

NORTH AMERICAN MOBEDS COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE THIRTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Location: OZCF Centre, 1187 Burnhamthorpe Road East, Oakville, Ontario.
CANADA.

Date: May 20 & 21, 2017

NAMC EXEC 2016-2017 Present:

Arda-E-Viraf Minocherhomjee	California (President)
Tehemton Mirza	Ontario (Vice President)
Gev Karkaria	Quebec (Secretary)
Xerxes Madan	Ontario (Treasurer)

Members Present:

Guloo Austin	Ontario
Jehan Bagli	Ontario
Athavian Bamji	Ontario
Xerxes Bamji	Ontario
Firdosh Bulsara	Ontario
Boman Damkevala	Illinois
Mehbad Dastur	Ontario
Soli Dastur	Florida
Xerxes Dastur	Ontario
Cawas Desai	Pennsylvania
Jamshed Dhabhar	Ontario

Kerman Katrak	Ontario
Nozer Kotwal	Ontario
Kevan Madan	Ontario
Adil Masani	Pennsylvania
Rohan Masani	Pennsylvania
Khushroo Mirza	Ontario
Noshir Mirza	Ontario
Farzad Mullan	Ontario
Palash Mullan	Ontario
Armaan Panthaki	Ontario
Farhan Panthaki	Ontario
Gustad Panthaki	Ontario
Kamran Panthaki	Ontario
Kobad Zarolia	Ontario

Five Proxies were registered.

Members were welcomed by OZCF President Cyrus Gazdar.

Meeting was called to order by President Ervad Arda-e-Viraf Minocherhomji after a short prayer.

(1) Read, discuss and adopt the minutes of the Twenty Ninth Annual General Meeting

No comments or discussions.

Cawas Proposed

Nozer Seconded. Minutes were adopted.

(2) Read & Adopt the Financial Statements for the year ending Dec. 31, 2016.

Treasurer Xerxes Madan presented the Statements and explained all items.

Secretary Gev drew the members' attention to a special donation of \$3,000 from the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec from their special fund set up in memory of late Ervad Pervez Kotwal towards expenses for Navar initiation in Mumbai India and also towards educating our young mobeds and mobedyars.

Kobad informed the members about funds also available from Fezana for Navar initiation.

Jehan proposed to adopt the Statements and Cawas seconded. Financial Statements were passed unanimously.

(3) President's Annual Report: President Arda highlighted NAMC's activities during 2016.

NAMC was represented at Fezana AGM by Arda.

The AtashKadeh manual prepared and published by NAMC was used in the establishment of the Atash Kadeh in Orange, California

Arda had a meeting with Kurdish Zarthushtis in California. He offered assistance by way of books, NAMC publications etc.

Communication from NAMC to North American Zoroastrian diaspora – Arda was requesting suggestions from members. He had personally tried to reach out through the Fezana Journal.

Bomi – short paragraphs in local associations' News Letters

Soli – through his Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extracts

Tehemton – Publicize events like Navar Initiation

Mehbad – use electronic communication

Kobad proposed to adopt the President's report and Nozer seconded. Report accepted unanimously.

(4) Review of NAMC goals & a five-year plan:

It was unanimously agreed that our “MISSION STATEMENT” on our NAMC website is still very pertinent, accurate & applicable today as it was when it was first written.

We should continue to aggressively promote our Zarthushti Religion and stress on the understanding of the spiritual aspect, as well as the practice of the faith on the North American continent.

We should work on the community's respect for our Mobeda as well as the well-being and the professional development of our Mobeds.

Cawas proposed, Jehan seconded & proposal was adopted.

Some Strategic plan suggestions:

Continue to provide religious & spiritual services to the community. Learn to provide counselling to families in times of need.

Raise NAMC's profile

Work closely but independently with FEZANA.

Increase membership of NAMC

Encourage youth interest, participation & commitment.

Start Fund-Raising from each local association, similar to what FEZANA does. Let members contribute even a small amount -\$3 per head annually -to help defray NAMC's operating expenses.

Allow enough time at NAMC's AGMs to discuss all items on Agenda without rushing through.

(5)Role of Senior Mobeds in education & training:

We acknowledge that our Senior Mobeds are our best source of knowledge, guidance & information. They are our precious “Intellectual Property”. We lean heavily on them to advise us, guide us & help transfer their knowledge of religion and customs to the next generation.

Senior Mobeds like Jehan & Adi have contributed immensely by preparing instruction & prayer books for several ceremonies. These are used extensively by our younger generation

Senior Mobed Soli has put out over 213 weekly extracts & religious commentaries, over the past four years and continues to do that week after week without a break, in spite of challenging health issues.

Seniors Soli & Tehemton will be running a “Hands-On” Seminar in July in La Jolla to train young Mobeds & Mobedyars re: the meaning of prayers and rituals involved in performing basic ceremonies and have a round table discussion on various topics.

Mehbad suggested aggressive use of U-Tube, Face Book and our website.

(6)Teaching Religious Classes, Participation by Congregation:

Tehemton suggested that we should get congregation involved in as many religious ceremonies as possible, by encouraging & facilitating participation. eg. Jashans, Tandarosti

Chicago has successfully introduced practice of praying Atash Nyaesh together.

Both Tehemton & Soli have tried successfully to recite a prayer or conduct a ceremony followed by an explanation or translation.

Soli proposed that we do part of the prayer in English.

Kobad & Tehemton proposed that we could shorten some prayers and provide extensive explanation and comments in English to attract younger generation.

(7) How to get adults more involved in community matters:

Xerxes Madan raised a concern that in our enthusiasm to involve & engage youngsters we are neglecting to engage older age groups. Several ideas were discussed.

