

Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 377: A Mobed's Recollections and Involvement in Muktdad Gatha Days!

Hello all Tele Class friends:

Shehenshahi 10 days of Muktdad including 5 Days of Vahishtoisht Gahambar/Gatha

Shehenshahi 10 days of Muktdad Gatha starts next week on Thursday August 6th 2020, Roj Aastaad Maah Asfandaard YZ 1389 with 5 Vahishtoisht Gahambaar and Gatha days starting from August 11th Tuesday followed by our Navroze on August 16th Sunday.

In normal times, in India and Pakistan, in all over cities and villages, and especially in Mumbai, all Parsi/Irani Humdins will be going to Atash Behrams and Agiyaris (Fire Temples) for attending their dear departed ones' Muktdad prayers by their family Mobeds.

However, due these extra ordinary times due to COVID-19, all Atashkadehs will be restricting all Humdins from visiting Atashkadehs during these holy days and only a few will be allowed to visit them based on the local Government Rulings. However, all Atashkadehs will have the regular Muktdad Prayers.

We were performing 5 Gatha Days prayers in our ZAF (Miami/Ft. Lauderdale/Boca Raton) for 8 years from 2009 through 2016, and unfortunately, we could not continue after that. In August 2015, our very good friend, current FEZANA President, ArZan Wadia, at that time VP FEZANA, requested me to write my recollections of Muktdad while growing up in the small village of Tarapur, and then in USA. These recollections were included in August 15, 2015 Parsi Khabar Blog of ArZan. I have decided to repeat these recollections today in this weekly but due to its length, divided it up in two WZSEs #377 and #378. So, here is the first installment of these recollections and next week we will complete them.

A Mobed's Recollections and Involvement in Muktdad Gatha Days!

In our ZAF, in 2015, we performed the 8th annual Muktdad Gatha days prayers, once again in Jeroo Irani home and it was so heartwarming to see many of our Humdins in ZAF, Orlando CFG and ZATAMBAY participating in these prayers. Please see the attached photo of our last year Muktdad Gatha beautiful layout.

My recollections and involvement in Muktdad Days growing up in the small village of Tarapur where my dear dad was a Panthaky for over 50 years, was presented to reminisce what it was like in a small village in old days celebrating Muktdad with prayers, special food preparations, community spirit, etc.

These memories of Muktdad really fill the need of a WZSE during our Muktdad days. In addition, [we have attached an article by my very good friend and the Principal of Dadar Athornan Institute, Dr. Ervad Ramiyar Karanjia on: Making Muktdad More Meaningful](#) as well as [what Muktdad Prayers to recite](#). Hope you all enjoy reading them.

So here it goes:

On the P&O SS Oronsay ship somewhere near Suez Canal during the first part of August 1960, we some 20 or so J. N. Tata Endowment Scholars on our way to USA/UK for higher studies, read on the ship's daily news flash that Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, "father of Indian Nuclear Program", selected Tarapur, Maharashtra State, as the site for the first Indian Atomic Energy Station! What are they doing to my Birthplace, I wondered at that time!

Yes, I was born as the last of 11 children to a Udvada Mobed family in Tarapur, where my father was a Panthaky (clergy in charge) of the Tarapur Agiary. In those days, 1940's and 50's, there were over 100 Parsi families in Tarapur. Most families owned large tracts of agricultural land, referred to as "Vaadi" or "Jungle", within 10 to 30 miles of Tarapur and most of the family men spent majority of their time in these family places whereas the rest of their families resided in Tarapur.



My father was in charge of all ceremonies for these families, especially for the 18 days of Muktaad in those days.

Before the Muktaad days, our whole family was engaged in the preparations for the Muktaad Days and one particular activity I still remember with fondness is the preparations of "Deemori" and "Gaanghaa", the specialized Muktaad prayers items. "Deemori" was made from the dough of the "Paapri" (sweet rotli) but you take a pinch of the dough and make a small ball out of it, size of a big pea, and then these balls were fried. Whereas "Gaanghaa" was a mixture of legumes like whole Mung, and different kinds of whole beans, etc. which were roasted. The two items were then used in the Satum prayers during the Muktaad days. We children just loved these items.

