

The Jashan Ceremony

Jashan : A Communication and Thanksgiving

A *jashan* is a thanksgiving ceremony performed by two or more priests; the officiating priest is known as the *zaotar* and his assistant is called the *raspi*.

A *jashan* is enacted for the well-being of both the spiritual and physical worlds in which the living offer thanks, and ask for blessings from the spiritual world.

In a *jashan* ritual all the seven *Amesha Spentas* are invoked in order that they may proffer their blessings. The seven Bounteous Immortals are the guardians of the seven creations which are symbolically represented by the materials and implements (*Ar. ālāt*) used in the *jashan*.



An Achaemenian vase (6th century B.C.)

Khshathra Vairya	: Sky	– the first creation	: represented by all the metallic implements.
Haurvatāt	: Water	– the second creation	: represented by the fresh water in the beaker.
Spenta Ārmaiti	: Earth	– the third creation	: represented by the demarcated area over which the ritual is performed.
Ameretāt	: Plants	– the fourth creation	: represented by the flowers, fruits and wood offered in the ritual.
Vohu Manah	: Cattle	– the fifth creation	: represented by the milk offered in the ritual.
Spenta Mainyu	: Man	– the sixth creation	: represented by both the priests, the <i>zaotar</i> and <i>raspi</i> .
Asha Vahishta	: Fire	– the seventh creation	: represented by the continuously burning sandalwood on the fire-vase (<i>Guj.afarganyu</i>).

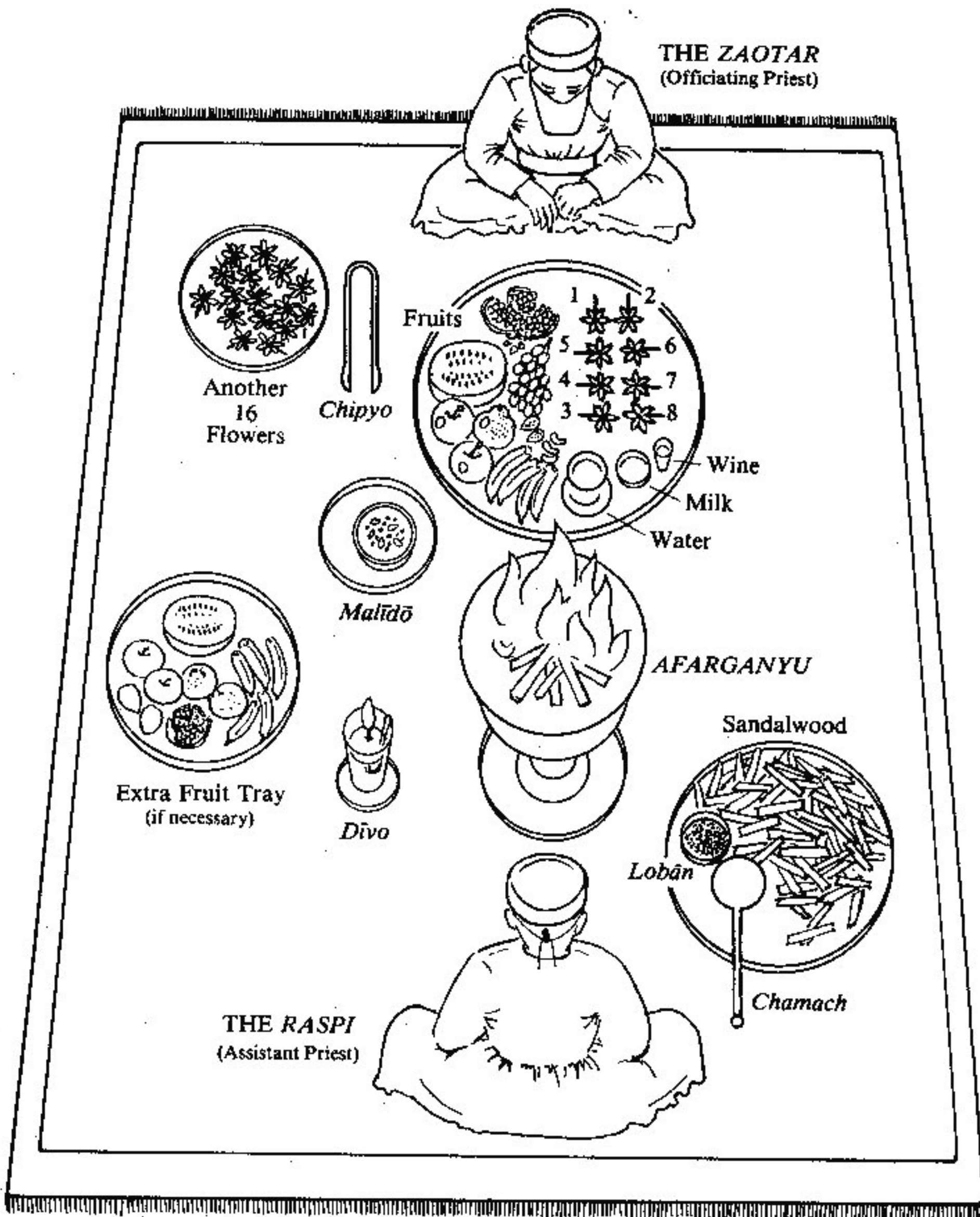
The Bounteous Immortals, along with the *fravashis* of the departed righteous souls, are ritually invited down to grace the *jashan*. The *Amesha Spentas* are also responsible for the ethical structure within man. This realization is further strengthened through the enactment of the ritual, which brings together the concrete and the abstract dimensions through the medium of ritual power (*amāi*).

