

MAKING UKTAD MORE MEANINGFUL

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Muktad are the 10 days starting from Roj Ashtad of Mah Spendarmad and ending on Vahishtoisht Gatha, when, according to Zoroastrian tradition, all Fravashis and souls collectively descend every year to their houses in particular and into the world in general. They remain wherever there is purity, prayers, performance of rituals and goodness. The Muktad days are also known **Farvardegan**, which means "days of remembering the Fravashis." They are considered more precious than other days of the year.

Fravashi and **Ravan** are two of the three spiritual immortal components of a human being. Every creation – spiritual or material – has a Fravashi. Human beings have individual Fravashis as their Guardian spirits, which give strength to the body and regulate functions like digestion, converting of food into energy and proper dispensation of energy to all parts of the body.

The Fravashis helped Ahura Mazda in the process of creation and also help Him in upholding creations. They help waters to flow, plants to grow, clouds to go where needed and the sun, moon and planets to go around in their orbits. They uphold the sky and earth. Apart from these, there are helper Fravashis, fighter Fravashis, nature Fravashis and protector Fravashis.

Those who invoke Fravashis with prayers and rituals, get boons of prosperity, power and leadership, health and divine energy. **ARDAFRAVASH** is the collective of Fravashis of all righteous departed ones.

The **Souls (Ravan)** are the immortal and spiritual constituents of men. They have to bear the rewards or recompense in the spiritual world on the basis of their life's actions.

The term Muktad or Muktāt is derived from the Sanskrit word 'mukt ātmān'. It is derived from the Sanskrit rendering of the Avestan word **ashaonām**. The word **fravashinām** is translated as **vrudhi**. Other terms used for the festival of Muktad in the past are: **Doslā**, referring to souls of dosa (old ones), **Māchi** or **Hurak / Hudak**, referring to the metallic stand and tray on which water and flowers were kept or **Takchae**, referring to the arch (taak) in the wall in which flowers were kept. The Iranians refer to these days as **Panji**, which constitute **Panji Meh** "five greater days" and **Panji Keh** "five lesser days."

Muktaḍ has to be a joyous and festive occasion to welcome and be hospitable to the Fravashis. The Muktaḍ celebrations have a twofold significance. Firstly the festival is to thank all the Fravashis collectively as they help us in many ways. Secondly these days are to individually remember the souls and the Fravashis of our own dear departed ones. Thus the days of Muktaḍ are to offer reverence to all Fravashis and remembering the Fravashis and souls of our own dear ones.

In olden books, among the list of duties of a Zoroastrian, celebrating the Farvardegan for 10 days and remembering the souls and Fravashis is an important duty.

Whenever the Muktaḍ are properly celebrated and the souls and Fravashis are happy, they bless the world with abundance and comforts of life. They keep the world away from grievous calamities and shower blessings of health, strength and happiness.

The vase in which flowers are kept during the Muktaḍ is called a **Behrā**. It is a Persian word and refers to the sharing aspect (Pers. **ham-behreh**) of these 10 day celebrations. The vase is symbolic and does not represent the departed ones. This word reminds us that in the past Muktaḍ celebration was a family affair. Water and flowers in the vase are representatives of Khordad and Amardad Ameshaspands. They are indicative of Perfection and Immortality of the soul. Moreover, water and plants are also conduits of divine blessings. Hence water, plant and Fravashis are remembered together at several places in the Avesta, like Yasna 26 and Farvardin Yasht, 23.

DURATION OF MUKTAD

The texts indicates a ten day period for the Muktaḍ (**dasa pairi khsafnao** Farvardin Yasht XIII; Pahlavi Vd. VIII.22) “ten Farvardegan days” (Anklesaria, 1949, p. 201). Even in 1880s the practice of 10 days of Muktaḍ was preferred over 18 days. The earliest evidence of 18 days Muktaḍ comes from 15th century ACE. Dasturji Khurshed Dabu in the early 1970s took the bold step of reverting the practice in India back to 10 days of Muktaḍ, due to paucity of priests, time and finance.

How the Custom of 18 Days Developed

The days immediately following the 10 days of Muktaḍ are religiously important: Hormaz Roj for Navroz, Ardibahesht Roj for Rapithwin consecration, Khordad Roj for Khordad Sal and hence the six days of the Ameshaspands were clubbed together to form the 18 days Muktaḍ. The last day was for farewell (Guj. **valaavo**).

IMPORTANT DAYS DURING MUKTAD

During the 10 days of Muktdad, the following are significant days:

1. Roj Marespand is known as Din Beh Mino Marespand. On this day the miracles of prophet Zarathushtra were manifest, Avesta was shown on that day and four Ameshaspands came to the court of King Gushtasp.
2. On Gatha Vahishtoisht, Patet Pashemani is to be recited to atone for mistakes committed during the year. Hence this day came to be known as 'Pateti.'
3. Five Gatha days belong to Hamaspathmaedhem Gahambar. On any one of the five Gatha days, preferably on Ahunavad Gatha, Gahambar rituals have to be performed.

CUSTOMS FOR MUKTAD

Since ancient times, certain customs have been followed during Muktdad days. It is interesting to understand their rationale.

1. **Not to cut hair and nails:** This is done, so as not to create naso and impurity, especially at times when the Fravashis and souls are visiting the house. It should be noted that Fravashis likes fragrance and life and Naso has a stench and is dead matter.
2. **To avoid stitching clothes:** This tradition indicates that one was expected to devote time to prayers and remembering the departed ones. They should not engage themselves in any activity other than doing their duty and performing meritorious deeds, and keep away from all avoidable chores.
3. **People should have a fire in the house, put fragrance on it, perform rituals and recite Avesta:** The Fravashis and souls enjoy the atmosphere where there is light, fragrance and where prayers are recited.

In short, people should ensure comfort, joy and delight of the Fravahshis, so that they may be happy and confer their blessings when they return.

PURPOSE OF MUKTAD

In many religious traditions, the souls of the departed ones descend on the earth once a year. The Hindus refer to these days as Shradh, and the Christians as Lent. According to

Zoroastrian tradition the Fravashis descend to clean the world of its impurities at the end of each year. Unlike in other traditions, we remember not just the departed ones during these days, but all Fravashis in Nature.

During Muktaḍ one needs to keep away from routine work and devote time to remembrance of Fravashis and do works of charity in their name. Fravashis come whenever they are invited. During the days of Muktaḍ the Fravashis collectively come down irrespective of whether they are invited or not. When they come to the house they are to be remembered and worshipped. If they are satisfied, they give blessings of prosperity and happiness.

PREPARATION FOR MUKTAD

In the past when Muktaḍ was ideally celebrated in the house, the following preparations were made. The House or at least the room where the prayer were to be done was specially cleaned and white-washed. Provisions and fuel was stored to last at least for ten days so that one had to go out to buy during these days. All family members used to chip in their share.

People in the house, especially the women, who were directly involved with the preparations took a Nahan. People, as far as possible did not go out of the house, as guests in the form of souls and Fravashis were in the house, and it is not right to leave them and go. Often night long vigil was kept by people.

In present times, preparations may be made in a room / corner of the house during the Muktaḍ days to welcome the Fravahshis and souls in the house. A room or a corner can be kept aside, where a table – preferably metal and stone is kept on which a metallic Vase (or an unused *behru* or *karasya*) can be placed and long stemmed flowers kept in it. Water, preferably from a well or else the one that comes daily to our homes is used to fill the vase. Water and flowers in the vase may to be changed daily or at least the water has to be changed daily and the flowers once every few days.

SPECIAL PRAYERS

During the days of the Muktaḍ the following prayers can be done:

1. Muktaḍ no namaskar (az hamā gunah patet pashemanom. ashaunam vanghuhish surao spentao fravashayo yazamaide (thrice). Ahmai Raeshcha – Hazangharem – Jasa me Avanghe – Kerfeh Mozd).

2. For the first five days Framraot Hā (commentary of Ashem Vohu) OR 1200 Ashem Vohu with the khshnuman of Ardafravash has to be recited.
3. For the five days of Gathas, each Gatha has to be recited the respective day OR 1200 Yatha with the khshnuman of Gatha has to be recited.
4. During the ten days 570 Yatha + 210 Ashem + 120 Yenghe (total 900) with the khshnuman of Sarosh can be recited daily for 10 days. This is known as Lakhi nu bhantar.
5. It would be nice if a Humbandagi could be done among family or friends.

When reciting prayers, either in Gujarati or English, especially the Gathas, one may encounter difficult words. There is a way to deal with such words. First, the vowels or group of vowels in such have to be identified, clubbed along with consonants and then broken up in syllables. Then word by word, sentence by sentence the prayer has to be practiced.

RITUALS

The following rituals are performed by the priests in the fire temple during the Mukta:

1. Baaj,
2. Afringan (Ardafravash, Daham and Sarosh Kardehs during the first 5 days & Gahambar (on one day) Gatha and Sarosh on the 5 Gatha days),
3. Farokhshi,
4. Stum.

In the past, Yasna of Ardafravash was also performed. Nowadays this is no more done on account of the prevailing circumstances. Presently, even the Baaj and Farokhshi are more or less recited for groups and not individually

Great and magnificent rewards can be obtained by the observation of Mukta. Remembering the departed ones fortifies our belief in the teachings of immortality of the soul and the presence of a divine world.

Mukta is a time of REPAYING the debt of gratitude to our ancestors, those whom we know and the countless others whom we don't know, but without whom, life would not have been possible. These days also fortify our MEMORY of the past and kindle HOPE for the future.

The Mukta should preferably be celebrated at home. If that is not possible, at least a special corner could be dedicated during these days where there could be purity, light, fragrance and chanting of the Avesta. As many prayers as possible should be done at home, preferably by oneself. The departed ones should be remembered by name. People in the house may devote some time to a family Humbandagi or reciting small prayers.

Just as a Hindu house is transformed during Diwali or Ganpati, and a Christian house during Christmas, a Zoroastrian house should be transformed during the Mukta days to give the special feeling of Parsipanu. The spirit of the Mukta days cannot come into our lives, till we bring the celebration into our houses.

Mukta are the days of enhancing communication between the physical and spiritual worlds. The needs of humans beings and divine beings is mutually fulfilled – We receive blessings of health, happiness and peace, and the divine beings feel happy on account of our hospitality, prayers and remembrance. The blessings of the Fravashis can give happiness and add meaning to our lives.