(8) Future of NAMC: Gev provided statistics on NAMC's membership over the past ten years. The most glaring short coming is our low membership year after year. We have been unable to attract more Mobeds from the estimated total of over 200 in North America. The highest number of them (approximately 45) reside in Ontario. Southern California has a substantial concentration. Mobeds seem to be comfortable in their own communities but are not enthusiastic to become part of the NAMC.

(9) "Time of day" for marriage ceremony: There is no restriction according to any Zoroastrian scriptures re: time of day. Our current Parsi practice of "wedding ceremonies after sunset only" is a custom that we have brought with us from the Indian sub-continent.

Another related topic that cropped up during this discussion is: In an inter-faith marriage should we perform the Zoroastrian ceremony after a minister or priest from the other faith has already done the ceremony? Members' consensus was that there is no objection in doing a Zoroastrian ceremony. It could be just a short Tandarosti to bless the couple.

(10) Educating Parsi Mobeds about Iranian ceremonies: Kerman illustrated a few instances where the prayers are slightly different. The kushti, the Navjote, the Afringans in a Jashan and some other minor variations. His advice is to check the information on <Avesta.org>

(11) Discuss up-coming young Mobeds seminar on July 2nd & 3rd: Tehemton & Soli outlined their approach to this project. This seminar is tailored strictly for the younger generation (18-35 years). It will be an interactive meeting with total participation from the younger mobeds. The emphasis will be on basics re: how to be Leaders in the congregation, how to earn Anjuman's respect, how to look beyond just prayers & rituals—understanding the meaning of our prayers. For the participants, NAMC shall bear all costs associated with the seminar—Two donors from San Diego will provide for their air fare (up to \$750) and room & board. It was noted with a little sadness that no young Iranian Mobed had applied.

On this topic of encouraging youngsters (young Navarias) to get involved, Kerman made a very impassioned submission. He recounted his own life experience as a young boy in India where a Panthaki in an Agiary & his school Principal got him involved in doing prayers & rituals for the laity. He stressed that a big incentive was the monetary compensation he received.

As we have tried different ways to attract young Navarias, with very limited success, we should seriously consider compensating them. They could be compensated for praying in public Jashans or similar ceremonies, by the local associations. Chicago has already implemented this practice & it is working well.

It was decided that NAMC would send all local associations a letter recommending this compensation. Each association would then either implement it or discuss with the laity.

(12)Role of Mobeds & Mobedyars in the 21st century in North America: Mehad suggested that Mobeds should get some training to provide “pastoral” service along with religious & ritual service to families in times of grief or distress.

Soli cited how Zarathushtra chose to spread Ahura Mazda's message (3rd Gatha Haa 28-53)

Jehan referred to Vedic influence on the Mazdayasni thought process when we seek Zarathushtra's message about being a good human being.

Mobedyar responsibility/reconsideration: Mobedyars Guloo & Boman requested permission to perform navjote/wedding- Boman to perform navjote of his granddaughter, & Guloo to perform wedding of a very close friend. President Arda said that they were not allowed to perform these ceremonies according to NAMC rules.

(13)Soli's update of recent Mobedyar training by video conferencing: After initial trials of instruction by phone, Soli decided that he had to try other means of instruction. The alternate method of using Skype & video conferencing worked much better. Soli has now very successfully completed the training of two Mobedyars. NAMC owes Soli a big debt of gratitude for this remarkable achievement.

(14)Mobedyar Curriculum & time line: Soli is planning to add Ghahambar Jashan, Gatha Jashan and Siroja Jashan to the current curriculum.

(15)Guidelines for Mobedyar Examination: The current guidelines are working well. These were recently tried by Tehemton when he tested Jamshid

Pouresfandiary by video conferencing. Tehemton was very impressed by the way Jamshid recited his prayers. He said “Jamshid did not just recite, he literally sang the prayers, which was very remarkable & inspiring”. All credit goes to Jamshid for his interest, enthusiasm & dedication. This would not have happened had it not been for the time, energy & equal enthusiasm devoted by his exceptional mentor Soli. Thank you Soli.

(16)Expenses to be incurred by the Anjuman & NAMC in training & examination of Mobedyars: NAMC has been bearing all the expenses related to the training, examination, and the initiation ceremony. Going forward, NAMC will continue to provide free training and examination but will ask the Anjuman to compensate the travel (and hotel, if applicable) expenses for Mobeds.

(17) NAMC Website update: Mehbad informed the members re: updates. Our official website is now: <http://namcmobeds.org>

Microsoft office-365 has been installed

Twitter or Facebook accounts will be developed.

Soli suggested that we keep checking regularly to get an idea of how many hits we get per day.

(18)Other Business permitted by the Chair:

Gusti gave a short explanation about “AALAAT”. Also the possible method of consecrating Aaalat & Barashnum in North America. He cited the example of the Fasli Agyari in Bombay in 1937.

(19)Short Commentary by Dr. Neville Panthaki: Neville is a professor in Toronto who has studied & researched Zoroastrianism extensively. His commentary was

focussed on “Relevance of Faith” & “Preservation of Tradition”. He believes that our Mobeds have not been great leaders in our communities. We provide ceremonies & rituals to the laity. However, there is no pastoral service and counselling, and less emotional connection. These elements have to be there to bind & keep the community together. He emphasized the fact that “WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF TIME”.

(20)Overview of development of new Centre at OZCF: Phil Sidhwa from the OZCF gave the members an overview of the progress re: the proposed AtashKadeh at OZCF.

With a vote of thanks to the chair and to our gracious hosts, for their hospitality & sumptuous banquet, the meeting was adjourned.