it difficult to adhere to this practice even in the old country. Family members are encouraged, however, to maintain a prayer vigil by reciting the suggested prayers [see page 74] or a continuous string of **Yatha Ahu Vairyos** and **Ashem Vohus**, either at the funeral home or at home by the bedside of the deceased.

PAYDUST (FUNERAL) CEREMONY, GEHSARNA, AND SEZDO (PAYING LAST RESPECTS)

The *Paydust* (funeral) ceremony should take place only in the daylight hours, in the Havan, *Rapithwan*, or *Uzirehn gah*. The deceased person is laid in state in the casket in the main hall of the funeral home, or in the prayer room of the crematorium or cemetery. Care should be taken that at no stage is the head of the deceased pointing towards the north. A *divo* (oil lamp) should be kept burning a few feet away, near the head, at all times. Fire may be tended with *sukhad* and *loban* in a small *afargan*. If flowers are sent for the deceased, they should not be placed in the same room with the dead body, lest they get vitiated by the virus from the *druje-nasus*, but could be used for subsequent ceremonies elsewhere. Background music in the funeral home should be turned off. All members of the congregation, men and women are generally dressed in white

or black and should have their heads covered with a cap or scarf. They should perform **Padyab Kushti** and the **Sarosh Baj** prayers before the ceremony begins.

Non-Zarathushtis are not traditionally allowed to view the body after the sachkar is done. It is preferable that the Gehsarna ceremony be performed in private with only family members and Zarathushti friends in attendance, but the *sezdo* (final homage) to follow, be open to all at a later time. However, the funeral home, crematorium and cemetery staff is all non-Zarathushti, as are often the spouse and relatives of the deceased.

The funeral begins with the **Gehsarna** ceremony, which is about one hour long, performed by two mobeds, maintaining the paiwand between them. In the absence of mobeds, two lay Zarathushti males may perform the Gehsarna. After reciting the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti, Sarosh Baj**, and appropriate **Gah** prayer, they stand facing the casket a few paces away, taking care not to face North. Wearing a padan (a mouth veil) they begin the **Baj of Sarosh** [[see page 76](#)] and recite the **Ahunavaiti Gatha** [Ys. 28-34] followed by the rest of the Sarosh Baj. The congregation may follow the priests by reading Ahunavaiti Gatha silently from their prayer book, or by reciting their **farazyat** [[see page 77](#)] prayers, or observe silence.

Upon completion of the Gehsarna ceremony, the congregation files past the casket one by one, bowing and paying their last respects to the deceased. This is called *sezdo*. There should be no touching of the body or the casket, nor placing of flowers or trinkets on the body.

The casket is then closed, and carried by the funeral home staff to the waiting hearse. Followed by relatives and friends in a motorcade, the funeral procession, proceeds to the crematorium or the cemetery. ■

Traditionally, in the old country, two or four nasesalars in all-white clothes from head to toe, and having a paiwand between them, enter the bungli with a *gehan* (an iron bier), cleanse themselves with gaomez, perform the **Padyab Kushti** and take the **Baj of Sarosh** [[see page 76](#)]. The sagdid is done. With an iron nail they draw three circles around the bier while reciting **Yatha Ahu Vairyō**. The two mobeds (or lay men) having done the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti, Sarosh Baj**, and appropriate **Gah** prayer, come with a paiwand between them (of a priestly sash or pichhodi) take a **Baj of Sarosh** and start recital of the **Ahunavaiti Gatha** [Ys. 28-34]. At the words “*vanaema drujem*” (“We vanquish all untruth”) in Yasna 31.4 the recital stops and sagdid is carried out again. The two mobeds, and preferably members of the congregation as well, turn their faces away or look down (so as to avoid eye contact with possible Ahrimanic forces and harmful effects of the *druje-nasus* that might thereby be released) as the nasesalars lift the corpse from the stone slabs and place it into the bier. Sagdid is carried out again. The Gehsarna recital is then resumed to its completion and the Baj of Sarosh also concluded.

On completion of the Ahunavaiti Gatha, all present pay homage (*sezjdo*) to the deceased, one by one after which the khandhias (corpse bearers) carry the bier out and walk towards the dokhma. The funeral cortege from the bungli to the dokhma, is headed by two priests who walk at least 30 steps behind the bier, with a paiwand between them. All those wishing to follow form pairs with a handkerchief paiwand between them, take the **Baj of Sarosh** and walk in procession to the dokhma. The bier is placed on a stone platform some distance from the dokhma and a sagdid is performed for the last time. All present then bow and pay their final respects (last *sezdo*) to the

deceased.

THE FINAL DISPOSAL: CREMATION OR BURIAL

Upon arrival of the funeral motorcade at the crematorium (if mode of disposal is cremation) the casket is carried, again by the funeral home staff, to the antechamber of the crematorium and opened up for the last respects. Led by the mobeds in paiwand, the mourners recite **Ashem Vohu, Yatha Ahu Vairyo**, and **Homage Unto the Urvans** [see below], **Yenghahe Hatam** (revering all righteous men and women) is also a very appropriate prayer to recite at this time.

Az hama gunah patet pashemanum.

Nemasate. Idha iristanam urvano yazamaide yao ashaonam fravashayo.

Ashaone Ashem Vohu I. (Recite three times)

Of all sins I repent with contrition.

We here revere the souls of the dead who are [worthy of the status of] the fravashis of the righteous.

[Homage unto the Urvans]

The mourners file past the casket one by one, bow, and pay their final respects. The casket is then closed for the last time and carried by the staff through the doorway for immediate cremation, while all present recite **Ashem Vohu** and **Yatha Ahu Vairyo**. A few days later, the ashes are available to the family, to be disposed off per the wishes of the deceased.

If the selected mode of disposal is burial, the motorcade drives up to the grave site, where the grave has been dug and lined with cement-like slabs. After the mourners pay their final respects, and recite the above prayers, the casket is closed, and lowered into the grave by the cemetery staff.

All in attendance at any of the funeral ceremonies, should wash their hands and face, perform **Padyab Kushti**, take a bath and put on fresh clothes upon returning home, before resuming normal activities. If this is not practical, they should minimally wash their hands and face and recite five **Yatha Ahu Vairyo** and three **Ashem Vohu** before returning to work, and take a bath and change clothes as soon as possible, thereafter. This minimizes the onslaught of drujenasus and the resultant possibility of catching any infection, a custom that has saved many a Zarathushti life during vicious epidemics. ■

Traditionally, in the old country, after the mourners pay their final respects, the nasesalars unlock the gate of the dokhma, take the bier with the corpse inside, and lay it down, unclothed, on the allotted platform. After the body is consigned to the dokhma, and when the clap of the nasesalaris is heard, or upon their return with the empty bier, the mourners leave the paiwand, conclude the **Baj of Sarosh**, and recite **Homage to the Urvans** [see above]. After cleansing their hands with taro and water, the mourners perform Padyab Kushti and recite the **Sarosh Baj**. Then

they return home, take a bath and put on fresh clothes, before resuming any normal activities. Note: Buying a new bier and new clothes for the corpse-bearers are not only unnecessary, but are expressly prohibited by our scriptures which highly recommend maintaining ecological balance by practicing conservation in every way. ■

FOUR-DAY CEREMONIES FOR THE SOUL OF THE DEPARTED



*The **Sarosh-nu-patroo**, **Uthamna** and **Chahrum** ceremonies are done at the darbe mehr or at the home of the deceased. The prayer area is laid out with an afargan (fire vase), sukhad-loban (sandalwood and frankincense), a divo (an oil lamp), flowers and rose-water in a silver 'golabas.' A folded sudreh is placed in the Uthamna setup, perhaps to represent the 'sawab' (good deeds) a person has collected, figuratively, in his 'giryān' (the small pocket in front of the sudreh) during his sojourn on earth.*

After the body has been disposed, the **Sarosh-nu-Patroo**, **Uthamna**, '**Pachhli-ratnu Uthamnu**' and **Chahrum** ceremonies are performed, to help the soul (which is hitherto lingering around his old world) ascend towards its onward journey at dawn of the fourth day. These rituals should not be performed in the presence of the dead body, and thus in India, where the four-day ceremonies were all performed at the bungli, the first night's Sarosh-nu-Patroo is not performed unless the body has already been disposed off.

Besides the above ceremonies, the family may arrange for performance of the following inner liturgies for the benefit of the soul of the departed. These can only be performed in fire-temples where the higher category of yaozdathregar mobeds and ritual implements are available, of which there are none outside India and Iran. To arrange for performance in India, see page 57:

- **Yasna** (or **Yazeshne** or **Ijashni**) in honor of Sarosh Yazad in the Havan gah for the first three days; and in honor of Ardafravash on the fourth day.
- **Yendidad** in honor of Sarosh Yazad in the Ushahin gah on the third day after death; and in honor of Ardafravash on the fourth day.
- **Maachi** may be performed in the Havan gah on the fourth day.

