

Guide to prayers for departed loved ones

by Kersey H. Antia

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Border embroidered with Chinese motifs of flowers, a peacock, butterflies (symbol of happiness and long life) and a man carrying a fly-whisk (to awaken the spirits of the dead).

These prayers are recited by family members of the deceased for the solace, protection and progress of the soul in its onward journey towards *haurvatat* (perfection) and *ameratat* (immortality), after it departs the body. They also serve to bring solace to the bereaved relatives and friends.

Prayers for the first four days after a death

The prayers described here may be recited constantly, day and night after the *sachkar* ritual and until the *Chahrum* at dawn on the fourth day. These prayers supplement the ceremonial prayers performed by the priests. If it is not feasible to recite these suggested prayers, then a string of *Yatha Ahu Vairyos* recited continually will suffice.



The prayer vigil may be held near the body (about three paces away) or at home by his bedside, or by a prayer corner set aside at home, specially for remembering departed loved ones [see photo left], on which are usually placed a picture of Zarathushtra, a divo/candle, prayer books, and photographs of the departed. The divo should be lit, and if possible fire enkindled in a small *afargan*, with fragrant sandalwood and frankincense. During the day, pray facing the sun, and at night facing a lighted object. Do not pray facing North.

The suggested prayers for the first three days, until the *chahrum*, beginning with the obligatory *farazyat* prayers [see *FEZANA Journal Winter 2005 page 77*] are:

- **Padyab Kushti**, to attain a clean, physical and mental state.
- **Sarosh Baj** to attune oneself with Sarosh Yazad (Sraosha), our guide and protector, both on this earth, and on the onward journey of the soul.
- Recite the following prayers, depending on the *gah*, or watch of the day [see page 42],

During the Havan *gah*, recite:

- **Havan Gah**
- **Hoshbam** (recite only at dawn, just before sunrise)
- **Khorshed and Meher Nyaesh**, litanies to the physical light (sun) and moral light (rays of the sun) respectively. The two *nyaeshs* must be recited together, while facing the sun, and only during the daylight hours.
- **Vispa Humata**, a short prayer extolling good thoughts, good words and good deeds.
- **Doa Nam Setayesh**, a short prayer extolling and giving of thanks to Ahura Mazda.

- **Homage unto the Four Directions**, offering salutations to all creations of Ahura Mazda.
- **Patet Ravan-ni**, a Pazand prayer of repentance and atonement for sins committed by the deceased.¹

If more time is available, the Khorshed and Meher Nyaeshs should be repeated, the first recitation being for oneself, and the second for the soul of the deceased.

During the Rapithwan gah, recite the following:

- **Rapithwan Gah**
- **Khorshed and Meher Nyaesh**
- **Patet Ravan-ni**
- Khorshed and Meher Nyaeshs may be repeated.

During the Uzerin gah, recite the following:

- **Uzerin Gah**
- **Khorshed and Meher Nyaesh**
- Khorshed and Meher Nyaeshs may be repeated.

During the Aiwisruthrem gah, recite the following:

- **Aiwisruthrem Gah**
- **Sarosh Yasht Vadi** [*Yasna 57*] is the greater yasht to Sraosha, the guide/protector of the soul.
- **Atash Nyaesh**, litany to the Fire.
- **Patet Ravan-ni**

During the Ushahin gah, recite the following:

- **Ushahin Gah**
- **Sarosh Yasht Hadokht** is the shorter yasht to Sraosha, the guide and protector of the soul.
- **Atash Nyaesh**, litany to the Fire.
- **Patet Ravan-ni**

¹ The **Patet Pashemani** is recited by an individual to repent for his own digressions; while the **Patet Ravan-ni** is recited by another person on behalf of the deceased, for his digressions while on earth. [Also see the note on Patet below].

- **Hom Yasht** for the yazata Haoma.
- **Khordad Yasht** for Haurvatat (perfection).

Prayers for death anniversaries

The prayers described below are suggested for recitation by individuals, on the 4th day (*Chahrum*), 10th day (*Dasmu*), 30th day (*Siroza*), monthly, and yearly anniversaries of departed loved ones.

- The prerequisite, **farazyat** prayers as appropriate (**Padyab Kushti, Sarosh Baj, Gah ...**)
- **Satum**, invoking the fravashis of all beings.

There is perhaps no better prayer than **Satum** for the lay person to pray on any day (except that it should not be recited during the first four days after a person dies, when his soul is still lingering near the earth) or even every day, remembering the fravashis of the departed loved ones. The main occasions for its recital are the anniversaries of death, but it is not necessarily connected with the dead, and may be recited, either by mobeds or lay persons, even on joyous occasions when one wants to gratefully remember the dear departed souls. The *dibache* (preface) for Satum is the same as for any *afringan*, and the rest is a mini-Fravardin Yasht.