Also, the Agiary and our home was thoroughly cleaned and whitewashed before the Muktaad days. During these white washing, we children were the "Go-fers", go for this and go for that and we gladly did those chores with gusto, so as to receive some bonus in terms of "Deemori" "Gaanghaa", or Paapri/Malido, and other sweets! The other preparation was to collect all families' "Behraa"s or "Karasyaa"s (small metal pots) for the Muktaad. Each family had to inscribe the names of the departed ones of the families in Gujarati, so we knew which family they belong to. In those days, many "Behraa"s were double, one on top of the other. All were

of German silver and no glass or crystal vases like today. Dad had to arrange with local "Maalis" (gardeners) to supply flowers of different colors, mainly roses – no carnations or other types of flowers.

On Asfandard Mahino (month) and Ashishvangh Roj (day), all the age old 6-8 Marble tables in Agiary were thoroughly cleaned, washed and dried, and all the "Behraa"s were cleaned and washed in the afternoon in the Agiary with its "chokkhku" (ceremonially made pure) well water. The father will then assign tables by families and all the "Behraa"s were placed in some order and the flowers were placed on top of them. Then Parsi "Deeva"s (oil lamps with wicks) were lit and the whole Muktaad arrangement was ready for the 18 days prayers starting on the next day of Aastaad Roj.

The whole Parsi Waad (street) was teeming with activities since all the family men from their lands would be visiting their families during the Muktaad. Each day, early evening, the huge grounds in front of the Agiary and the huge ruins of Vicaajee Meherjee Palace was used for Hu Tu Tu, wrestling, cricket, and such other sports. I was too little to participate but was an awed spectator at the strength of these young Parsi men.

Just before sunset, my dad would come to Agiary to conduct Hum Bandagi (community prayer) every day of the Muktaad. Few minutes after sunset, the

Aiwisruthrem Geh (4th part of the 5 part day) will start and all the men (only) will be coming into the Agiary, do their Kusti Paadyaab prayer, and gather in front of the Muktaad tables and my dad will lead all of us in a Hum Bandagi. What a sight that was!! After that the crowd scattered, some continue praying, and others gathered outside Agiary in groups swapping tall tales and some others went home. We had to continue our Daily Farajiyat (prayers) including Fraamraot Ha, Satum no Kardo, etc. One of the brothers will perform the Boi ceremony. After our prayers, Dad will orchestrate the preparations of khumchaas (trays) with fruits for the Aafringaan and Farokshi prayers next day. Then all brothers went home for our family meal and to bed for the big day tomorrow.

Every Muktaad Day the whole family got up at 4 AM or so, took bath in an open Moree (bathroom) with cold and hot water pails from our well, which we mix to create hot water for the bath using a "karasyaa" (a small metal pot), no shower. Then after a short morning prayer, we were in the kitchen to help out with the preparations of the morning Satums (prayers) in Agiary. Mom and my sisters were busy preparing food for the Satums which consist of eggs, rotlis, a sweet dish and chaai (tea). By this time, dad had gone to Agiary to prepare for the Satum prayers, followed by us brothers carrying Satum items in big Khumchaas. The main hall of the Agiary was transformed into a magical ambiance with Parsi Deevas, German Silver "Behraa"s, fresh flowers in them and the sweet smell of sandalwood.

My two maternal uncles (Maamaas), Mobeds Maneckshah and Sohrab Bharda, will have already started a Yasna ceremony and pretty soon you will hear the sonorous sound of "Laalo" (pestle) striking "Haavanim" (mortar) which you can hear from far away. My Dad and brothers will be reciting Satum prayers for different families and the whole Agiary would be filled with wonderful sounds of prayers, sandalwood and loban (frankincense) smoke! After a Satum, the attending family members will do the loban ceremony and then on to the next Satum for another family. During the Satum recitals, we had to walk to our home where mom and our sisters have prepared "Daran"s (small round rotli), Paapri (fried rotli), Malido (sweet dish), etc. for the Baj ceremonies in "Langri"s (small metal vessels) with a lid on them and we had to carry them to Agiary for our uncles to recite Baj prayers.