The Jashan Layout (Refer to diagram)

The fruits are washed, partially cut and placed on the right half of the tray. This is done so that the guests from the spiritual world may

sample the freshness and essence of the fruits. In the upper left half of the tray a beaker of water is placed; next to it is placed a glass of milk, with a beaker of wine or *sherbet* as well.

The flowers are kept in the lower left half of the tray. They are placed in a set prescribed order, in two vertical rows of four flowers each. The first two flowers are placed vertically with the stalks pointing towards the *zaotar*, while the remaining six flowers are positioned with their respective stalks pointing sideways. During the *jashan* ritual, the flowers are exchanged three times between the *zaotar* and



THE ZAOTAR
(Officiating Priest)

Another
16
Flowers

Chipyo

Fruits

Wine
Milk
Water

Malidō

AFARGANYU

Extra Fruit Tray
(if necessary)

Divo

Sandalwood

Lobān

Chamach

THE RASPI
(Assistant Priest)

THE JASHAN LAYOUT

raspi. Thus in all, twenty-four flowers are used in the ceremony. A tray containing the additional sixteen flowers is placed to the right of the officiating priest.

The *afarganyu* is placed centrally between the *zaotar* and *raspi*. To the right of the *zaotar*, near the *afarganyu* the traditional oil lamp (*Guj.dīvo*) is kept burning. To the right of the *raspi* is placed the tray of sandalwood and frankincense (*lobān*) which are offered to the fire on a flat circular spoon known as the *chamach*. The *zaotar* uses a pair of tongs called the *chipyo*.

The Three Parts of a *Jashan*

A *Jashan* is usually enacted in three main parts during which three *Yazatas* are propitiated.

The priests first stand and recite the *Ātash Nyāish* and the *Dōa Nām Stayishn* prayers. The *zaotar* then recites the first *āfrīnagān* (blessing) which is dedicated to Ohrmazd. Next, the *zaotar* recites a *dibache* (portion) in Pahlavi, which lays out the general spirit and tone of the *Jashan*. The *zaotar* and the *raspi* then together chant ten *Yathā Ahū Vairyōs* and three *Ashem Vohūs*.

Next, the *Fravarānē* ("The Articles of the Faith") is recited in Avestan, followed by the appropriate *gāh* prayer and the small *Khshnūman* (blessing/invocation) of Ohrmazd. Both the priests then recite the large *Khshnūman* of Ohrmazd, followed by the recitation of *karda* 13 (*Yt.* 13.49 - 52) in which the *fravashis* of the righteous are invoked.

The *zaotar* then picks up the first two flowers whilst three *Ashem Vohūs* are recited by both the priests and he gives one flower to the *raspi*, who stands up to receive it at the end of the third *Ashem Vohū*. The *raspi* once more recites the small *Khshnūman* of Ohrmazd and is joined by the *zaotar* on the word "*āfrīnāmī*" (I bless). They then begin to pray a portion from the *āfrīnagān* of Dahman. Upon the

completion of this prayer, an exchange of the two flowers takes place between the *zaotar* and *raspi*. The two flowers are said to represent symbolically the Spirit of God (*Spenta Mainyu*) in both the physical and spiritual worlds.

Both the priests then recite the second verse of *Yasna* 35 and upon the words "*humatanam, hūkhtanam, hvarshatanam*", three flowers are given to the *raspi* by the *zaotar*, from the upper right-hand column moving downwards. This verse is repeated once more and three more flowers are given to the *raspi*, this time from the lower left-hand column moving upwards.

According to the oral tradition, the first set of flowers is believed to represent:

Vohu Manah (good mind)
Asha Vahishta (best truth) and
Khshathra Vairya (desirable kingdom).

The second set of flowers is said to represent:

Spenta Ārmaiti (holy devotion)
Haurvatāt (perfection) and
Ameretāt (immortality).

The *raspi* thus has seven flowers in his hand, representing the attributes of the seven Holy Immortals. Towards the end of the second recitation of the prayer (*Yasna* 35), the *raspi* (standing) transfers the ladle from his left to the right hand, making sure that the ladle is in contact with the *afarganyu*. In doing so, he completes the circuit between himself and the fire.

The *zaotar*, in his right hand, holds the tongs with which he touches the *afarganyu*; simultaneously with his left hand, he touches the tray of fruits which are to be consecrated. The ritual circuit is thereby completed by both the priests touching the *afarganyu* upon which burns the fire. At this point of the ritual the *raspi* represents the pillar of doctrine, whilst the *zaotar* is deemed to represent the pillar of

practice. The *zaotar* is like the ritual alchemist through whom the power from the spiritual world descends, in order that the consecration of the fruits, water, milk and wine may indeed be possible.

The prayers are then intoned in a suppressed voice by both the priests, as they are in the process of reciting a Pahlavi prayer juxtaposed between two Avestan sections. Upon the completion of the *bāj*,¹ both the priests recite aloud the *Yathā Ahū Vairyō*. As this is being done, the *zaotar* touches four points of the circular water-pot with his tongs, in an up-down right-left action and then touches the *afarganyu* to complete the circuit. He next recites one *Ashem Vohū* and whilst doing so, he touches the same pot of water at four points in a clockwise manner. He then skims over the fruit offerings with his tongs and finally offers the "ritual energy" back to the fire.

The symbolism of the gestures is rather interesting. According to the oral tradition, the up-down right-left action followed by the circular motion made by the *zaotar* with his tongs over the water pot, is seen to be the traditional method through which a vortex of "consecrative energy" is generated via the water. Through this gesture, it is believed that the spirits descend and bless the food offerings placed in the tray.

Next, the *raspi* hands back the seven flowers to the *zaotar*. They both recite the *Yathā Ahū Vairyō* twice, followed by the small *Khshnūman* of Ohrmazd and one *Ashem Vohū*. A ritual handshake known as the *hamazor* is done by the priests whilst they are praying intoned in *bāj*. An exchange of energy takes place through this ritual handshake which unites the priests in strength. The *raspi* then sits down and both the priests begin to chant from *Yasna* 35.2 onwards.

1. The mode of praying in an intoned voice is known as *bāj*.

The second *āfrīnagān* is intoned as it is a Pahlavi prayer juxtaposed between two Avestan portions. This *āfrīnagān* of the *jashan* is dedicated to *Dahman* (pious beings, co-workers for the day).² The *zaotar* recites two *Yathā Ahū Vairyōs* and three *Ashem Vohūs* in honour of *Dahman*.

The third *āfrīnagān* of the *jashan* is dedicated to Sraosh, the Lord of Prayer. The structure of the ritual remains the same but the formulae of prayers vary accordingly, for the second and third *āfrīnagāns*.

The Three *Āfrīns*

On the completion of the last *āfrīnagān*, three *āfrīns* or blessings are recited. The first blessing is dedicated to the righteous *fravashis*, the second *āfrīn* is dedicated to the noble ones, and the third *āfrīn* is dedicated to the seven *Amesha Spentas*. Basically, all these three short blessings are triumphant invocations directed towards the spiritual world.

The *zaotar* and the *raspi* next recite twenty-one *Yathā Ahū Vairyōs* and twelve *Ashem Vohūs*, followed by the *Ahmāi Raēscha*, the *Hazanghrem*, *Jasa mē avanghē Mazda* and the *Kērfeh Mōzd* prayers. Finally, the *Dōa Tan-Dōrōstī* prayer is recited for the health and well-being of the community as well as especially for the good health, happiness and prosperity of the family members who arranged and paid for the *jashan* ceremony.

The *jashan* therefore, is a ceremony in which man learns to experience the doctrine which in turn is brought alive through the symbolism of the ritual, as well as through the active participation of the priests and the celebrants. A realization of this, together with the readiness of wanting to communicate with the spiritual world, is triumphantly brought about through the proper enactment of the *jashan* ritual.

2. The term *Dahman* is commonly mistaken for the 33rd *Yazata*, *Dahm*.