SAROSH-NU-PATROO

Sarosh Yazad, protector of the soul, in both the material as well as the spiritual worlds is invoked at the **Sarosh-nu-Patroo** ceremony, performed for three consecutive nights from the day a person dies. It is done by two mobeds,

at the darbe mehr or at home, immediately after sunset, in the Aiwisruthrem gah.

The following prayers are recited at the Sarosh-nu-Patoo, after reciting the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti, Sarosh Baj**, and **Aiwisruthrem Gah**:

- **Sarosh Yasht Vadi**, for the propitiation of Sarosh Yazad, who is appointed by Ahura Mazda to guide the souls of men in this world and in the hereafter.

Sraosha is implored to guide and protect the soul of the deceased.

- **Patet Ravan-ni**, a Pazand prayer of repentance and atonement for sins.
- **Sarosh no Kardo** (Karda 7 of Sarosh Yasht Vadi).

After the mobeds conclude the recitation, members of the congregation, may come to the afargan and offer loban [page 76] and remember their departed loved ones.

UTHAMNA CEREMONY

On the afternoon of the third day, the *Uthamna* ceremony is performed by two or four or more priests, in the early Uzirehn gah, when the following prayers are recited, preferably while standing, after reciting the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti** and **Sarosh Baj**:

- **Khorshed and Meher Nyaesh**, litanies to the physical light (sun) and moral light (rays of the sun) respectively. These two nyaeshs were as a rule, recited twice, once for the living participants, and again for the departing soul.
- **Vispa Humata**, a short prayer extolling good thoughts, good words and good deeds.
- **Doa Nam Setayesh**, a short prayer of thanksgiving to Ahura Mazda.
- **Homage unto the Four Directions**, offering salutations to all creations of Ahura Mazda.

The priests then perform the ‘*hamazor*’ handshake with each other, signifying their strength (*zor*) and union (*hama*) in Asha, then sit down, and recite the following:

- **Uzirehn Gah**.
- **Sarosh Yasht Hadokht**, when Sroasha is implored to guide and protect the soul of the deceased.
- **Patet Ravan-ni**, a Pazand prayer of repentance and atonement for sins.

A priest then stands and recites:

- **Dhoop Nirang** (a recitation of the *dibache-i-Afringan* for the propitiation of Sarosh) wherein for the first time the name of the deceased is uttered aloud and the protection of Sarosh Yazata is sought for the upward journey of the soul.

The priests pray that Meher Yazad would find the soul worthy of upward journey in the high heavens. The prayers exhort that the only way to qualify for it is to understand the tenets of the religion and follow it rigorously in one's life.

The Pahlavi name for the Dhoop Nirang prayer is **Nirang-i-Bui Dadan**, or the '*ceremony for sprinkling perfume.*' After the Uthamna, each participant's hands are sprinkled with rose water from a '*golabas*' (a silver rose-water sprinkler) as he reverently touches the *khoomcha* (round silver tray) containing flowers that were prayed upon, in the ceremony. Each one is advised to spread the knowledge and fragrance of the Zarathushti religion all over the world:

May the Mazda-worshipping religion spread all over the universe.

May the message be heard in each and every corner of the world.

May evil be defeated.

After the mobeds conclude the recitation, family and members of the congregation may come to the afargan one by one, offer loban and remember their departed loved ones.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Following the Uthamna ceremony, friends and relatives may offer their eulogies and remembrances of the departed loved one in the new world.

Commemorating the deceased. Up until the early twentieth century it was customary to collect donations on this occasion for a cause relevant to the deceased's sojourn on this earth. Friends and relatives generally announced liberal donations to charity funds in memory of the deceased. It would be fitting to revive this custom, especially in lieu of sending expensive flowers.

The Parsis have another custom of commemorating the name of the deceased in the case of someone who was a great public benefactor. In Mumbai, admirers of the deceased send a signed petition to the Bombay Parsi Punchayet to hold a Hama Anjuman meeting to record his service to the community, during which a resolution is generally passed to commemorate his name in all jashans and afringans recited by priests. This is a great honor that a grateful community could bestow on a person for the good he had conferred upon his fellow-men, but as such names abound, priests usually recite inore outstanding names they could recall from their limited memory.

A **highly meritorious deed**, and perhaps the best way to benefit a soul, either deceased or living, would be to help a deserving Athornan to become a priest (Navar) [[see page 76](#)].