After all Satums were recited, there will be a short break for the breakfast using the items from Satums. Then the main prayers of Aafringaans and Farokshi will start with Humdin family members attending the prayers and doing Loban ritual after the prayers were done. During that time, our uncles have completed the Yasna ceremony and they will be performing the Baj ceremonies for the Humdin families.

During these prayers, it is time for the “lunch” Satums and we had to walk home to get the khumchaas with the Satum items usually rice, some meat or fish dish and may be a vegetable. While Satums were being prayed, Dad will prepare Baj “Langri”s with Daran, Malido, Paapri, some sweets and fruits from Aafrigaan for the Humdin families and we had to deliver them to the families homes by foot. There was one humongous home in which multiple families resided and one of the family did not even have an outside window and even during the mid-day, the home was dark, and we used to be scared to deliver Baj to this family. After the deliveries, and after the “lunch” Satums are over, we went home for our family lunch usually from the “lunch” Satum items. Then it is time for the adults to have a siesta and us kids usually had a ball playing different games.

The siesta is over before 3 PM and it is time for tea together with some sweet dish. And then the preparations for the evening Satums and around 5 PM we have to carry the khumchaas again to the Agiary with the evening Satum items and Satums were performed. After that, the day’s prayers were completed and the cycle of the activities with sports, Hum Bandagi, etc. is repeated. This then was the daily schedule of the Muktaad days.

During the 5 Gatha days, we had to pray each Gatha prayer after the night Hum Bandagi. On the fifth Gatha Day, the Pateti, we also had to pray Patet Pashemani which is a prayer to repent for all the bad things you did during that year and ask forgiveness from Dadar Ahura Mazda and promised to yourself not to repeat those bad things next year.

At the midnight on the last Gatha day, we had to get up and prepare for the “Paachhli Raat nu Bhanwaanu” – Aafringaan, Farokshi and Satum prayers for the night to say good bye to the Asho Farohars who will return to heaven with blessings to you for treating them right with food, flowers, water, etc.

The next day will be Navroze – Farvardin Mahino and Hormuz Roj – Saal Mubarak to all! This was the most important day for us children since we get to wear brand new clothes, and after performing all chores mentioned above, we get to visit our maternal grandparents next door and other friendly families with our new clothes where we were treated with all kinds of delicious foods and even a Silver Rupee coin at some places. We stuffed ourselves with sev (vermicelli), dahi (yogurt), malido, paapri, mesur paak (chick peas fudge), and my favorite kopraa paak (sweet coconut fudge). This was the best day of the whole Muktaad for us.

The next big day was Rapithwan Ijwaani – Farvardin Mahino and Ardibehesht Roj – when we restart the Rapithwan Geh and there will be a community Jashan in Agiary to welcome Rapithwan Geh with the whole village in attendance!

And finally, there was Khordad Saal – Farvardin Mahino and Khordad Roj – the birthday of Zarathushtra – Khordad Saal Mubarak! Again, a full house afternoon Jashan in Agiary with the whole village attending.

The 18 Days Muktaad are over and on Farvardin Mahino and Amardad Roj - Amardad Saal Mubarak – after the morning prayers, all the Behras will be dismantled, washed, dried and given back to the Humdin families. The days of hard work, great food, feeling of belonging to

the Parsi customs are all over and routine daily life will start again.

The first part of these recollections is over. We will continue these recollections in USA in the second part in the next WZSE #378.

May the Flame of Fellowship, Love, Charity and Respect for all burn ever eternal in our hearts so we can do HIS work with humility, diligence and eternal enthusiasm!

In HIS service 24/7!

Atha Jamyaat, Yatha Aafrinaamahi! (May it be so as we wish!)

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli



