

## Reverence of ancestors

Respect for the departed loved ones in the form of an annual observance of reverence is known from ancient times in most cultures. The rituals of observance are often misinterpreted as a manner of ‘**worship**’ of the Divinity. The use of the word ‘**worship**’ can be a misnomer in many ways since **worship usually refers to reverent love and devotion accorded to a ‘divine being’**. This act of reverence does not confer any belief that the departed ancestors have become some kind of divinity worthy of reverence in a divine sense but, rather in the **sense of a dutiful, loving, devoted remembrance**.

The social purpose of ancestor veneration is to maintain the bond of family loyalty, and family lineage. The act is a mark of showing respect and devotion to them and, possibly, a way of seeking their guidance. Some merely visit the resting place of their parents and other ancestors, leave flowers and pray to them in order to honour and remember them. Some cultures believe that their ancestors actually need to be provided for by their descendants. Others do not believe that the ancestors are aware of what their descendants do, but that the mere earthly expression of respect and devotion accorded to them in their after-lives is what is really important.

## Indo-Aryan observances

### Vedic Rituals

Ritualistic reverence accorded to ancestors was particularly predominant among the Indo-Aryans. It is still followed implicitly among the Vedic and Avestan peoples. Among the Hindus after the demise of a family member, the family observes *Śraddha*, a ritual of a ten-day mourning period of reverence to the loving departed. The deceased person, for whom the ritual of *Shraddhā* is being performed, is considered as a follower of Vasu, his parents as followers of Rudra and his grandparents as followers of Aditya. Therefore, during *Shraddhā* the names of the parent(s), grandparent(s) and great grandparent(s) are pronounced as representatives of Vasu, Rudra & Aditya respectively.

*Rg Vēda x.15.1.1: May the ancestors residing on Earth attain an evolved region. May the ancestors who are in heaven, that is, at a higher plane of existence, never degrade. May the ones who are at a medium plane of existence, attain a higher plane. may the ancestors who symbolise the Truth protect us. May our lineage grow.*

Eighteen months later, they observe the ritual of *Pitri Tarpana*, in which the family offers tributes to the deceased in the form of a prayer to a deity and the deceased ancestors' soul to obtain their blessings. The ritual involves *Puja* (sacred chants), and offerings of food and water. It may take place on the banks of a holy river, depending on the geographical situation, just before sunrise on a particularly auspicious day.

During these above rituals, the family prepares the food items that the deceased liked and offers this food to the deceased as well as to cows and birds. They are also obliged to offer a small feast of specific preparations to eligible Brahmins. Only after these rituals have been fulfilled do the family members partake of the consecrated food.

Each year the family remembers all its loved departed by re-enacting the entire ritual of **Pitri Paksha** just before **Navr̄̄tri** in the shared months of **Ashwin** and **Bhadrapada** for a fortnight (called the dark fortnight, beginning with the Full Moon day and ending with the New Moon.

### **Vedic belief: an acquired genetic significance of ‘Karma inheritance’**

We owe a lot to our parents and ancestors since we owe all our genetic characteristics to them. *Each ancestor is actually present in our personal makeup as a genetic characteristic.* Arguably, among the Vedic people their belief tradition involving ‘**Karma**’ implies one could supposedly even inherit some ‘**Karmas**’ of one’s parents and ancestors as each ancestor is deemed to be actually present in one as a **karmic predisposition**. This concept may even be further extended to multiple lives, some karmic tendency having been inherited from the ancestors from a previous life, although they may not be related to one in this life.

By thinking of the deceased ancestors with gratitude and trying to propitiate them, the Vedic people believe they are actually trying to free themselves from various karmic predispositions acquired as a result of their **karmic obligation** with several people.

According to Vedic tradition, **Manusm̄ti** (Skt: **Mānava-Dharmaśāstra**) around 200 BCE - 400CE records the words of Brahma, the Creator and is part of the textual tradition among the Hindus. By attributing the words to the Supreme force, the text takes on an authoritative tone as a statement on Dharma. Their treatises (śāstras) - the Indic Law branch of learning of religious and legal duty, ethics, etc. presents itself as a discourse given by **Manu**, the progenitor of mankind, to a group of rishis (seers), who beseech him to relate and explain to them the "law of all the social classes" (Code of Manu 1.2). His ordinance is that the devotees should duly perform all the rites laid down in respect of the deities and the **Pitrīs**. Manu, then, became the standard point of reference for all future Dharmaśāstras that followed it.

