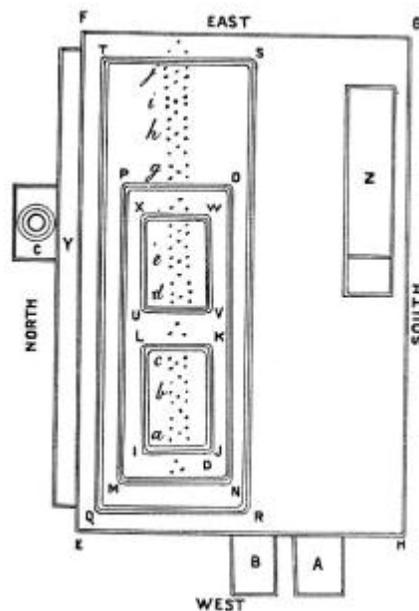


The Bareshnum

By Ervad Marzban Hathiram



The *Bareshnum* is the highest purificatory ceremony of the Zoroastrian religion. It is sometimes also referred to as the *Bareshnum-i-noh-shab* – ‘the Bareshnum of nine nights’ since that is the period of time it takes for the entire process to complete. The word Bareshnum is derived from the Avesta root ‘*bareshnu*’ meaning ‘top, head’, since the process of cleansing starts from the head and moves down the body. Till about a hundred years ago, the Bareshnum ceremony was undergone by both Behdins (including women) as well as priests, but today it is confined solely to the priestly class. In fact, the process of becoming a complete priest consists of passing through two Bareshnums for the *Navar* ceremony, and one Bareshnum for the *Maratab* ceremony.

The Bareshnum is the foundation of all ritual in the religion, since no inner liturgical (*Pav Mahel*) ceremony can be done unless the Priest has a current Bareshnum. In the absence of the Bareshnum, the *Nirangdin* ceremony cannot be performed and without *Nirangdin* there can be no consecrated *Nirang*, which is the cornerstone of all other religious ceremonies. Hence the continuity of a priest's Bareshnum is of vital importance to the preservation of the religion itself.

The main injunction for the Bareshnum occurs in the ninth *Pargarad* (chapter) of the *Vendidad* – the only surviving complete *Nask* (mega-volume) out of the 21 *Nasks* which encompassed all knowledge. In addition, the various manuscripts belonging to the priestly families have long laid down the rules and regulations regarding the practice of the Bareshnum, and it is from these sources that the following material has been written. The ninth *Pargarad* deals with five issues – the procedure of giving the Bareshnum; the capabilities of a Bareshnum holder; the benefits of giving the Bareshnum correctly; the dangers when a Bareshnum is vitiated; the methods of containing the pollution caused by the destruction of a Bareshnum and the punishment to be meted out to those who vitiate a Bareshnum.

The Bareshnum ritual came in for a great deal of criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when western scholars with prejudiced minds and some of their Parsi followers lambasted this sacred ritual, calling it barbaric and a relic of an age where sanitation and public hygiene were non-existent. One so called *Dastur* even termed the Bareshnum as a 'Red Indian dance' because of the practice of jumping over certain groups of stones during the Bareshnum giving process. However, the esoteric meaning of this ancient practice that has been followed devotedly for thousands of years gives us the real understanding of this process and its immense importance in the preservation of the Religion and also its followers. This essay is an attempt to give a clear description of the process and then take the reader through the esoteric explanation or the *taavil* behind its seemingly arcane methodology.

We start by taking a detailed look at the process itself. The following are the necessary implements for the ceremony.

1. 2 Priests, having a valid and current Bareshnum themselves.
2. 1 dog
3. The consecrated *Nirang*, from the *Nirangdin* ceremony
4. The consecrated *Av* (water), from the *Nirangdin* ceremony
5. The sacred *Bhasam* (ash) from the *Atash Behram* fire
6. A few pomegranate leaves
7. 2 small bowls (*fulia*)
8. 2 pots (*kaharna*) of pure well water
9. 2 *Navgrehs* (sacred stick having nine knots). The small *Navgreh* (about 2 feet long) has a metal spoon tied to its end. The long *Navgreh* (about 7 feet long) has an iron nail or an iron knife blade tied at its end.

