



NORTH AMERICAN MOBED COUNCIL **NEWSLETTER** **ATHRAVAN**

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Presidents Message:

Respected Mobeds, please inform me of any new Navars or Martabs happening in your area. This will help us recognize them with some financial assistance towards their travel expenses.

We would also like to conduct a religious essay competition among young Mobeds (there will be an age restriction of under 20 years) with cash prizes from \$500. How many young Mobeds will participate?

Please give me your feedback at *kobadzarolia@gmail.com*.

RIGHT AGE FOR NAVJOTE OR SUDREH PUSHI

Ervad Tehemton F. Mirza

Importance of Navjote or Sudreh Pushi in the life of a young Zarhosti cannot be overstated.

Since Navjote contains declaration of oath of allegiance to Zoroastrianism by the person being initiated, it is often argued that that the person making such a declaration be of mature age to understand the declaration.

The current practice amongst Parsi Zarhostis is to initiate a child into Zoroastrianism between the ages of 7 and 11. Zarhostis in Iran are more relaxed with this age requirement, for various reasons.

However, our ancestors started wearing Sudreh and Kusti at a later age..

Ervad Dr. Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi in his book “The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees” (chapter VII) references various sources to establish that ancient Iran saw a child being initiated up to about age 15, and even later under certain circumstances.

It appears that the age was lowered to 7 by the seventeenth century.

Rivayat of Kaus Kamdin states that a child of seven years and six months and higher, but not less can be invested with Sudreh and Kusti.

Christians baptize their very young, Islam has no formal initiation ceremony and Jews undergo Bar or Bat Mitzvah at age 13.

Does age matter?

It is argued that a child of 7 to 11 is not mature enough to understand what he or she is committing to.

Does it matter?

It is a generally accepted practice in society at large that a child inherits the religion of his or her parents. Accordingly, a child of Zarthosti parents (or at least one of the parents) will inherit Zoroastrianism regardless of his or her age at the time of initiation.

In their capacity of custodian of their child, parents are called upon to make decisions in the interest of the child. Sir J.J. Modi places the responsibility of religious and moral education on the child's parents. Therefore, parents would act within their rights as custodians to decide what age should their child be initiated.

During a Navjote ceremony, the child professes Zoroastrianism and promises to live by its teachings. These teachings are universally accepted as instructions to live a righteous life. The child does not sign a contract to his or her detriment. It can be argued that the earlier the child commits to a righteous life the better.

The Jesuit boast with success: "Give me the child for his first seven years, and I'll give you the man". It is important to impress Zoroastrian teachings at a child's tender age; and what better way to do so than by ceremonial initiation into Zoroastrianism.

Transmitting the beliefs, values, and perceptions of one generation to the next is an important and unavoidable necessity that must take certain definite forms because of the nature of who we are transmitting them to: children. Navjote is a passage in life that could be taken as passing of Zoroastrian values to the next generation; the earlier the better.

It is acceptable when social, political or geographical circumstances compel postponement of Navjote past the prescribed age. Also, it is understandable that Zarthostis reclaiming their ancestral faith later in life may have their Navjote performed at an advanced age.

Once initiated, the new Zarthosti, irrespective of his or her age, is set on the right path to continue his or her journey of study and practice of Zoroastrian teachings. With Mobeds as their guide, let Navjote or Sudreh Pushi be just the first step of this journey.

Regardless of age at Navjote or Sudreh Pushi, a Zarthosti is one who lives the teachings of our prophet Zarathushtra.

A VOYAGE OF LIFE: FROM MANLINESS TO GODLINESS

(Part I)

Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli

Rituals and doctrines are the vital components of every faith, that must work in complete synergy to convey the full impact of its teachings. Segregating the study of Rituals in isolation and the Doctrines as ethical system of Zarathushtrian or any religious tradition is to strip a noble religion off its vitality and substance.

For Zarathushti they together reiterates that, Ahura Mazda that represents, personification of Wisdom is absolute in purity, absolute in truth, absolute in goodness and benevolence. Perception of God for every human being is based on one's imagination and experience in life, since the word God is coined by mankind. Human imagination often portrays the figure of God as an old esoteric being, of serenely bearded personality somewhere in the clouds up in the sky.

Asho Zarathushtra was the first among the Divine teachers to put forth the notion of One God or sole creator of the Universe. In his profound comprehension of the divine, this Aryan prophet radically altered the human conception of God. He proposed veneration of Wisdom for his Godhead identifying it as Mazda. To Zarathushtra the supreme Divine being- Mazda - is the wisdom incarnate, a personification of Wisdom. For him religion is a quest, a quest for ones true self. A quest for true self is the quest for the Divine within.

Oneness of God fundamentally implies, that all Faith traditions of the world, in their devotion, converge to the One Ultimate Reality irrespective of the Faith. Consequently, Zoroastrian, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews or any other religious tradition all recognize the same Divine Being. They however do so under different names and in their own traditional manner. We must be aware, that Zarathushtis are just one of the several faith groups, who commune with the same Ultimate Divinity under the name Ahura Mazda following the Zarathushtrian rituals and customs.

Divine Omnipresence is an attribute of Ahura Mazda. This concept firmly stresses, that 'spirituality of God is within each one of us' and in all creations. Each person in general, and Zarathushtis in particular are a vehicle of that common Divine Spiritual entity. This innate Divinity renders all human, as spiritual beings, going through experiences of a physical lifespan. In a spiritual sense, we are a part of all that we encounter, and all that we encounter is a part of us.

For Zarathushtis Ahura Mazda is intangible. Despite its intangible Nature, it is the living, breathing (SLS Ch.15.1, 2) divine energy, that pervade through the Universe, more particularly through each one of us, and through each member of the entire human race.

The prophet intuitively concludes that anger, tyranny, hatred, and ego are all negative attributes not worthy of a Divine being. To him Wisdom incarnate, which is absolute in its truth, purity and unconditional love is the expression of the Divine. He expresses that in his hymns as follows:

"I shall sing your praises, Wise One, and I shall do it, as long as I shall have the strength and will through righteousness,..... "

Ys 50.11.

It is this concept of Ahura Mazda as divine energy that Zarathushtra has encapsulated in the concept of Sacred Fire as an embodiment of his God, to adorn all the ceremonial and festive Zoroastrian events. Of the three yazatas mentioned in his Holy hymns of Gathas the most prominent one is Atar –the Fire. This the prophet invariably associates with his God - Ahura Mazda and his order of nature embodied in Asha.

In later Avesta five different fires are identified as belonging to various categories of creations. In Yasna 17.11 we recite as follows:

âtrem** berezisavanghem ýazamaide,**
âtrem** vohu-fryânem ýazamaide,**
âtrem** urvâzishtem ýazamaide, âtre**m** vâzishtem ýazamaide,**
âtrem** spênishtem ýazamaide,**

Ys 17.11

The above quote pays homage to the five fires that are described. 1) **berezisavangh**, the fire that glitters in all the creations of Mazda. 2) **vohu-fryân**, the fire that resides in the human and animal life. It is the energy that manifests itself as love, compassion, righteousness and justice. 3) **urvâzishte**, the fire or energy that pervades through plant kingdom. 4) **vâzishte**, the fire that is in the clouds and in the lightning. 5) **spênishte**, the eternal fire or the glow that manifests as the presence of Ahura Mazda. The explanations of these fires are also described in Chapter XVIII.6 of Bundahisn. In chapter 101 of Arda Viraf nameh we are told as follows:

...when Ahura Mazda spoke I remained astonished for I saw a light but I saw nobody and understood that ‘this is Ahura Mazda’.

Book of ArdaViraf Ch. 101

To adequately explain the role of his God - Ahura Mazda, to fully comprehend what Wisdom incarnate implies, Zarathushtra elaborates some six primal values that reveal to the adherents a way of life. Collectively we recognize these values as Amesha Spentas - Bounteous Immortals. We shall learn more about them in the future issue.

(To be continued in the next issue)

*For more Information or submission of any articles in NAMC Newsletter,
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