*Manu Smṛti 3.76: ‘The offering given into the fire reaches the sun; ....The devas and pitris bless us and harmonize our environment and means, endurance and cleansing of the conscience by undergoing the ritual of five fires - Pancha-agni’*

### **Vedic concept of Re-incarnation - being reborn as another individual or creature.**

Both, in Iran and on the Subcontinent ancestor-worship among the Gathic/ Avestan peoples developed into the deeper and the more philosophical idea of the **Fravasi**, which is the **Eternal Principle** of each individual, representative being in ethereal form, after whose replica each being at birth is made on earth. *This Eternal Principle of each individual living entity (human and non-human creature) was present before the birth of the entity, is present during life and will continue to exist forever after death. Even Ahura Mazda Himself, possesses a Fravaši.*

*Yasna 65.6: 'Reverence be to the righteous Fravašis of those who exist, of those who had existed before and of those yet to be born.....'*

Being eternal the **Fravaši** of each human and creature, which existed before birth, during birth and will continue to exist forever, eliminates the **possibility of reincarnation** in our Zoroastrian

beliefs. Having an individualistic nature there obviously cannot be any exchange, interchange or replacement of the *Fravaši*, which is specific to each entity, both humans and creatures.

*Fravardin Yasht 13.74: ‘..among the animals reverence be to all who wander wild,  
those living in the waters, those on land, the creatures  
who are winged and to domesticated animals...’*

***Therefore, in our spiritual beliefs there can never be any reincarnation into another living entity, which already has a differently unique and specific, individualistic Fravaši of its own.*** The body of each person with its individualistic physical, mental, moral and spiritual capacities is shaped and formed after the model, which each particular *Fravaši* presents. This, indeed, is the very foundation on which the *Fravardēgān days* at the end of each year are observed by Zoaroastrians for the specific felicitation of the *Fravaši* of their departed loved ones, who are invoked by their own individualistic names.

**Fravardin Yasht**, which is recited by the Zoroastrians, for the invocation of the *Fravašis* during the *Fravardēgān days* gives us the idea of the *Fravašis*, the ever-present spiritual essences as being active cosmic forces. It is believed that since they desire to be recognized and remembered, they are eager to guide and inspire, pouring forth their power of benediction and bestowing strength and blessings to the good, virtuous loved ones on earth, when they are invoked, but only in a good cause.

It follows, then, that in our beliefs we must also spiritually prepare ourselves and invoke our own *Fravaši*, becoming conscious of this '**Divine Presence**' within ourselves –each one of us.

*Yasna 1.18: ‘I learn as I work with the righteous Fravašis of.....  
& the righteous Fravaši of my own soul....’*

It would appear that they are all too ready to receive blessings of the cosmic forces working in the universe while sharing the Universal Divine Consciousness. [For a concept of the Universal Consciousness see the article: [The Philosophical concept of 'Consciousness' in Zarathushta's Teachings in Avesta - Zoroastrian Archives www.avesta.org](#)].

Here are some select references to justify the above statements:-

**Fravašim:**

*Fravardin Yt.13.80: ‘The first among all, reverence be to the Fravaši of Ahura Mazda,  
the greatest, best, fairest, firmest wisest, most gracious,  
having reached the highest stage....’*

*Vənd 19.14: ‘Thou, O Zarathushtra, too, doth revere  
the Spiritual Fravaši of Ahura Mazda’*

*Yasna 16.2: ‘Reverence be to the Fravaši of the righteous Zarathushtra.....’*

*Fravardin Yt.13.148: ‘Reverence be to every Fravasi among the Fravašis*

*of all righteous men and women, in the invocation of whom, we have heard, Zarathushtra to be the foremost and the best follower of the doctrine of Ahura Mazda....'*