The Bareshnum Part II

The place where the Bareshnum is taken is known as the Bareshnum-gah. This is an open ground, covered with sand, approximately 50 feet long and about 40 feet wide. Generally, the Bareshnum-gah is attached to the Agiary premises itself. The Bareshnum gah needs to be specially re-activated, each time a Bareshnum is given. Observing the attached diagram of the Bareshnum gah, we see that the main feature of the Bareshnum gah is the *pahadias*, or the sets of five stones (marked i to ix) and three stones, placed at various intervals running west to east. We shall discuss them later. We now turn to the actual ceremony.

The Bareshnum is generally given only in the *Havan* gah (sunrise to 12.40 p.m.). In the morning, the two priests (Priest A and Priest B from hereon) who will give the Bareshnum to the candidate (C, from hereon) perform a Yasna ceremony and prepare themselves for the task. Thereafter they go to the Bareshnum gah carrying the implements as detailed above. Both priests perform the *padyav-kusti*. Priest A goes to the south east corner of the Bareshnum gah and using the long Navgreh with the nail at its end as a drawing tool, traces the outline of the rectangle marked in the diagram as A. This is known as drawing a *karsha* or *pavi*. The *pavi* is a spiritual boundary inside which no pollution can enter. Just as we have permanent pavis drawn in the Fire Temples, these are temporary pavis which are activated with the prayers of the Priests. After drawing the outline of the A *pavi*, Priest A makes four divisions of that rectangle, as shown in the diagram. In A2 he places the *fulia*, *kaharna* and the Navgreh. In A3 he places the Nirang, Av and Bhasam.

Meanwhile the candidate for the Bareshnum (C) also comes to the Bareshnum gah, performs *padyav-kusti* and sits near the *pavi* marked B in the diagram.

Priest B goes to A2 and washes the *fulia* with well water and dries them in the sun. In one *fulia*, he pours the sacred Nirang, and adds a pinch of the Atash Behram ash in it. In the other *fulia*, he pours out the Av. Then he purifies the water in both the *kaharna* and adds a few drops of Av in both. Priest B then takes one *kaharna* to *pavi* D (top left corner).

Now Priest B goes near the candidate C who now moves to *pavi* B. C catches the *gireban* of his *Sudreh* with his left hand, and putting a handkerchief on his right hand holds it out. Priest B puts the pomegranate leaves on this hand and C recites the *Jamvani baj* (Prayer for taking food). Having recited the *Baj*, C takes the leaves in his mouth, chews them, swallows the juice and spits out the rest. Then Priest B gives him the *fulia* of Nirang, and C recites the *Nirang* (formula) '*in khuram, in paki-e-tan, yaozdathra i ravan ra*' (I drink this for the cleansing of my body, and for the purification of my soul.) He then sips the consecrated Nirang. This process is repeated three times, then C throws the *fulia* on the side, and finishes of the *Jamvani baj*. Then he unties and reties his *Kusti* and sits in *Pavi* C and recites the *Patet* prayer, cleansing his mind, body and soul for the sins he may have committed knowingly or unknowingly during the period before the Bareshnum.

Part III

Now Priest A goes to pavi D in the extreme top left corner, recites ‘*Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazda, Ashem Vohu 1*’, removes his clothes, sits on the big stone placed in this pavi and takes a bath using the kaharna placed there earlier by Priest B. While Priest A takes his bath, Priest B pours a little of the Av on the clothes removed by Priest A, so as to purify them. Priest A finishes his bath, puts on his clothes, recites the ‘*Kem na Mazda*’ prayer and ties his Kusti.

Now Priest A goes to pavi A2, takes the small Navgreh with the spoon in his left hand, the big Navgreh with the nail in his right hand, and comes to the first of the set of 3 stones marked in the diagram as point E. Now standing facing the East, Priest A places the nail of the big Navgreh on the set of three stones and recites the *Dasturi* – or the power and authority invocation prayer. He recites:

“*Ba Dasturi e Dadar Hormazd,
Ba Dasturi e Ameshaspandan,
Ba Dasturi e Sarosh Asho,
Ba Dasturi e Zarathushtra Spitaman,
Ba Dasturi e Adarbad Marespandan,
Ba Dasturi e Dastur* (here the name of the current high priest) *bashad.*”

Thus invoking his divine right to perform this exalted ceremony, Priest A initiates the process of activating the Bareshnum gah. Then reciting the Baj of Sarosh, Priest A walks to the bottom left corner of the Bareshnum gah (marked point F in the diagram) and placing the long Navgreh with the nail on the ground, and reciting the Yatha Ahu Vairyō prayer four times, drags the Navgreh nail on the ground and walks to point G, thereby drawing the first karsha or spiritual boundary from point F to point G. He then turns right and draws the second karsha – from point G to point H, reciting the Yatha prayer three times. Turning right again, Priest A draws the third karsha – from Point H to point I, reciting the Yatha prayer 3 times. Turning right one more time, he completes the rectangle by drawing the fourth karsha – from Point I to point F, again reciting the Yatha prayer three times. Thus the first rectangle FGHI is drawn.