PACHHLI RATNU UTHAMNU AND CHAHRUM (FOURTH DAY)

Dawn after the third night is a very significant period, for this is when the soul, that has lingered around for three days, departs from this world on its onward journey. This is theologically the real ‘Uthamna,’ which means ‘getting up,’ while the Uthamna held the previous afternoon is an Uthamna of convenience, which most people find easier to attend. The soul comes to the Chinwat Bridge, which is guarded by Meher Davar (‘the Judge’), assisted by Rashnu, the yazata of spiritual Judgment and Astad, the yazata of Order, Rectitude and Justice. If his good deeds while on earth outweigh his misdeeds, his soul is allowed to pass over the bridge to paradise, otherwise he falls down into hell.

The *Pachhli Ratnu Uthamnu* at dawn, and the *Chahrums* prayers to follow at sunrise of the fourth day, are therefore of momentous significance at this juncture in the soul’s journey.

Pachhli Ratnu Uthamnu (‘Late Night Uthamna’) is performed at dawn on the fourth day, at the darbe mehr. Two or four priests recite the following prayers, after reciting the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti, Sarosh Baj,** and **Ushahin Gah:**

- **Atash Nyaesh**, in which Fire is implored to stay burning until the final renovation, and asked to grant paradise to the worshipper.
- **Sarosh Yasht Hadokht**, when Sraosha is implored to guide and protect the soul of the deceased.
- **Patet Ravan-ni**, a Pazand prayer of repentance and atonement for sins.
- **Dhoop Nirang** wherein the protection of Sarosh Yazad is sought.
- **Hoshbam**, a dedication to the Supreme Being, who is All-Light, to be recited at twilight just before sunrise.

Chahrums. Several ceremonies are performed on the fourth day, to provide solace and support to the soul at its critical time of judgment at the Chinwat Bridge.

(A) At sunrise, in the Havan gah, on the *Chahrums* (4th day) the following prayers are recited by preferably four mobeds, at the darbe mehr, after reciting the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti, Sarosh Baj,** and **Havan Gah:**

- **Afringan** with the khshnuman of “*Daham Yazad Vispaesha Arda*

Fravash Beresad,” followed by the **Daham** and **Sarosh** kardas.

- A standard **Afringan** with **Ardafravash**, **Daham**, and **Sarosh Kardas** and two **Afrins**.

This is the first afringan prayed for the deceased, who is now an ‘*anaoshe-ravan*’ (immortal soul) and belongs fully to the other world.

Afringan-i-Daham describes the fravashis, if pleased with our invocation as bestowing their blessings upon us:

In this abode ...

May obedience (to spiritual laws)

overcome absence of such obedience,

Peace (overcome) anarchy,

Magnanimity (overcome) miserliness,

Right mentality (overcome) wrong mentality,

Well-spoken speech

(overcome) ill-spoken speech,

Asha - divine truth/righteousness

(overcome) druj (lie/falsehood).

[*Afringan-i-Daham*, Yasna 60.5]

After the mobeds conclude the recitation, members of the congregation, may come to the afargan one by one, offer loban [[see page 76](#)] and remember the departed loved ones.

(B) Some traditional families have four **Baj ceremonies** done just before dawn of the Chahrum. These are ‘inner liturgies’ that can only be performed in the consecrated precincts of a fire temple, where yaozathregar mobeds and ritual implements are available, of which there are none outside India and Iran. To arrange for their performance in India, see page 57. The four Baj ceremonies are performed for:

- **Rashn-Astad**. Rashnu Yazad keeps the record of our deeds in this world and weighs our deeds. Astad Yazad assists Meher Yazad in his attempt to establish justice.
- **Mino-ram**, the angel of Good Wind (as opposed to the Bad Wind which belongs to the Ahrimanic forces) who helps the pious soul to pass through ratified air in the higher regions.
- **Sarosh Yazad**, who has sheltered and protected the soul for three days on this earth and now guides the soul on its journey in the other world.
- **Ardafravash**, the righteous farohars, as the soul of the deceased has

now joined their ranks.

A set of new clothes, '*shiyav*' [see page 10] is consecrated during the Baj of Ardafravash, and then given to the priest, to family members or to the needy. Except for consecrating the shiyav, it is not necessary to consecrate any utensils or other items, as was customary in the past.

