

Animal Sacrifices Are They Mentioned In The Pak Avesta?

The word ‘sacrifice’ means giving up or forsaking of a thing, a quality, and it could also mean the killing of an animal.

Our Mazdayasni Zarathushti Religion is fundamentally based on the purity of body, mind and soul. It emphasizes Universal Brotherhood (*Ardafravash*) and extends it to all the Kingdoms of Nature which include, most importantly, the animal kingdom, and the plants, minerals as well as the elements that are within us and without us such as the elements of fire, water, air and earth. Subsequently, great care and importance is given to the preservation of the sacred elements of Nature, namely, fire, water, air and earth. These elements are to be safeguarded from being polluted because their care and purity is responsible for the physical as well as the spiritual good health of mankind. All the kingdoms of Nature are interdependent and all must progress towards the Divine Event, called Frashogard, when all creations will be once again united with Ahura Mazda. For this reason, great emphasis is paid to the Universal Brotherhood of Ardafravash over which mankind is appointed as the custodian. Life on Earth is holistic and therefore we need the other kingdoms of Nature to sustain Life on Earth and in return, these kingdoms need us to look after their well-being. It follows that by not conserving the mineral, plant and the animal kingdom, we harm ourselves.

In all our rituals we invite and invoke Ahura Mazda, the Divine Yazads, the Holy *Fravashies* of Asho Zarathushtra and all the righteous men and women. Is it possible, is it ever conceivable, that during the consummation of any such rituals performed in the presence of the sacred elements with utmost purity of environment as well as of body, mind and soul, that “blood” or any other “*nasu*” formed a part of that ritual? Certainly not!

We are taught that as soon as life leaves the physical form, the dead body is considered “*druj*” or “*nasu*”. Even when the body is alive, any part of the physical body, viz. hair, nail, blood, or any excretion which is not part of the vital circulation within the body, immediately becomes “*druj-e nasu*” or defilement, an agent of decomposition. “*Nasu*” is considered to be *angre-mainyu* or the dark side. It is a repugnant thought to even consider for a minute that our rituals, performed with utmost purity and piety, in the sacred presence of the Divine Beings, can ever tolerate the use of “*nasu*” in any shape, form or in any way or manner what-so-ever!

As given in the Rivayet of Ervad Eduljee Kersaspjee Antia, in “The Kisseh of Sultan Mahmoud”, (Spiegel Memorial Volume, 1908, edited by Dr. J.J. Mody), it is stated that when Sultan Mahmoud of Gazni conquered Iran, he ordered all Zarathushti lives to be taken. The Zarathushtis of Yazd decided to appease the Sultan by showing him proof of the greatness of our Divinely Revealed Religion and its time-tested rituals! They performed a *Yasna (Ijeshne)* ceremony in the presence of the Sultan and requested him to view the outcome of the ritual on a white sheet they erected at a distance. They wished to prove to him that we invoke and invite the Divine Host in our rituals and they accept our rituals performed with the offerings of hom, jivam, and manthra, through their Divine Presence! While the ceremony was under way, the Sultan became furious and ordered the performing *mobeds* to be beheaded. The *mobeds*, under the leadership of Ardeshir Kermani, were scared but curious as to what could have evoked such an adverse reaction! They wanted to find out and upon investigation, found out that by mistake, a single hair had fallen from one of the *mobed's* beard and that attracted the dark forces instead of the Divine Beings which the *mobeds* felt certain would grace the ritual of *Yasna* they performed to appease the Sultan. When the detection of the hair was disclosed to the Sultan, he gave the *mobeds* a second chance and they did prove to him the greatness of our rituals, the purity with which our rituals are conducted and that ours is also a Religion that belongs to “Din-e Asmani” and we are “Ahl-I Kitab”! That is, ours is a

Revealed Religion, and we are bound by the Book! The second time, the Sultan saw the Divine Beings gracing the ritual on the white sheet the *mobeds* had erected. The reason for the white sheet was because only Zarathushtis were permitted to witness the rituals and this way, the Sultan could indirectly see the outcome of the ritual reflected on the white sheet and consequently the *mobeds* could save the Zarathushti lives. Indeed, Zarathushti lives were spared! This proves that our religion is not only “*baal karta baarik*”, meaning, finer than a hair, but also that fallen hair is a “*nasu*” and it attracts the evil forces. Hence, it is not even remotely imaginable that any kind of “*nasu*”, such as flesh or blood, could ever be ritually accepted or be permitted to become a part of any of our rituals.