Having finished drawing the boundaries of the extremities of the Bareshnum gah, Priest A now draws the different karshas for the sets of pahadias in the following manner. Going to point J, Priest A draws three karshas around the first set of three pahadias (marked i to iii) walking from point J to point K, then to L, then to M and back to J reciting as many Yatha prayers he can. This finishes the first set of three pahadias in the rectangle JKLM. Then he draws the second set of three karshas for the first six pahadias (marked i to vi), starting from point N, walking to O, then to P, then to Q and finally back to N, completing the rectangle NOPQ. Then he draws the third set, covering all the nine pahadias (marked i to ix), starting from point R, walking to S, then to T, then to U, and finally back to R, reciting as many Yatha prayers he can. The third set of rectangle RSTU is thus drawn. Finally, he draws the last set of three karshas around the second set of 3 pahadias (marked iv to vi), starting from point V, walking to W, then to X, then to Y, and finally back to V, thus completing the last rectangle VYXY. Having drawn these karshas, Priest A returns to point D and finishes of the Baj of Sarosh, and then walks back to pavi A1.

Now Priest B gets the dog into the Bareshnum gah and both stand in the pavi marked Z in the diagram.

Now candidate C gets up in pavi B and recites '*Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdao, Ashem Vohu 1, Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshata, humanashne, hugavashne, hukunashne (name of C) tan pak.*'

Having recited this cleansing formula, C enters the Bareshnum gah and moving to the right, draws a karsha with his hand (marked ZZ), takes off all his clothes, wraps them in his handkerchief, and walks silently to the first set of 5 stones, marked (i) in the diagram, and sits there, with his right hand over his head.

Now Priest A moves out of his pavi A1 with the small Navgreh with the spoon tied at the end in his right hand, and the long Navgreh with the nail at one end in his left hand. Standing outside the rectangle JKLM, Priest A places the spoon of the Navgreh on the right hand of C, which C has placed on his head. C then places his left hand on top of the spoon of the Navgreh, taking extreme care that the hand touches only the metal spoon, and not the wooden stick. Then C recites:

'Ashem Vohu 3. Fravarane ...(gah), Sraoshahe ashyehe takhmahe... fra ashava vidhwao mraotu. Ashem.'

Part IV

Now Priest A lifts the small Navgreh from C's head, goes back to his pavi A1, gets the fulia containing the sacred Nirang and putting some on the spoon of the Navgreh, pours it onto C's hands three times. C takes the Nirang in his hands. First he cleanses both his hands up to the elbows vigorously with the first application of the Nirang. The second and third helpings he applies in the following order.

- Top of the head
- the forehead and between the eyebrows
- the back of the head
- the cheeks
- right ear, then the left ear
- right shoulder, then the left shoulder
- right armpit, then the left armpit
- right breast, then the left breast
- right back, then the left back,
- right ribs and stomach, then left ribs and stomach
- right hip, then the left hip
- hind private parts, then the front private parts
- right thigh, then the left thigh
- right knee, then the left knee
- right calf, then the left calf
- right ankle, then the left ankle
- right instep, then the left instep
- right sole, then the left sole
- right toes, then the left toes

Having given C then Nirang thrice, Priest A goes back to pavi A. Now Priest B comes out of pavi Z with the dog. Walking up to the left of the candidate C, he comes and stands near C, facing the south, with the dog between him and C. C touches the left ear of the dog with his left hand. Then Priest B walks back to his pavi Z with the dog, making sure the dog does not touch him at any point.

Now Priest A comes out of his pavi, walks towards where C is sitting, and coming up to him (but outside the rectangle JKLM) recites the '*Kem na Mazda*' prayer up to the words '*Nemascha ya Armaitish izacha.*' He then puts the long Navgreh held in his left hand on the second set of 5 stones (marked (ii)), and removes the Navgreh. Then C also recites '*Nemascha ya Armaitish izacha.*' and jumping over the intervening set of three stones, moves to the second set of five stones marked (ii). Now Priest A goes back to his pavi and gets the fulia of Nirang, hands it over in three streams to C who then proceeds to apply it in the same manner as described above. Then Priest A moves back to pavi A, Priest B comes out of pavi Z with the dog and C again touches the dog's left ear with his left hand, and Priest B walks back to pavi Z.