(C) At noon (in the Rapithwan gah) and in the evening before sunset (in the Uzirehn gah), a mobed may recite at the darbe mehr:

- **Satum**, invoking the fravashis of all beings, recited with an offering of food, preferably favorites of the deceased. It may be vegetarian or non-vegetarian, per the practices of the family and the deceased.

We revere here the souls of the departed ones,
who belong to the Fravashis of the holy ones.
Here, in this house we revere
those Fravashis of the righteous men and women

[Satum no Kardo, verse 7]

CEREMONIES FOR REMEMBERING THE DEPARTED ON THEIR DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

If the surviving relatives cherish the memory of the departed, remember him with gratefulness, try to please him with pious thoughts words and deeds, and perform meritorious charitable deeds in his memory, it is likely that these departed spirits will in turn, assist in their well being on this earth with an invisible helping hand.

The Avesta does not give details about what ceremonies are to be performed after Chahrum, but the Pahlavi dibache (preface) for afringans make it explicit that prayers are to be recited on **Chahrum** (4th day), **Dahum** (Gujarati **Dasmu**, 10th day), **Siroza** (30th day) and **Salroz** (year anniversary). In addition, some families elect to have ceremonies-performed every day until the Dasmu; monthly anniversaries (on the roz of death) for one year; and the yearly anniversary or **varsi** (on the roz-mah of death) for a number of years. **Siroza Yazeshne** may be performed on: the 30th day (i.e. the day before the masiso or first month anniversary; on the 180th day, i.e. the day before the **chhamsi** or six-month anniversary; and on the 365th day, the day before the varsi or yearly anniversary [see Overview on page 7].

On these anniversaries, individual lay persons may recite prayers in memory of their loved ones [[see page 74](#)].

Mobeds may be engaged to perform the following ceremonies at the darbe mehr. After the prerequisite **Padyab Kushti** and **Gah**, they may recite:

- **Afringan** for remembering the souls of the departed and invoking their blessings. Usually it consists of the **Ardafravash**, **Daham**, and **Sarosh kardas**, and the **Ardafravash** and **Bozorgan afrins**.
- **Satum**, invoking the fravashis of all beings, recited with an offering of a meal; one Satum is performed at noon (in the Rapithwan gah) and another Satum in the evening before sunset (in the Uzirehn gah).
- **Farroksi** invoking the fravashis of all beings. It is not generally performed in North America, but a lay person can recite it at any time [[see page 75](#)].

Performance of the following inner liturgies may be arranged in a fire temple in India [see page 8] in memory of the departed soul.

- **Baj, Yasna** (i.e. **Yazeshne** or **Ijashni**) and **Vendidad**.

Afringan-i-Ardafravash seeks the blessings of the fravashis. A brief example:

May the fravashis of the departed enter our house,
go all around our house, bless our house with the prosperity
Ashishwang Yazad bestows on men, and may they depart
from our house highly venerated and pleased with us (and our
prayers).
May they never depart displeased from our house.

The *dibache* (preface) that precedes every *karda* in the *afringan* ceremony, repeatedly invokes all the souls of all the seven continents known then:

... whether born or to be born, men, women, or children,
from the time of the first man, Gayomard, to the last man,
Saoshyant (the messiah who will bring about the ultimate
renovation of the world).

In the *afrins*, which conclude the *afringan* ceremony, we long to unite with the fravashis of the holy as with all other God's holy creations.

The post-death ceremonies may be performed depending on the family's ability to afford the services, their belief, their perception about their importance, their desires as well as the wishes expressed by the deceased in his lifetime.

FRAVARDEGAN, UKTAD (PARSI) OR PANJEH (IRANIAN)

The last ten days of the year (i.e. the last five days of the last month Aspandarmad and the five Gatha days) are observed by the Parsis as *Muktad* or *Fravardegan*. Iranians refer to the five Gatha days as *Panjeh-i-meh* (the greater five days) and the prior five days as *Panjeh-i-keh* (lesser five days). Lately, especially in the western diaspora, *Muktad* is observed for only the last

five days of the year (the Gatha days). Up until the late 20th century, in India, Muktd was observed for 18 days, extending up to Amardadsal (Fravardin Mah).



Muktd tables, laden with flower vases in remembrance of dear departed ones, at the darbe mehr in Chicago.

These Muktd days are devoted to remembering and honoring the fravashis of departed souls, who are believed to visit the homes of their loved ones at this time. Homes and agiaries are cleaned and a divo is lit to welcome them. It is also a time to do acts of charity.