*Yasna 13.7: 'Reverence be to the Fravasi of all mortal life belonging to the good creation.....'*

*Vənd 2.6: 'Reverence be to the Fravaši of the righteous Yima Vianghan who after he fell from grace, was relegated to again become a mortal.....'*

**Fravašimcha:**

*Tir Yasht 8.2: 'Reverence be to the Fravaši of the holy Spitama Zarathushtra.....'*

**Fravašia:**

*Yasna 23.2: 'Reverence be to the righteous Fravašis of Gayomard - the first mortal, of Zarathushtra Spitama, Kai Vistaśpa, Isat-vastra - the first followers of the Good Religion.'*

**Fravašēh:**

*Yasna 1.6: '.....as I work with the righteous Fravašis of women who have borne many sons...'*

*Yasna 1.18: 'I learn as I work with the righteous Fravašis of..... & the righteous Fravaši of my own soul....'*

*Yasna 3.2: 'Reverence be to the Fravaši of the true worshipper .....& propitiation of Zarathushtra..'*

*Yasna 23.4: 'Reverence be to the righteous Fravašis of the powerful, triumphant first followers....'*

*Visp 11.7: 'Reverence be to the righteous Fravašis of.....& of the Saoshyants who work for the ultimate renovation of our worldly existence..'*

**Fravašyāōi:**

*Yasna 16.7: 'Reverence be to the righteous Fravašis of those departed souls in the brilliant and blissful House of Best Existence...'*

*Yasna 65.6: 'Reverence be to the righteous Fravašis of those who exist, those who had existed before and of those yet to be born.....'*

*Tir Yasht 8.34:- Fravašis of the righteous are here described as also 'assisting Apam Napat, the source of waters and the Kayanian glory residing in the Sea - Vouru-kaśa in the distribution of the waters.'*

*Mehr Yasht 10.3: 'The righteous good, powerful and beneficent Fravašis will bestow intellectual progeny to those who do not break their promise.'*

*Mehr Yasht 10.66: 'The powerful, righteous Fravašis will accompany those righteous Mazda worshippers.'*

*Mehr Yasht 10.100: ‘Supportive of Mithra, in his quest, drives Sraośa on the right side and Rashna on the left surrounded and assisted by waters, plants and the righteous Fravaśis.’*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.1: ‘The powerful righteous Fravaśis even come to the assistance and support of Ahura Mazda, too.’*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.45: ‘Reverence be to the righteous, good, powerful, beneficent Fravasis, who achieve victory in their brilliant garments and helmets of iron and bearing iron armour and weapons against an army of thousands of daevas bearing spears....’*

[This verse appears to indicate that at least part of this Yasht was added to, sometimes during the Iron Age in Central Asia (ca. Iron Age I: 1200-1000 BCE; Iron Age II: 1000-550 BCE)]

*Fravardin Yasht 13.45: ‘....one who offers reverence with food, clothing & payer to the Fravaśis of the righteous please them. Not being in distress and unoffended they bless the person...’*

*Yasna 60.4: “....the righteous, holy Fravaśis fetch beneficent remedies and deliver them far and wide - as far-reaching as the river, as distant as the sun to fulfill the needs of the morally good....”*

#### Fravaśyāō:

*Fravardin Yasht 13.18: ‘...the ruler, who offers gifts to the Fravaśis of the righteous he becomes most powerful among men.....’*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.21: ‘...reverence be to the Fravaśis of the righteous in the house, the village, the town, the country and to the Holy Pontiff.....’*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.59, 60, 61 & 62: ‘Reverence be to the 99,999 righteous, good, powerful, beneficent Fravaśis who keep a watchful eye on the shining Sea, Vouro-kaśa, who watch over the Star Hapto-iring - the ‘light-spreader’ who watch over the astral body of Kersāspa, son of Sām of plaited hair, the valiant club bearer, who watch over and guard the seed of the righteous Spitaman Zarathushtra (unto the end of time).*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.69: ‘...the ruler of a nation who evokes the assistance of the Fravaśis triumphs over hostile opponent if he be attacked unawares....’*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.74: ‘..among the animals reverence be to all who wander wild, those living in the waters, those on land, the creatures who are winged and to domesticated animals...’*

