

Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 388: Shehen Baaj – Performed by Udvada 9 Sanjana Family on September 26th, 2020

Hello all Tele Class friends:

In our previous WZSE #383, we mentioned the Shehen Baaj performed on September 26 th, 2020 in Udvada by the Sanjana 9 Families.

I usually get a few comments for all our WZSEs, but I replied to them without mentioning their comments in the WZSEs. However, for Shehen Baaj, we got a number of good comments and I thought it would be nice to use this WZSE #388 to present these interesting comments to you all. So, here it goes:

1. Arnavaz Sethna, ZAH, Houston:

On March 24 th, 2020, Arnavaz Sethna of Houston ZAH, daughter-in-law of famous Avesta scholar T. R. Sethna of Karachi, wrote to me:

“Hello Solibhai: When I was growing up in Karachi, there was a very pious lady Jerbai Kandawalla. At the time of partition when the country was ravaged by riots, she had requested a few Mobeds to do Shehen Baaj, saying that in the old Iranian times, during the "aafat" on the country, the Mobeds would do Shehen Baaj on a hill (taikri). Have you ever heard of that? Apparently, it was very expensive, but Jerbai was a very wealthy lady so she bore all the cost. I must have been around 9 or 10 years old so don't remember much except the name and that it was held. I don't even know what the expense was for – may be sukhad loban? Any insight into this would be very much appreciated. I wonder if we can do something like that here.

Arnavaz”

To this, I replied:

“Hello Arnavaz: You are correct about Shehen Baaj.

I think it is performed by Udvada Mobeds only. (I was proven wrong in this conclusion).

When I was in MF Cama Institute, around 1949 – 50, Boyce Agiary in Mumbai approached our Principal asking if they can perform a Shehen Baaj on the grounds (our school was on a hill). And school allowed them to perform it.

I remember they clear some ground under the mango groves and perform the Baaj, but we were not allowed to attend it, so I do not know what prayers were recited and what items were used.

My nephew in Udvada, Yozdathregar Mobed Zarir Dastoor, also informed me that when his dad, my brother Minu, was in charge of the Saghdi (small Aatash Daadgaah near Udvada Dakhmaa), this Baaj was performed on the hill nearby.

In Unwalla's book on *Pavmahel* (higher liturgical rituals) for the Udvada Sanjana Mobeds, it describes this Shehen Baaj which requires 132 Daroons (4 for each of the 33 Yazads in the Siroja khshnuman of the Baaj) for it, and another 6 being large ones for performing a single Baaj with the combined Khshnuman of Sirojaa, Sarosh and Ardaafravash. It requires 7 Taai Barsam, 2 Karasyaas and 5 new Khumchaas which are filled with fruits and nuts. One Mobed with Bareshnum is required to perform it. After he is done, his Bareshnum is vitiated and he has to take 9-night Bareshnum again to perform higher liturgies. (In some books, the old custom was to select a very elderly Mobed close to his retirement and requests him to perform the Shehen Baaj after which his Bareshnum is vitiated for life and he cannot perform any Pavmahel ceremonies after that.)

After the Baaj is performed, the attending Humdins can partake the "Chaashni".

Unwalla book states that it originally was called "Shehenshahi Baaj" in the Sassanian times and was performed when the empire was faced with major catastrophe and performing it removed the catastrophe. So similarly, when a family faces a major problem, it can be performed.

This is all I know. The basic prayer is similar to a Baaj ceremony performed at the inauguration of your Bhandara Dar-e-Meher including the final "Chaashni" by Mobeds at the end of the prayer.

I could not find any reference to this Baaj in Navsari Bhagaria or Kadmi Paavmehel books."

(Once again, I was wrong in this assumption)

I then contacted Udvada Vadaa Dasturji Khurshed about it and he informed me that they are also thinking about performing this Baaj but due to some problems and availability of Bareshnum Mobeds, they had to postpone it.

So, finally, it was performed together with a Jashan in Udvada Saghdi on Saturday September 26th at 9:40 AM Indian Standard time (12:10 AM NY time).