Now Priest A comes out of pavi A and repeating the above procedure points to the third set of five stones marked (iii) and C moves from (ii) to (iii) where the whole process is repeated. The same process is repeated for set (iv), (v) and (vi). From (vi), C moves on to (vi a) where Priest A gives C 15 applications of sand instead of the three streams of Nirang. This sand is also to be rubbed over in exactly the same order as the Nirang was applied. Then Priest A moves to his pavi A, Priest B gets the dog, C touches the left ear of the dog with his left hand, Priest B moves back to pavi Z, Priest A comes out, recites the normal formula and moves C to set (vii).

On the eighth set of five stones, the same procedure is followed, the difference being that instead of Nirang or sand, the consecrated water – Av is given to C in three streams which is then rubbed over the body in the same manner. Then the dog is brought in and the same procedure is followed and C moves on to set (viii). On the ninth set, the application is again of Av, however after the dog has been brought in, Priest A gives a second helping of three streams of Av, and the dog is brought in a second time, and then C passes on to set (ix). On this last set, there are three helpings of Av, and the dog is also brought in three times. C remains seated on this last set.

After this, Priest A gets some more Av in a fulia, and places it near C at a little distance, after drawing a karsha around the fulia. He then gets the second big kaharna of water and taking care that no drops of water spill onto him, throws the water over the head of C in three streams, with which C bathes himself and removes all remnants of sand and Nirang from all parts of his body. Priest A then returns to his pavi A. Now Priest B comes out with the dog and going close to C makes him touch the left ear of the dog with his left hand. Having done that, Priest B leads the dog out of the Bareshnum gah. Both the dog and Priest B's role end here.

Now Priest A comes out of his pavi with the small Navgreh in his right hand and recites '*Ahunem vairim tanum paiti (3), Yatha (1). Kem Na Mazda... Nemascha ya Armaitish izacha.*' C also recites '*Nemascha ya Armaitish izacha.*' Now Priest A takes the fulia of Av which he had set aside a short while ago and pours half of the Av over the new set of clothes that C will wear. The other half of the Av he pours over the left hand of C, so as to cleanse it since he had touched the dog with this hand after the bath. Priest A then returns to pavi A. Now C dries himself and

wears the new set of clothes, including the *Jama*, or the loose robe that is the dress of the priest. He however does not tie the Kusti but instead puts it over his shoulders. Now Priest A comes out of pavi A with both the Navgreh in his hands. C puts his left hand on his left shoulder, throws the right end of his *Jama* over the left hand. On this, Priest A places the spoon of the small Navgreh. Over this, C puts his right hand, covered with the right sleeve of his *Jama*, such that it touches only the metal spoon and not the wooden stick, and recites the following:

‘Nemascha ya Armaitish izacha (3). Yatha (2). Yasnemcha vahmemcha...Sraoshahe ashyahe...Ashem Vohu (1). Ahmai Raescha...Kerfeh Mozd.’

Then the whole formula is recited again, this time both by Priest A and C. Then Priest A makes C recite the following:

‘Zadeh nashesh sar-o-tan pak ashahi Ruvan. Sag Asho, herbad pak (3).’ i.e., ‘The pollution has been destroyed. The body has been cleansed and the soul made righteous. The dog has become righteous and the priest has become pure.’

Then C recites the Hormazd Khodae prayer and ties the Kusti. Here ends the Bareshnum ceremony.

Part V

After the main ceremony is over, the candidate proceeds to a place called ‘*nahn-khanehs*’ which are specially made and attached to the Atash Behrams where he will spend the next nine nights in seclusion. The rules to be followed during these nine nights are very strict. He is not allowed to touch anybody. Contact with wooden items is also prohibited. The major part of the time is to be spent in reciting prayers, specially the Patet, in each and every gah of the day. Two sets of plain white clothes are worn – one set is used only while eating, whereas the other set is used for the rest of the period. Both the sets are stored in different cupboards, each opposite to the other in the same room. When the clothes are to be changed, the candidate recites ‘*Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdao, Ashem Vohu 1*’ and then takes off the worn clothes from the body completely. Then he rubs his entire body with ordinary Nirang and then crosses over to the other cupboard and wears the second set. Contact with water is strictly prohibited, except for drinking. Even while going to the toilet, small clay tablets are used as a dry system instead of water. Food is served by other people in metal vessels and is eaten with a metal spoon, wearing hand gloves. A leather mattress stuffed with hay is used for sleeping, and a square piece of leather about 2 feet square is used for sitting. He may not sleep or sit anywhere else. All meals are had only when the sun is in the sky. Even drinking water is prohibited during the night. During the night a strict vigil is maintained. Generally, groups of priests sit together with the candidate and discuss matters of religion through out the night, so that no nocturnal emission may take place, for if that happens, then the Bareshnum is vitiated. Contact with outsiders is generally minimised.