*Fravardin Yasht 13.143: ‘Reverence be to the Fravaśis of righteous men and women of Airyanic as well as Turanian and Sairima countries....’*

*Yasna 2.6: ‘...with this good intentioned offering I seek to revere the righteous, helpful powerful, prosterity increasing Fravaśis.....’*

*Yasna 16.5: ‘Reverence be to the Creator, Ahura Mazda, Mithra, Sraośa, Rashna and their helpful, powerful and beneficent Fravaśis.....’*

*Yasna 23.1: ‘...reverence be to the Fravaśis of the righteous in the house, the village, the town, the country who protect the atmosphere, the waters, the properties, and shelter domestic animals and the child in the womb.....’*

*Visp 21.1: ‘.....worthy, indeed, are those waters, those trees to whom righteous Fravaśis pay homage.....’*

#### Fravaśēḥ:

*Yasna 23.3: ‘...reverence and praise be to the righteous Fravaśis of the righteous departed, siblings of tender age, diligent maidens in this house.....’*

#### Fravaśīē:

*Fravardin Yasht 13.75: Here the Fravaśis have been described as ‘most valiant, beneficent, heroic, profitable, steadfast, triumphant, most powerful, efficacious’*

#### Fravaśibyō:

*Fravardin Yasht 13.46: Here there is an allusion of the ‘winds carrying the scent of the offering of frankincense and fragrant material to the Fravaśis to assist in a victorious outcome during times of impending hostilities....’*

*Yasna 4.2: Chanting of the Gathas, among other worthy deeds are ‘dedicated to Ahura Mazda, to the righteous Fravaśis, Sraośa...’*

*Visp 11.6 & 9: ‘With this scent from the Fire wood I dedicate to Ahura Mazda, Sraosa, Mithra, to the righteous Fravaśis.....in adoration, homage, propitiation and glorification.’*

*Visp 11.15: To those righteous Fravaśis of those who are strong, powerful and righteous....’*

#### Fravaśināñm:

*Fravardin Yasht 13.156: ‘May the strong, triumphant and victorious Fravaśis of the righteous among the Paoiryotkaeshas (those of the ancient Faith) and Nabanishta (their next of kin) enter this house and, being pleased, move about freely...’*

*Yasna 22.27: ‘I am privileged to work with the righteous Fravaśis of the first followers of the Faith and of those women who have borne many sons...’*

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[Below is a lucid explanatory exposé of our **Holy Muktād**, which the author, **Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia** has kindly given permission to be included in this essay]

## Fravardēgan days

Zoroastrians all over the world celebrate the last ten days of their religious calendar year, that is, from Roj Ashtad Mah Spandarmad to the Vahishtoisht Gatha, as the **Muktād**. The word, **Muktād** is also referred to as **Muktāt**, which is closer to the Sanskrit word from which it is derived - ‘**mukt ātmān**’. It is the Sanskrit rendering of the Avestan word ‘**ashāunām**’.

**Muktād** is a joyous occasion for remembering and welcoming the **Fravaśis**. We need to show our love and gratitude to them, as they help us in many ways. We have to thank both the types of **Fravaśis** - those helping Nature and those helping the souls of men (living as well as departed ones). In old books, among the list of duties of a Zoroastrian, the duty of celebrating the **Muktād** is foremost.

According to Saddār Bundahiśn during these days **the souls of the departed too come down to the earth. The Fravaśis, who are the guardians of the soul, accompany them.** All souls are

liberated, from wherever they are, even from hell. The souls of the pious make merry as if a traveller has returned home. The souls of the evil do not experience much joy as they are in the dread of returning back. Zoroastrians erroneously believe that **Muktād** are the days of remembering just their departed ones. In fact, **Muktād** are the days for the collective worship of all **Fravaśis**, followed by the individual remembrance of souls and **Fravaśis** of one's dear departed ones.