We want to thank Dasturji Khurshed and the Udvada 9 Family Sanjana Mobeds to perform this Shehen Baaj for the good of our community as well as for the whole world and with the

Blessings of Iranshah we all hope that this calamity of COVID pandemic end soon..

As always, I received a few comments about my above writing about Shehen Baaj in our previous WZSE #383. I usually do not mention such comments for our WZSEs but for this one, these comments are worth sharing.

2. Mobed Zerkxis Bhandara, LA, wrote:

“Hi Soli Uncle,

Thank you for these informative write ups. I always enjoy them.

I was able to find reference in Pavri’s book for Bhagarsath kriya kam on page 178. I’ll attach a photo below.

(please see the attached photo in Gujarati)

Thanks once again!”

I replied to Zerkxis:

“Paint your face red’ they say when you make a boo boo, Zerkxis!

Thank you for pointing Shehen Baaj in Pavri book.

I found it.

I do not know how I missed it.

Thanks once again and see you on Saturday.

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli”

3. Darayes Mobed, ZAF, Florida:

“Hi Soli,

Talking about Shehen Baj brings back memories of Karachi.

I remember when I was about 6-8 years old (do not quite recall), I went in a bus chartered to take Parsis to a hill far outside Karachi; near a place called Mahongo Pir. I went with my parents, aunts and cousins. The bus picked us up from the local Sadar Agyari. It was a full day affair. We reached the destination just before

sunrise, had prayers most of the day and returned in the evening. I was told that this was 'Shehen Baj' sponsored by a very rich family in Karachi and all Parsis were invited. These are special prayers said during very troubled times, I was explained. In my mind I can still picture and relive that day, sitting and sleeping under a big tent with many Mobeds praying, a quiet and tranquil setting.

This was the only Shehen Baj, I believe, I have attended.

Darayes.”

Soli's Reply:

“Darayes: so nice to hear your childhood experience of Shehen Baaj in Karachi. I am so glad to hear about it. It was so nice to know that it was also performed a few times in Karachi. Since Karachi Panthak was/is managed by Udvada Sanjana families, it must be done by them that you attended.

Thank you for sharing your experience.

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli”

4. Mobed Gustad Panthaki, NAMC Distinguished Scholar, Toronto, Canada:

“Good morning Soli bhai,

You stated about Shen Baaj ‘I could not find any reference to this Baaj in Navsari Bhagaria or Kadmi Paavmehel books.’

I think Shen Baaj reference is in Dinsha A. Karkaria's (a Bhagaria mobed) book "*Baaj Dharna Avesta Kriya Saathe*". Please see attached above the first page of the Baaj for reference. [\(please see the attached for this page in Gujarati\)](#).

Another Bhagaria mobed Er. Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia has shown Reference to Shen Baaj in his "*The Baj-dharna (Dron Yasht)*". Also JJ Mody has written about Shen Baaj in his famous "[.....Customs & Ceremonies.....](#)"

Best wishes,

Gustad”

Soli Dastur:

“Thank you Gustad Bhai for your reply to our WZSE about Shehen Baaj.

I read the Shehen Baaj description you attached from [Dinsha Karkaria's book](#) which I have not seen it before.

I know Ramiyar and JJ Modi has referred to Shehen Baaj with a very short summary of it.

I am very grateful for you to point these out to us.

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli”

5. Mobed Cawas Desai, NAMC Distinguished Scholar, JAPANJ

“Good evening my dear Vidhwan Scholar Soli Bhai,

Please allow me to add my two paisa (with holes in them)!

My father was present at the Shehen Baj performed at Magar Pir, just outside Karachi, in 1958 shortly after Ayub Khan had staged a military coup against Iskandar Mirza. Arnavaz Sethna is right in that Jerbai Kandawalla had sponsored the Baj and Dasturji Mirza from Udwada had officiated at the ceremony. Seeing so many Parsis gathered at the spot, a small contingent of the Pakistani army had come to see what was going on. My father and some other elders of the community responded that it was a ceremony of thanksgiving and blessings for the new regime, which pleased the army captain in charge!

At the time, my father had enquired of Dasturji Mirza about the Shehen Baj and was informed that in ancient times the Baj used to be performed by at least 100 priests, the usual order of the Afringans was not adhered to, and that the Afringan of Ardafravash was followed by the Afringan of Daham Yazad and then Haft Ameshaspand and finally Sarosh Yazad.