The Holy Avesta clearly emphasises the care and preservation of animals. *Vohu Mano* or Bahman Ameshaspand is the Protector of Cattle. By killing animals, certainly the Archangel Bahman or *Vohu Mano* is not propitiated but desecrated! One of the four holy professions is that of a farmer/shepherd. By cultivating the earth and by breeding cattle, one cultivates *ashoi* and propitiates *Vohu Mano*. Killing an animal and offering it to the sacred fire equals to committing a grave spiritual sin! By offering dead meat to the sacred Fire, we pollute the Fire and by killing an animal we also offend Bahman Ameshashpand! Therefore, it is absolutely impossible that animal sacrifice was ritually practiced in our Mazdayasni Zarathushti religion.

The reason why we never ever offer animal sacrifice is because blood contains iron which is magnetic. Any separation of blood from the body’s main circulation draws impurities, “*druj*”, to itself. Any severed blood therefore, is charged with *druj* and becomes one of the greatest pollutants. In fact, over and over again, in our *Yashts*, warnings are given to those who seek the blessings and union with the *Yazads* (Divine Beings) through any impurities of body, mind and soul, as well as through improper cleanliness and neglect of the environment. Such individuals are penalized; never can they please or establish a communion with any Divine Being.

The avowal of some to accept animal sacrifices as part of Zarathushtrian rituals is perhaps due to the distortion of a certain phrase occurring in the sacred Avesta. For example, in Behram Yasht, stanza 17, the word “*pasu-pach*” is mentioned. Translated literally, it means to kill a “*pasu*” (animal). It is the incorrect rendition and misunderstanding of this one word that has caused the wrong idea in the minds of some that animal sacrifices were a part of Zarathushtrian rituals. “*Pasu*” denotes a gentle quality and hence it meant “*gospand*”, an animal that can be domesticated. Vile, ferocious beasts are not referred to as “*pasu*”. The beasts are called “*khrafastra*”.

As mentioned in the Behram Yasht, the devotee, when spiritually perfected, is required to perform the rite of “*pasu-pach*”. But was this rite of “*pasu-pach*” or “sacrifice” meant in a literal physical sense of killing an innocent “*pasu*” or was it meant mystically and metaphorically to give up the “animal” **within** each one of us, the animal qualities, the baser instincts, or the lower ‘self’? It stands to reason that this mystic rite of “*pasu-pach*” referred only to the killing or giving up of the animal instincts **within** so that the individual who wished to attune to the Divine Yazads could do so once the inner self was cleansed of vices. (For example, in the Ardibehesht and Vanant Yashts, we are asked to defeat the “brood of snakes, wolves, wicked men”, meaning the evil tendencies of snakes, wolves and wickedness that gain strength within our dual mentalities if not checked.)

We know from our Yashts that the Yazads, when invoked with purity, to bestow blessings, are said to appear in the forms of several mythic animals. These mythical or fairy-tale animals have been described with special qualities and unusual colours and characteristics. As mentioned in the Behram Yasht, Behram Yazad appears before the devotee, whom he wishes to bless, in the form of a celestial bull with golden horns and as a beautiful horse with yellow ears, etc. These mythical animals represent and depict a specific spiritual quality or attribute of Behram Yazad. Mythology has its roots in mysticism.

The different mythical forms that Behram Yazad (Tir Yazad and other Yazads) adopt are personifications of the different spiritual gifts the Yazads bestow upon their devotees. To explain the true significance of the mythic and mystic animal forms donned by the Yazads, we must try and understand that we have five physical senses that help us to know the physical world we live in. But, as spiritual entities, we are not simply of the earth, Earthly. The two worlds of spirit and matter are combined within us because the physical man sustains the spiritual soul within the body of flesh. Hence, even while living, we partake of both the physical as well as the spiritual worlds. Naturally, just as we have the five physical senses, our soul too has its own spiritual senses, viz. clairvoyance, clairaudience, prophecy, disperse the atoms of the physical body as well as the power to give shape and animate thought forms. These attributes, required for the spiritual progress of the soul are the mystic gifts that the Yazads impart to the devotee in the form and shape of magical animals. For example, in mysticism, the beautiful horse with yellow ears represents the power of thought as well as the ability to hear spiritual sounds or clairaudience; the golden camel represents the power of clairvoyance or spiritual sight to see beyond the physical dimensions; the celestial bull with golden horns symbolizes the power to animate thoughts.

If we can understand and accept the mystic symbolism behind our scriptures, then it can be irrefutably demonstrated that “*pasu-pach*” or the allegorical killing of a “*pasu*” as mentioned in Behram and other Yashts is this mystic and occult sacrifice which indicates the “killing” of the vile nature / mentality, the lower instincts. In the same Yasht, Behram Yazad is referred to as the Victorious One who slays the enemy. He is the destroyer of the evil foes, meaning of course, the army of *angre-mainyu*. It should be noted that *angre-mainyu* resides in the dualistic mind; the unprincipled aspect of the mind is “*angre-mainyu*”. It is this inherent enemy that Behram Yazad vanquishes or asks to “sacrifice”. It is the unrighteous mind that we are asked to sacrifice on the altar of spiritual wisdom. Behram Yazad is also called the Protector,

the Guardian of the Golden Sword of Ahura Mazda. If we take these symbols and attributes literally, it makes no sense that a Celestial Being should kill, destroy and at the same time be the guardian of a Golden, Spiritual Sword! The “sword” itself is allegorical. It mystically personifies thought. It is the power of good thought, “*spenta-mainyu*” that destroys evil thoughts *orangre-mainyu*. No physical weapons can match the evils of *angre-mainyu* or a sinister mind. The brain is physical but the mind (thought) is non-physical and cannot be destroyed by a “sword” or any physical weapon. Behram Yazad, who personifies divine ‘Thought’, is always victorious because wisdom is the only weapon and protection against the dark forces of matter and ignorance.

Killing any creature with a sword is destroying only the physical form. The energy of mind, as well as the spiritual soul, survives physical death. Only a spiritually illumined mind can achieve spiritual victory over the darkness and destruction of *angre-mainyu* (evil mind). Physical destruction of any kind, killing, fasting, torturing the body is against the spiritual disciplines of the Zarathushti Religion as these cause physical pain as well as physical destruction without affecting a cure for the mind or the soul. Wisdom is the outcome of spiritual illumination that increases righteousness, spiritual mastery over the physical senses and harmony in accordance to the Will of Ahura Mazda; wisdom leads to spiritual ecstasy, **not** to pain and penance.

In our *kusti* prayers, while reciting Jasme Avanghe Mazda, we utter the word “*nidhasnaithishem*”. The literal translation reads as “laying down the weapons”. In reality, the “weapon” is our physical body. Our physical senses through which our physical body and mind learn and evolve are considered “weapons” for our souls. To lay down arms means the soul will unshackle the weapons of senses controlled by an unprincipled mind. Then alone will “*khaethvadtham*” (divine union or resurrection) and “*frashogard*” (renovation) be achieved. For attaining to the final goal, the physical body having served as a “weapon” for destroying the evil instincts and tendencies will have to be sheathed or laid aside, discarded. This is the teaching of “*nidhasnaithishem*”. The

final resurrected body is called “*tan-pasin*”, which is a body of ‘light’, which is bloodless and survives without food! This indicates that without the physical body, the soul will survive as a conscious entity on its own level of ethereality.

The individual, who kills his own “beast” within, rises as a twice-born initiate, re-born spiritually of the Spirit. When an individual has conquered the inherent *angre-mainyu*, the lower animal instincts, then through Behram Yazad, the Higher, the Godly Self in Man, becomes the Initiator, the Priest, and sacrifices the lower self, the “animal” within. Such a one who has ‘sacrificed’ all the vices, the ‘animals’ within, is the worthy “*athravan*”, the Protector of Atash, the Divine Flame / Spirit Within, to whom Behram Yazad imparts these sacred teachings and spiritual gifts in the shape and form of supernatural animals. Conclusively, the rite of “*pasu-pach*” or “animal sacrifice” indicates the killing of the lower instincts. It is further described that the “*pasu*” that is about to be sacrificed, is said to be in a state of bliss, willingness, rapturous joy. This “*pasu*” is “*aoorushem*” or “white” and domesticated or “*hamo-gaon*”. These references to the “*pasu*” positively prove the allegorical, occult and mystic ritual of animal sacrifice or “*pasu-pach*”. What we sacrifice, is **worth** the sacrifice. We merely give up or forsake, we merely sacrifice, we merely exchange the lower instincts for the higher virtues and in so doing, the “*pasu*” is willing and joyous and in exalted ecstasy, blesses its own slayer!

At the ritual city of Persepolis (Iran), where spiritual rites were celebrated, carved in bas relief is a scene depicting animal sacrifice. It is not an ordinary animal, depicting an ordinary hunting scene. This is the depiction of a ritual event. This scene is generally referred to as the “Slaying of Ahriman”. The initiate, depicted as the King (Ruler), is portrayed as slaying a mystic animal with feathers, wings and the tail of a scorpion. The animal combines the shape and characteristics of a bull, lion, eagle and scorpion. While the “animal” is being slaughtered, an umbrella personifying divine “*kshathra*” or glory is held over the head of the initiate indicating his victory over Ahriman. There may be many

interpretations to this ritual event but one of the explanations regarding the animal is that it represents the Beast of the Apocalypse: lion, bull, scorpion and eagle whose feathers also suggest the waves of water. Also, the mystic animal symbolises the four signs of the zodiac, namely, Leo (lion), Taurus (bull), Scorpio (scorpion), and Aquarius (water). This mystic scene greets the visitor at the entrance to the Hall where the King received his subjects and gifts; or, we may presume where the “*pasu-ratu*” successfully conquered his own “animal” within, arose as a “twice born” initiate and received the spiritual rewards and gifts from fellow initiates.

Such mystic, occult, and divine rite **alone** was celebrated and mentioned in our Pak Avesta. No physical man and no physical animal, such as a horse, a bull nor a lamb were meant as a sacrificial victim in any ritual mandated in our religion. “Animals” represent certain spiritual faculties and attributes. The stampeding horses in the story of Asho Zarathushtra personify “mind”. For us, thoughts are like a stampeding herd of wild horses. The undisciplined stampeding herd of thoughts often destroys our spiritual, righteous thoughts substituting these with untamed ones. In the case of Asho Zarathushtra, the white stallion represented Asho Zarathushtra's Yazatic Mind that kept at bay the onslaught of wild, stampeding thoughts.

Faridun Padshah was brought up by a gentle cow named *Purmaye* and when Zohak killed all the cows in the kingdom (meaning he killed wisdom and led men astray) Faridun made the mace “*Gorz-e-Gavsar*” with a cow's head, representing Divine Wisdom, to conquer Zohak (Av. Azi-Dehak = ten ‘snakes’ or vices). The horns of a cow symbolise the crescent moon which is associated with the ‘mind’. This mace is still the ceremonial weapon against evil.

Such is the divine initiation and the divine ritual of “sacrifice”, the allegorical sacrifice of “*pasu-pach*” as mentioned in our Pak Avesta. If indeed divine wisdom was abused and distorted, and used as an excuse to justify evil doing, it is not the fault of the religion or the Pak Avesta.

The evil doers alone are responsible for their own thoughts, actions and consequences. Just as the Bible is written in parables and contains many levels of meanings, the Avesta too is “*razeng*” or mystic as mentioned in Yasna 50. Yasna 48 also affirms the teachings are “*guzra-senghaongo*”, meaning they are occult and hidden. Therefore, mysticism is a fundamental aspect of all religions and religious teachings. Scriptures can never be taught or understood by literal translation (philology) alone.

Yasna 33.14, included in the recitation of Atash Niyayesh, also refers to “sacrifice” wherein Asho Zarathushtra unconditionally offers the best fruits of his ‘self’, his entire being, to Ahura Mazda who is the greatest SELF. The manthra of Ahunavar also teaches the supreme surrender of ‘self’ as sacrifice, as “giving” to the highest SELF in order to attain to *khaetwadath* and *frashogard*. Only by surrendering ‘self’ to the “SELF”, to His Divine Will, can we finally unite with Ahura Mazda in life everlasting and fulfil the divine aim and goal of *frashogard*.

During the Seleucid, Parthian and Roman times when the Mithraic cult was in vogue, several groups of so-called magi gathered into societies all over Europe and Asia Minor. These were not the magi who were the true heirs to Zarathushtrian priesthood and the legal heirs to the wisdom of the great Mazdayasni Zarathushti religion. If the sham claimants to magi brotherhood or any other misguided individuals practised blood sacrifices, it is not the fault of our religion. Instead of “*pasu-pach*”, such wrong sacrifices should be regarded as “*nasu-pach*”.

Would it not bring supreme exultant joy to the soul of *Geush Urva* (personified as a cow), if each one of us, through spiritual progress, would sacrifice the animal instincts within us in order to rise as “*pasu-ratu*”, *Master of the Self*? Consequently, we would all become our own rulers, having conquered our own little kingdom by ruling over our own “animals” within.

Atha jamyat yatha afrinami! May it be so!

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