

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE JASHAN CEREMONY

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The significance of the Jashan ceremony is brought out by the fact that *Jashan* really is the Pahlavi (Middle-Persian) word for the lofty ceremony of *Yasna*, meaning act of worship/prayer, Y being usually replaced by J in Pahlavi. However, unlike *Yasna*, *Jashan* does not consist of one set pattern of prayers but it takes on sets of different prayers depending upon the occasion and reason for having the *Jashan* prayer, the most familiar one amongst the laypersons nowadays being the monthly or yearly anniversary of the dear departed souls, but the most important ones are the six *Gahambars* and *Nawruz* (*Noruz*) which is also celebrated by the priests as marking the re-institution of the *Rapithwin Yah* for the afternoon prayers after its discontinuance during the winter. *Jashans* are also celebrated in honor of the *yazad* of the month (*mah*) when it coincides with the day (*roj*) that bears the name of the month such as *Tir Maah* and *Tir Roj*, which is also known as *Tiragaan*. Other examples are the *Jashan Sadeh* for heralding the midway to the advent of spring, *Mihragan* in honor of *Mihr Yazad*, the death anniversary of the Prophet *Zarathushtra*, the consecration of a sacred fire, any act of communal or individual thanksgiving seeking relief from any disaster or hardship or simply expressing devotion, worship or gratitude, etc.

Jashan consists of the prayer called *Afrinagan*, meaning “a category of blessings or praise,” which can be performed by two priests and is regarded as *Jashan* when performed by four priests or more, there being no higher limit to it.

All the seven aspects or creations of *Ahuramazda* are represented in the *Jashan* ceremony. *Joti*, the head priest represents *Ahuramazda* who represents mankind, His top creation.

Vohu Manah (good mind) or *Bahman Amesha Spenta* is represented by milk as he stands for the benevolent animal kingdom. *Asha Vahishta* (Best *Asha*) or *Ardibehest Amesha Spenta*, who represents the best righteousness and the cosmic order governing the entire cosmos, is represented by the presence of fire. *Khathra Vairya* (Desirable Rule). *Shahrewar Amesha Spenta* is represented by the metal utensils present in the ceremony as metal had come to embody *Mazda's* desirable rule or sovereignty. The ritually pure place on which the *Jashan* is performed represents *Spenta Armaiti* (Holy Devotion and Piety). *Haurvatat* (Total Well-being/Perfect Health) or *Khordaad Amesha Spenta* is represented

by the water left in a metal glass. Ameretat (Immortality) or Amurdad Amesha Spenta is represented by flowers, fruits, and for vegetation offered in the ceremony, pomegranate being the most essential one as it represents immortality and eternity.

Any priest can perform Jashan as it does not require Barashnom which is a rigid requirement for higher ceremonies such as the Yasna. Therefore, even a layman can participate in Jashans under the Joti, the officiating priest, after performing all the obligatory prayers and holding a clean white handkerchief in his left hand in place of a *padan* (mouth veil).

Jashan is usually comprised of three Kardahs (chapters), the last two devoted to Daham and Sarosh Yazad and depending on the occasion, the first one is devoted to Ohrmazd, souls of the departed, etc. Farokhshi, prayer for eulogizing the souls (Fravashis) of the righteous and seeking their blessings is also recited simultaneously but separately by one priest of the priests. For each Kardah as well as for the Farokhshi the Joti and the priest reciting Farokhshi each need to arrange flowers in the following pattern: Pick up each one towards the end of the ceremony while reciting the prayer celebrating good thoughts, words, and deeds which is quoted on the conclusion of this paper. The two rows of two flowers denote the two worlds. This arrangement of flowers embodies the Zoroastrian ideal of human souls coming into this world to perform good thoughts, good words, and good deeds and leave for the other world after accomplishing it as best as one can. However, it is often erroneously held that we have to overcome bad thoughts, words, and deeds by doing good ones, which is not in conformity with the quintessential Zoroastrian insistence of completely separating good from evil, as otherwise it will vitiate the ceremony. Anything that is not good has no place in a Jashan ceremony (or in any other ceremony).

Each Kardah opens with a Dibache which is an introduction and is entirely in the Pazand, which is very similar to the modern Persian which makes it possible for the Irani Zoroastrians to follow it. Even Muslim Iranians often told me they were able to follow it. The Dibache requires the Joti to mention the name of the person for whom the Jashan is being performed, either living or departed, as well as the name(s) of persons requesting it and the names of their dear departed ones. The Iranian Mobeds told me they say only the name of the person for whom the prayer is held, as they can well understand the Pazand prayer explicitly includes not only all the relatives but any one having any *Paywand*, any connection with him or her while on this earth. Nay, all the good souls from all the continents, from the time of the first man, Gayomard to the last Saoshyant (Saviour, Messiah) to come at the end of the world are invoked not just once but for seven times in all. And all the prayers and blessings incurred will reside in the Divine Treasury so

that it will be shared with even those who mean to have the ceremony performed but lack the means to fulfil it. And all those who take part in the Jashan are also said to derive full spiritual benefit occurring from this ceremony.

As the Jashan ceremony, unlike other ceremonies, varies according to the occasion or reason for its performance, there is no standard text, which makes it hard to provide a standard translation. But I have found it useful to prepare a general gist of the Jashan ceremony, that fits all occasions to the Jashan, to be read by a suitable pre-appointed person during the interval between the first two Kardahs when the Joti does not pray the Kardah aloud but intonates it softly in Baaj as is required when praying in Pazand in between two Avestan prayers. This gist of the Jashan ceremony is also added here for better understanding of this beautiful ritual.

In the end the Joti recites the Afrin, the blessings prayer, all by himself. Of all the seven Afrins, six are in Pazand and only one, the Afrin of Zarthosht, consisting of the prophet's blessings to his patron, King Gushtasp, is in Avesta which is recited on the Khordaad Saal, the birthday of the prophet, however, in addition to the regular Afrins.

The Afrin, true to its meaning, not only offer choicest blessings of all kinds but also embrace and promote different ideals and themes in Zoroastrianism and even promotes a spiritual bond with nature and environment with lofty mountains, rivers, streams, seas, all vegetation, etc. After each Kardah as well as after the completion of the Jashan, comes the *Hamazor*, a ritual for promoting unity in strength and righteousness among all those present. Sadly it is hardly practised today.

What each Kardah as well as the entire Jashan ceremony declares in the end is very revealing of the goal of the Jashan ceremony. Even more revealing is the fact that this is recited twelve times during the entire ceremony: "all the good thoughts, good words, good deeds, whether done here or done elsewhere, whether already performed or will be performed in future, we endeavour to assimilate them all in our inner being and will sincerely endeavour to transmit them to others with the added strength of goodness so that we may all belong to the fraternity of the good forever." This is the goal that Jashan inspires us to attain in life, so our afterlife will be blessed. There can hardly be a greater emphasis on goodness from a religion which was often known only as the Bah Din, the Good Religion. So heavy is its emphasis on being and doing good, it throws a big challenge to us all to be good in every way we can as well as bring about all the goodness in the world in every way we can for humans, animals and the environment. Let us then strive for it and all forever.

Gist of the Jashan Ceremony

We begin in the name of the Lord who is the great giver, great forgiver, and so kind and merciful!

May the light and radiance of my soul shine bright by virtue of my Knowledge of the Nature and Function of the Fravashis and Angels Daham and Sarosh and help me toward self-realization. May the light of wisdom and excellent Maazda-Yasni faith be moving in the minds of men, of all the Seven Climes of the earth. May the participants in the Ceremony here, have (a) Glimmerings of perfection (b) Triumph of spirit over flesh (c) the state of virtue and Bliss, linked with (d) the Auspicious Light of the soul shining clearer and growing in Glow from strength to stength!

May the good outcome of all these prayers be spent for the greater good of mankind! May we develop (a) Inner Strength (b) Intellectual Keeness, (c) power derived from our prophet's precepts (d) and moral strength. May my single endeavour be accepted to the value of a thousand (listless) performances! Side by side with the universal and collective of the immortal soul of (so and so) as also the very special, extraordinary Remembrance of Zarathushtra Spitama of the Holy Realization—the Fravashi!

May all the Fravashis of the Sainly be collectively remembered here from Gayomard who was the first man on earth to Saoshyant who is the last messiah to come to redeem us all. May the fravashis of the following Order be remembered here from Gayomard to Saoshyant – (a) Of the living (b) Of the departed (c) Of those to be (d) Of the born (e) Of those unborn still (f) Of this country (g) Of the countries across our borders (h) Of holy men and women (i) Of the minors (j) Of the adults, each and every one of those who have departed from thisphysical world!

We prayerfully remember the souls of our (a) Fathers (b) Mothers (c) Grandparents (d) ancestors (e) children (f) persons with diverse Relationships, (g) and the Fravashis of the Perfect Sainly Souls and the pious souls of the close-knit Fraternity of Faith from Gayomard to Saoshyant! May the Fravashis of the pious of all the Seven Climes of the earth be ALL collectively remembered here from Gayomard to Saoshyant! May we contribute to the total good of mankind. May each one of us endeavour to make the most and the best of each day, month, and year of his/her precious life! May it be so!

We pray for (a) Moral Courage that shapes Life well and to a virtuous growth, (b) Triumph over evil as destined by the Supreme, (c) and Winning excellence of Asha-Truth (d) a complete Vigilance over Malice and Hatred (e) putting down the bad thoughts (f) driving out hostile, dark mental attitudes! May our meaningful utterances be

acceptable to the Supreme Being by virtue of their (a) granting us inner strength of the Holy Spirit (b) strength for self-sacrifice and service and thus enable us to spread the (a) knowledge (b) progress in life and (c) wide renown of the Mazdayasni religion on the seven continents of the Earth – Amen!

(Greet the person next to you and recite) “Hamaa Zor Hamaa-Asho Bad”. May our community be soon blessed with: (a) Adequate Means of Decent Living, (b) Opportunities for the Righteous and Truthful Living, (c) Holy Men of Spiritual Strength, and (d) the careful Observance of the the Faith!

May in our homes obedience triumph over disobedience, peace over discord, generosity over self-centeredness, Benevolent Spirit over Evil Spirit, well-spoken words over ill-spoken words and Asha over Druja.

May SRAOSHA the divine Conscience working for the Triumphant Fulfilment of the Cosmic Law (ASHA), abide with us—within us, to help us attain the Goal of Life! All the Words of Wisdom, communicated to us by ZARATHUSHTRA do we ever revere! We revere Sraosha ... who from the very dawn of Conscience in Man sweetly intoned the Songs Divine (the Holy Gathas).

May all the Good People and we, who have reached here from far and near, to participate in this Sacrament, receive the Best light of the Soul, twelve hundred times our merit. May the physical life grow in moral Good! May the spiritual life gather Strength in Excellence of Spirit! May the sum-total of all my Endeavours culminate in the gradual Growth of Goodness!

All the Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds—one in the past, or to be done henceforth, here or anywhere else, (in the wide world) – do we assimilate these into our Being and transmit them to others with added strength of Goodness-- So that we may belong to the Fraternity of the good and the virtuous!

Hamaa Zor Hamaa Asho Bad -
 may we be ever united in Asha.
 Amen