Dasturji Mirza said that reversing the order by reciting the Afringan of Daham before that of Haft Ameshaspand vitiated the bareshnum! My father had asked Dasturji Mirza what was so bad that praying the Afringan of Daham before that of Haft Ameshaspand would vitiate the bareshnum but did not receive any answer other than that was what it was!

I recall my father asking Dasturji Jamasp Asa and others about this but there were no satisfactory answers!

Many years later, I was researching the name of Saena Ahum Satud which appears in the Farvardin Yasht and in the naam grahan of the Afringans. According to some sources Saena son of Ahum Satud was a direct disciple of Zarathushtra Himself and was taught the art of medicine by the Prophet, while others place him about 200 years after Zarathushtra.

According to the Columbia Encyclopaedia, 'After Zarathushtra, Magian priests headed Zoroastrianism, and the greatest of them was Saena son of Ahum Satud'. I remember reading further that Saena died after performing a Baj for 52 consecutive days to avert and protect against a calamity facing the Magian Brotherhood. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find that reference again!

I would submit that the "Shehen" Baj is named after Saena Ahum Satud and like so many other myths and beliefs, after several centuries, became associated with royalty as only they could sponsor so many priests having to retake their bareshnums!

Regards to JoAnn and you from a poor student of our history,

Cawas"

Soli's Reply:

"Thank you so much my Distinguished Scholar Cawas Bhai for your wonderful reply to our last WZSE about yours and your father's experience about Shehen Baaj in Karachi and conversations with Dasturjis.

I learnt quite a bit from these 2 paisa with hole reply.

I have decided to write a separate WZSE just for all the people who replied to me about this WZSE like you and our Distinguished Scholar Gusti Bhai.

Once again thank you for your enlightening reply.

I may discuss this further with you at a later time.

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli"

6. Mobed Gustad Panthaki Replies:

"Hello Cawas,

Your historical knowledge is un-beatable. You write, 'my father had enquired of Dasturji Mirza about the Shehen Baj and was informed that in ancient times the Baj used to be performed by at least 100 priests'.

Farvardin Yasht 97: Saenahe Ahum-stuto ashaono fravashim yazamaide; yo paoiryo sato-aethryo frakhsatata paiti aya zema.

'We worship the Fravashi of the righteous Saena (the son) of Ahum-stuta; who first came into prominence as the possessor of one hundred disciples'.

(Soli's comments: Saena of Ahum Stuta is also remembered in Aafreen-e-Rapitwan).

Further on you write: 'I remember reading further that Saena died after performing a Baj for 52 consecutive days to avert and protect against a calamity facing the Magian Brotherhood. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find that reference again! I would submit that the "Shehen" Baj is named after Saena Ahum Satud and like so many other myths and beliefs, after several centuries, became associated with royalty as only they could sponsor so many priests having to retake their bareshnums'!

From the above may I suggest Sahen Baj was first performed by Saena with 100 mobeds as suggested by Dasturji H. Mirza. I know I am crossing the limit of my imagination, my apology. Kawas I shall abide by your opinion.

Best wishes to Kamal & you."

7. JJ Modi in Baku – His comments on a 7 Stories Maiden Tower as an old Atash Kadeh

(please see the slide #9 in the attached PowerPoint presentation)

When we are talking about Shehen Baaj performed by 100 Mobeds, I remembered Dr. JJ Modi in his travels around the world visited Baku, Azerbaijan and saw a 7-story high Maiden Tower which he surmised to be a Zoroastrian Atash Kadeh. Let me present his words from these travels in Gujarati translated by me:

In his world travels, Dr. Modi visited Baku in Azerbaijan. He inspected the Surakhani Temple and decided it was not a Zoroastrian Atash Kadeh.

However, nearby there was a 7-story structure called Maiden Tower which attracted his attention. On his examination, he found that it was indeed a Zoroastrian Atash Kadeh which was kept burning 24/7 by natural gas. The thick stone walls of this 7 story Atash Kadeh has an escape hole for the natural gas which when lit created a fire ball.

An interesting account of this Atash Kadeh is given by Nazemi Ganjevi, the famous 12th century Persian Poet, in his poem "eskander Nameh" as follows:

"In that place was a fire built round with stone which the fire-worshippers used to call – "Khudi-soz" (Burning itself). For it, were a hundred erbadaan (Ervads) of the fire-temple with collar of gold."

To have 100 Ervads praying together required a large space and this Maiden Tower would have been able to accommodate them.

My reason to mention this is the reference to “hundred erbadaan” by poet Ganjevi and my conjecture to relate this may be for performing a Shehen Baj (?!?). I know I am walking on quicksand!!

In olden days, multi-story Atash Kadehs were known to be built. One such Atash Kadeh was built by Sassanian Dynasty founder Emperor Ardeshir Babekan in Ardeshir-Khwarrāh in the province of Pars (now Firouzabad). It was located in the center of the city, 30 m high and spiral in design. (please see slides 11 and 12 for this Atash Kadeh sketch in the attached PowerPoint).

Please see the PowerPoint presentation attached to this WZSE.

May the Flame of Fellowship, Love, Charity and Respect for all burn ever eternal in our hearts so we can do HIS work with humility, diligence and eternal enthusiasm!

In HIS service 24/7!

Atha Janyaat, Yatha Aafrinaamahi! (May it be so as we wish!)

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli

યાંત્રમનહ જતણ, વીસ્પાયા વૌહ અર્થમ ૩, સુધી ભણી, પદાન નીચું જ રાખી (ગતવત) કરે. આ પ્રમાણે ઉપરની બાજ લેવાની ક્રિયા પૂરી થઈ. ત્યાર પછીથી ખાણું ખાવું હોય તે ખાઈ જે કનૂમનથી બાજ ઇજા હોય તે કનૂમનથી બાજ મૂકે.

બાજ શેહેનની.

(નોંધ : આ બાજ ઈજવાને માટે એવું કહેવામાં આવ્યું છે કે અસલના વખતમાં જ્યારે રાજ્યપર ઘણા સંકટો આવી પડતાં હતાં ત્યારે અંજુમનની મીજલસ ભરીને આ બાજ ઈજવામાં આવતી હતી અને જે મુરાદ માંગવામાં આવતી હતી તે બર આવતી. આ બાજને શેહેનશાહની બાજ (શેહ-શાહ-રાજા) કહેવામાં આવતી હતી. હાલમાં આ બાજ ભાગ્યેજ ધરવામાં આવે છે. જો કોઈ પર નધારેલી મૂસીબતો આવી પડે છે, અને આ બાજ ઈજાવીને મુરાદ માંગવામાં આવે છે તો તે ફળીભૂત થાય છે. વળી આટલું યાદ રાખવાનું છે કે કેટલીક યશતોનો સાર વાંચતાં આપણને માલમ પડે છે કે પાદશાહો કે જેઓ અષો, પરહેઝગાર હતા અને સારી મુરાદ માંગતા હતા તેઓનીજ મુરાદો બર આવતી હતી, જ્યારે બુરા પાદશાહોની બુરી મકસદો પાર પડી ન હતી.

બુઝોર્ગ દુનિયાદારીથી ફારેગ થયેલા પાક મોબેદ પાસે શહેન બાજ ધરાવવી જોઈએ. શેહેન બાજ ધરયા પછી તે મોબેદનું બરશનૂમ હંમેશનું રદ થાય છે અને તેમનાથી પાવ મહેલને લગતું કામ થતું નથી. તેમજ આ બાજ ઈજતી વેળા, સાત તાએની બરેસ્મન, “અઈવ્યાઑધન્”થી બાંધવામાં આવે છે અને ત્રણ ફસસ્ત, તથા ત્રણ દરૂન મલી, છ દરૂન માંડવામાં આવે છે, જેની યાશની સરોશની બાજ ઈજતી વેળાએ કરવામાં આવે છે તેમ કરવી. આ બાજમાં સીરોઝાની, સરોશની તથા અર્દાફવશની મળી ત્રણ કનૂમનો એક સાથે ભણવામાં આવે છે, અને બધી બાજો કરતાં લાંબી છે.)