Muktd ceremonies are in general the same as those performed for death anniversaries [see previous page]. For each departed soul, family members set up a silver vase (or *behrun*) of flowers, at the darbe mehr. In North America tables of vases laden with flowers fill the prayer room, and requisite prayers are done by the mobeds, for all the departed souls of the community in one set of prayers. Some families prefer to engage the services of mobeds to perform individual ceremonies for their departed loved ones. Family members may also recite prayers [see page 74] at home for their loved ones.

Some communities in North America gather to recite a **hambandagi** (group prayer) every day during the Muktd days. An appropriate hambandagi for Muktd, derived from the Avestan portions of the Satum prayer, is described elsewhere [page 72].

If facilities or mobeds are not available locally in North America, Muktd ceremonies for a departed family member may be arranged to be performed in another town, or in India [see page 8]. However it is not advisable to have the ceremonies performed in more than one place [see page 13].

FRAVARDIAN OR FOROODAK

The 19th day of Nouruz (Mah Fravardin and Roz Fravardin) is celebrated as a day of remembrance, *Fravardian* or *Foroodak*, for the departed. Zarathushtis visit the dokhma, cemetery, or final resting place of their beloved ones. Individuals may recite prayers in memory of their loved ones [see page 74]. The following ceremony may be performed by mobeds at the darbe mehr:

- **Fravardian Jashan**, including the appropriate afringan and afrin in honor of the departed.

There is no need to perform any ceremonies on Fravardin Roz of every month, before or after the first anniversary of death, as some are wont to do.

* * *

Despite the various ceremonies outlined above, the Zarathushti religion is a very humanistic, ethical and practical religion. If a person cannot afford all these observances, his predicament frees him from such obligations and discourages him from incurring any debt.

According to *Ardaviraf Nameh*:

Let them (Zarathushtis) lead such lives that on their deathbeds they may not need repentance, and let them not believe that punishments will be remitted (decreased) at the intercession of those they leave behind, nor will the prayers of the priests avail them.

Asho Zarathushtra has expressly stated [Ys. 43.5]:

Evil will follow the evil doers,
Good will follow the good.

It is, after all, the good deeds we perform here on this earth and not the prayers of the survivors that will lead us to heaven; though they may provide some solace to the living as well as the dead.

A NOTE ON THE PATET PRAYER. The Patet, written in Pazand, is a much later prayer, unlike the other prayers written in Avesta, and is generally acknowledged to have been compiled in the Sasanian times to counteract the growing influence of Christianity in Iran. It contains patet (repentance) for such a long list of sins that contemporary Iranian mobeds who can, for the most part, still understand Pazand, find it inappropriate to recite it on any occasion and even vehemently demanded its exclusion from the prayers listed here. This, however, regretfully cannot be done, as the Parsis, who are not as aware of its meaning, religiously abide by it to this day, although reformist Parsi priests such as Dastuiji Dhalla concurred with the Iranian view, especially for its use during the navjote ceremony. Moreover, being a much later innovation, the devoutness

of the hundreds of generations that preceded its formation was not violated or diminished by their not having recited it. Also, the idea of repentance being a later invention, primarily in response to social forces generated by the movement of another religion with a very different theology - Christianity, does not seem to me to be in real accordance with the fundamental tenet of Zarathushti theology, that bad thoughts, words or deeds can only be atoned if they are counterbalanced by good thoughts, words or deeds of equal or better value or proportions. Even the *Shah-nameh* often bears it out.

A NOTE ON THE SOURCE. For the most part, Er. Kuka's booklet [see Reference 6, page 5] was used as a guide in compiling the above lists of prayers. Needless to say, the learned Jashan Committee, on whose recommendations the booklet is based did not recommend performing the second Uthamna on the fourth dawn, Bamsi (the second month anniversary), the Chhamsi (6 month anniversary) or Vendidad on any day at all after death. It did not include the recital of Farroksi either. Neither is it necessary to perform the ceremonies (Afringan, Baj, Satum) daily for the whole first month or year. There is also no evidence or references made in the scriptures to perform the Bamsi or Chhamsi prayers, and these need not be performed. The Committee found no need to perform the ceremonies (Afringan, Baj, Satum) on the monthly roz anniversary after one year. It is not enjoined anywhere to perform any ceremonies on the birthday anniversaries of the departed.



Dr. Kersey H. Antia is the 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 M. F. Cama Athoman 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 "2000 Outstanding Religious Personalities and Scholars of the 20th Century" and others.