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During the days of **Muktād**, the **Fravaśis** come collectively to this world and go to their respective houses. Whenever the **Muktād** are properly celebrated and the **Fravaśis** are duly propitiated, the affairs of those people are successful, and there is all round prosperity. People are blessed with health, strength, happiness, protection and abundance of waters. The **Fravaśis** even bless the city and nation in which they are remembered.

## Preparation for Muktād

In the past, especially when **Muktād** was mainly celebrated in the house, preparations were made in the house. The full house or a particular room was cleaned and white-washed. Provisions and fuel were stocked at least to last the days of **Muktād** and new Year. This was done so that one did not need to go shopping during these days. People, as far as possible do not go out of the house, as souls and **Fravaśis** come home, and it is not proper to leave them and go. Sometimes night long vigil was also kept by people. People of the house, especially women who were actively involved with preparations, took a *Nahān*.

All family members used to contribute their share towards buying house-hold items. This sharing gave rise to the term **Bēhru**, a Persian word, which means "share" Today, what we understand by the term **Bēhru** is the consecrated **vase or karasyō** in which water and flowers are kept during the days of **Muktād**. The **Bēhru** is symbolic of the unity of the family and does not necessarily represent the departed person.

## Muktād in the house

It is advisable to observe the **Muktād** in the house. If not the prayers, at least some arrangement can be done to welcome the **Fravaśis** home. The main requirements for observing **Muktād** in the house are fresh water, flowers, a metallic vase or a Karasyō, a metallic or stone table, fire, divō and chanting of prayers. Flowers can be arranged in a vase filled with water and kept in the prayer room or a secluded corner of the house. Water and flowers in the vase have to be changed daily. Flowers and water are the visible emblems and symbolic reminders of the invisible souls and **Fravaśis**.

Water and flowers are representatives of Khordad and Amardad Ameshaspand. They are the carriers of reward for the soul of the deceased. They also uphold life and so do **Fravaśis**.

Moreover, all the three are also carriers of divine blessings. Hence water, plant and **Fravaśis** are remembered together at several places.

## **Duration - 10 or 18 days**

The number of days **Muktād** is celebrated for is variable. Generally we celebrate 10 days of **Muktād**, starting from Roj Ashtad of Mah Spandarmad and ending at Vahishtoisht Gatha. Zoroastrian texts have references to 10 Fravardēgān days.

In **Fravardin Yasht 13.49**: ‘.....*dasa pairi khshafnāō*.....’ refers to the **Fravaśis**.  
‘....moving about freely for ten nights.....’

The verse reads as follows:- ‘*Reverence be to the good, heroic, beneficent Fravaśis of the righteous. They, on the occasion of this Holy Hamaspathermāēdām festival for ten nights, come down to this family house and move about freely towards those desiring assistance.*’

For a long time in India, Muktād was celebrated for 18 days. It started on Roj Ashishwanh of Mah Spandarmad and ended on the dawn of roj Amardad mah Fravardin. The earliest evidence of 18 days Muktād is through references in a book which relate such celebrations since the 15th century

The reason Muktād were lengthened to 18 days was that the 7 days after Vahishtōisht Gatha are important since they belong to the 7 Amshaspands. Hörmazd Roj is Navrōz, Ardibēhēsht Rōj is for Rapithwin consecration, Khordād Rōj is Khordād Sāl. Hence these days were clubbed together to form 18 Muktād days. It should be noted that though the Muktād are said to be of eighteen days, on Ashishwanh Rōj and Amardād Rōj hardly any ritual prayers are performed.

In the early seventies, especially due to the initiative taken by Dasturji Khurshed Dabu and others, **Muktād** were once again gradually reverted back to 10 days.

**Hamaspathermāēdām Gahambar:** The later five days of the 10 day **Muktad** are also the days of the sixth and the last Gahambar, Hamaspathermāēdām. According to Zoroastrian religion, each of the 6 creations was created during one of the Gahambars. Mankind was created on the last Gahambar.

## **Purpose of Muktād**

In most religious traditions, the departed ones are specially invoked once a year. The Hindus refer these days as **Shraddha** and the Christians as **Lent** (before Good Friday). According to Zoroastrian tradition the **Fravaśis** descend at the end of the year.