- **Fravardin Yasht**, revering righteous souls of ancient Iran and celebrating the fravashis of all the creations of Ahura Mazda.

This great yasht, dedicated to the fravashis of the righteous, reveres all souls from the first one (Gayomard) to the last (Saoshyant) and celebrates the fravashis of all the creations of Ahura Mazda, as well as living human beings. Fravardin Yasht [143-155] declares:

We venerate the fravashis of women in all the lands ... We venerate the souls of righteous men and women...

Of those we know, Zarathushtra is the first and the best in the Divine Doctrine ...

We venerate the life, conscience, perception, soul and conviction of the righteous men and women, who have acquired the teachings of Zarathushtra for the sake of righteousness. We venerate the righteous men and women of the primal principles who acquired all these houses, settlements, districts, and lands, and who acquired righteousness, who acquired the thought-provoking message of Zarathushtra, who realized their own souls, who acquired all that is good.

We venerate the souls of the helpful, law-abiding persons. We

venerate the souls of the righteous persons, bom in whatever land, and of men and women, whose religious convictions are gaining, have gained, or shall gain (in future).

Thus we venerate good men and women who are progressive, eternal, ever-gaining and ever-growing - all men and women who live a life of good mind.

- **Farroksi** is a prayer invoking the fravashis of all beings. It basically consists of the Fravardin Yasht and Satum, an excellent combination of prayers for the veneration of the dead.

Prayers for Muktd/Panjeh

During the ten days of Muktd, or Fravardegan or Panjeh [*see FEZANA Journal Winter 2005 page 69*] the same prayers may be recited as for the death anniversaries [*shown above*]. In addition,

During the first five days (i.e. the last five days of Mah Aspandarmad) recite:

- **Framroat Ha** (Yasna 20), which is a commentary on the Ashem Vohu prayer.

During the second five days (five Gatha days), recite:

- The appropriate Gatha prayer:
 - **Ahunavaiti Gatha** on Ahunavad Gatha day.
 - **Ushtavaiti Gatha** on Ushtavad Gatha day.
 - **Spentamainyu Gatha** on Spentomad Gatha day.
 - **Vohukhshathra Gatha** on Vohukhshathra Gatha.
 - **Vahishtoisht Gatha** on Vahishtoisht Gatha day. An appropriate hambandagi for recitation during the Muktd days, derived from the Avesta portions of the Satum prayer, is described elsewhere [*see FEZANA Journal Winter 2005 page 72*].

Prayers for Fravardian

The prayers described for death anniversaries [*see above*] may also be recited by individuals on Farvardian (Roz Fravardin, Mah Fravardin) which is a day of remembrance for the departed.

Recitation of the names of the deceased

The name of the deceased is recited at indicated places in the Patet Ravan-ni and other prayers and while offering loban. For Parsis, the name should be recited together with their father's (for men and unmarried women) or husband's (for married women) name. Iranians as a rule recite women's name with her father's even after marriage. Surnames are not recited. The name is prefixed with their status:

Behdin: Male or female from non-priestly family.

Ervad: Male who is at least a navar (priest).

Khurd: Child whose navjote has not been done. 'Khurd' here means 'small.'

Osta: Male from priestly (athornan) family, but who is not a navar.

Osti: Female from priestly (athornan) family.

Thus, Sohrab, son of Rustom, from a non-priestly family would be "Behdin Sohrab Behdin Rustom."

When reciting Patet Ravan-ni, at the word '*falan*' recite the first name of the departed soul prefixed with the appropriate title.² '*Khud*' here means 'self.' For example, if the name of the departed is Behdin Sohrab, for '*falan*' say "Behdin Sohrab"; for '*khud falan*' say "khud Behdin Sohrab;" and for '*falan khud falan*' say "Behdin Sohrab khud Behdin Sohrab."

Offering loban, 'Loban mukvanu'

When offering loban, one should bow reverently, offer sandalwood and frankincense, and remember departed loved ones by name, reciting as follows:

Nam chesti anaoshahe ravan ravanee Behdin Sohrab Behdin Rustom aeder yad bad.

May the immortal *ravan* of (*name of deceased*) named here be remembered by me.

Or, we pray that (*name of deceased*) be in heaven:

Behdin Sohrab Behdin Rustom ney garothman behesht.

2 See Birdy, Ervad Jal and Parsi-Zarathushti volunteers of Southern California, *A Guide to Funeral Services for parsi-Zarathushtis in Southern California*. 1993. General guidelines for North America.

One may invoke the help and blessings of Ahura Mazda and all departed souls and fravashis, by reciting:

*Dadar Hormuzd-ni madad hojo ji
Asho ravan, asho farohar ni panah hojo ji*

One may also pray the following verse from the Avestan portion of the Satum prayer [verse 10]:

*Vispao ashaonam vanghahuish soorao spentao fravashayo
yazamaide, yao hacha Gayat Merethnat a Saoshyantai
verethragna-ey*

We revere all the virtuous, brave, beneficent fravashis of the ashavans (righteous ones) – all those from Gayo Maretan or Gayomard (the first mortal) to the victorious Saoshyant (the savior will redeem the world by ending it eternally into frashokereti).

Recite *Yenghe Hatam* (1) and *Ashem Vohu* (1)

Taking the ‘Baj of Sarosh’

Traditionally, in the old country, the ‘Baj of Sarosh’ is recited by those who perform the sachkar ritual bath, by nasesalars and priests during the funeral services, as well as by mourners who follow the corpse to the dokhma. To take the Baj of Sarosh, recite the Sarosh Baj prayer upto the following words at the end of *Kemna Mazda*:

Ma merenchainish gaethao astavaitish ashahe.

Do not destroy the living creations of Asha.

After the particular ritual is completed, resume recitation of the Sarosh Baj, but omit recital of *Ahmai Raescha*, *Hazanghrem* and *Kerfeh Mozd* and omit the passage “*ramano khvastrahe*, etc.” in *Jasa me Avanghahe Mazda*. Conclude with *Ashem Vohu* (1). ■



Dr. Kersey H. Antia is the high priest of the Zarathushti community in Chicago since 1977, and has served as an honorary priest for over half a century. A fully-ordained priest, with the Best Boy medal and the Prefect Medal from the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute in Mumbai, Dr. Antia studied religion and Avesta-Pahlavi under Dasturji Dabu, Mirza, and other learned priests, and has won essay prizes from K. R. Cama Oriental Institute and other institutions since 1956, and Avesta-Pahlavi scholarships in college. He has lectured widely and is author of numerous papers on religion and psychology. A clinical and management psychologist in private solo practice in Illinois, he is also affiliated with several hospitals. He is listed in several “Who’s Who” and included in “2000 Outstanding Religious Personalities and Scholars of the 20th Century” and others.

PRAYER BOOKS

The prayers mentioned here may be found in most Tamam (complete) *Khordeh Avesta* prayer books, notably in Er. Kanga’s *Khordeh Avesta* which can also be viewed at www.avesta.org. [See references, page 56],

Useful information about the contents, significance and devotional uses of various prayers may be found in the “Companion FEZANA Journals” [see *FEZANA Journal Winter 2005* page 56] ■

A meritorious deed

Helping a deserving Athornan to become a navar is a highly meritorious act and perhaps the best way to benefit a soul, either deceased or living.

According to our Pahlavi scriptures, for whatever good deeds or prayers a person performs in his entire life, a portion of the benefit accrues to the one who helped him do the good or become a priest.

Assistance to become a navar is both the best and the most unique way to benefit the soul of the deceased, because it will reap the benefits as long as the young priest lives and prays. It is unique because a deceased person can no longer make such a choice and benefit from it, but it is not too late for a relative to act on his behalf. In such a case, the benefit accrues to the living person as well, in this world and the other.

It is also our long established custom to make someone a navar for the spiritual benefit (*sawab*) of a living person. Indeed my uncle, a life-long Yaozdathregar, chose to make my brother navar, for such a sawab.

As the whole structure of post-death rituals depends entirely on priests, and as it is nowadays so hard to find them, the benefits to the community at large of enabling someone to be a priest is also immeasurable, as if life can spring back from death.

Death, be not proud!

How you can help. WZO has started a **Navar Fund** to assist deserving Athornans to become a navar. To donate to this worthy cause contact Dr. Kersey H. Antia at kerseyantia@yahoo.com or WZO at Secretary@w-z-o.org (website www.w-z-o.org).

Audio Tapes Available

Dr. Kersey Antia has recorded two audio tapes:

- (1) A tape of Gathas recited in the original meter, and
- (2) A tape on uniting body, mind and spirit using Zarathushti principles, which could be very helpful in relieving stress, ulcers, high blood pressure, headaches and tension, etc.

The tapes are available from Dr. Antia [*see above*] for a donation. All proceeds from the tapes will be donated by Dr. Antia to the Navar Fund. ■