During the **Muktād**, one has to keep away from routine work, devote time to the remembrance of **Fravaśis** and do works of charity. **Fravaśis** come whenever they are invited. However, during the days of **Muktād** all the **Fravaśis** descend. When they come to the house they have to be remembered and worshipped. If they are happy, they give blessings of prosperity and happiness. They should not go back dissatisfied. Great rewards can be obtained by the observation of Muktad.

Muktad 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 who have made a difference to our lives. These days also help us to renew the MEMORY of our dear departed ones. They also help us

realise our RESPONSIBILITY for the future generations. Just as we reap the rewards of the actions done by our past ancestors, we should do something for the future generations.



This beautiful photograph is from a book on Parsis written (probably late 1800s - early 1900s) by a French traveller, journalist and photographer, Mademoiselle Delphine Menants, who lived for months among the rural and urban Parsis of Gujarat to study their way of life and their religion. Back in France, she published 2 Volumes titled 'Les Parsis' in French. Volume I is devoted to our Scriptures. Volume II describes the Parsi way of life in Gujarat and contains a large number of photographs. Only Volume II, it appears, was translated into English and printed. There is no mention of the year, the printer or the publisher of the French publication or even of the translator into English. But M. M. Murzban, Esq., Bar-at-law (Eng), Advocate of the High Court of Bombay and Officier d'Academie (France) is quoted as the 'Editor' of the translated version called - 'The Parsis in India, Volume II' in 1917.

### **Special prayers for Muktād**, especially for laity:

1. For the first five days, ***Frāmraōt Hā*** (commentary of Ashem Vohu) or 1200 Ashem Vohu in the Khshnuman of Ardāfravash has to be recited.

2. For the five days of **Gathas**, each Gatha on its respective day or 1200 Ahunavars in the Khshnuman of Gatha has to be recited.

### 3. **Muktād nō namaskār**

4. **Lākhi nu bhantar** 570 Yatha + 210 Ashem + 120 **Yēnghē Hātāñm** (total 900) in the Khsnuman of Sarosh has to be recited daily for 10 days.

## Customs for Muktād

1) Not to cut hair and nails, so as not to create **nasō** and impurity.

2) Not to stitch clothes or other such avoidable chores, so that one could devote time to prayers and remembrance of **Fravaśis** Men should not engage in activities except doing their duty and performing meritorious deeds, so that the Fravashis may return with delight and pronounce benedictions.

3) To keep fire in the house and offer fragrance to it, praise, **Fravaśis** recite the Fravardin Yasht, perform Āfringan and recite Avesta prayers so that the **Fravaśis** experience comfort, joy and delight and confer blessings.

Some customs arose out of ignorance and were later discontinued. For instance, a Jama (long white robe) was hung on sugarcane sticks to remind of the presence of the souls of departed persons. There was also a custom of cleaning the corners of the house with a broom immediately after Muktad to make sure that all the souls and **Fravaśis** depart, lest some may stay back and take back the soul of a living person as company. Presently there is a practice of going from Agyari to Agyari to pay homage to Muktad. This practice is not in agreement with the spirit of Muktad, wherein we need to stay at home, pray and invite the **Fravaśis** in our houses. Moreover, in the past Muktads were mostly celebrated at home and not in Agyaris.

## Important days during Muktād

1. Roj Māhrēspand – Din Beh Mino Māhrēspand: On this day the Zarathushtra was accepted as a prophet by King Vishtasp.

2. Hamaspathermaēdhēm Gahambar days: To consecrate Gahambar preferably on Ahunavad Gatha or any of the five Gathas.

4. Vahishtoisht Gatha is known as Patēti - day of Repentance. On this day, preferably in the Ushāhin Gah, Patet has, Patet has to be recited to seek forgiveness for sins committed knowingly or unknowingly during the year. The night of Vahishtoisht Gatha is also referred to as '**Valāvō**', that is, farewell (for the Fravashis). **Muktad** are the days of heightened communication between the material and spiritual worlds - our need of health, happiness, peace and prosperity is fulfilled through the blessings of the souls and the **Fravaśis**, and their need for our remembrance is fulfilled by our sincere prayers and invocations.

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