On the fourth morning after the ceremony, a special bath (called *Navsho*) is given to the candidate by one of the priests who had given him the Bareshnum. Priest A goes to the Bareshnum gah and places a large stone on which the candidate can sit and have a bath, and draws three karshas around the stone. Then he gets one kaharna of pure well water and adds the consecrated Av in that. Then taking a fulia, he washes it and dries it in the sun and then pours a

little of the consecrated Nirang in the fulia. Now the candidate enters the Bareshnum gah and draws a karsha around himself. Then he recites ‘*Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdao, Ashem Vohu 1*’, takes off his clothes, wraps them in his handkerchief and sits on the stone on which he will have his bath, facing the East. Then Priest A takes the fulia of Nirang and drawing a karsha on the ground close to C, puts the fulia in the karsha. Then C covers his head with the right hand and recites the Baj for Bathing. He then applies the Nirang all over his body and throws the fulia to the side. Priest A then pours a little of the consecrated Av over the new set of clothes that C will wear and then places the rest of the water near C. Now C has a bath with that water, dries himself properly, wears the new set of clothes and finishes the Baj for Bathing and ties the Kusti. He then proceeds to the *nahn-khaneh*, applies Nirang over his body, reties the Kusti and says the Patet.

The same process is repeated on the seventh day, the exception being that the candidate gets two pots of water instead of one; and then again on the tenth day where he gets three pots of water. The Bareshnum ends after the 10th day bath. Generally that day is used for resting, and on the 11th day, the Priest wears a new set of clothes, goes to the Atash Behram and performs the Yasna ceremony with Priest A who had given him the Bareshnum. After this only is the candidate said to be qualified for performing the Pav Mahel ceremonies like Yasna, Vendidad, Vispered, Nirangdin, etc.

Having taken this long description of the ceremony itself and the various rules to be observed by the candidate during the nine nights, we now try to understand the significance of each of these. Why is the Bareshnum required? To answer that question we need to understand the composition of man’s body. According to the Avesta, the human body is composed of nine parts, divided into three groups of three bodies each as under:

Group	Body name	Meaning
Physical	<i>Tanu</i>	Physical body, skeletal structure
	<i>Gaetha</i>	Internal organs
	<i>Azde</i>	Fluid bodies, blood, etc.
Ultra-physical	<i>Keherp</i>	Subtle body containing the 16 energy centres - <i>Chakhras</i>
	<i>Ushtan-aap</i>	Life breath
	<i>Tevishi</i>	Emotions body
Divine	<i>Urvan</i>	Soul, Ruvan
	<i>Baodangh</i>	Divine wisdom
	<i>Fravashi</i>	Implicit obedience

{ For Face book Posting Group }

A)Physical

Body Name

Tanu = Physical Body Skeletal Structure

Gaetha =Internal Organs

Azde= Fluid bodies. Blood Etc

B) Ultra Physical

Body Name

Keherp=Subtle body containing the 16 energy centres -Chakhras

Ushtan-aap= Life breath

Tevishi= Emotions body

C)Divine

Body Name

Urvan=Soul, Ruvan

Baodangh=Divine Wisdom

Fravashi=Implicit Obedience}

PartVI

Man is composed of physical DNA which through various permutations and combinations gives rise to the atoms that make up the different parts of the body. However, the spiritual counterpart of the physical DNA is known as Anasers. They are the divine building blocks of Nature. The anasers are composed of two basic elements – the Good Element, called *Gava*, and the Non-good element, called *Dravao*. The intermingling of Gava and Dravao in various intensities gives rise to the physical DNA which in turn forms the human body as we know it.

The Earth is constantly being bombarded with various types of radiations. The Avesta categorises these radiations into two main types – *Asere Roshni* – the good, beneficent blessings arising out of the work of Ahura Mazda and His Amesha Spentas and Yazatas; and *Asere Tariki* – the evil, malevolent radiations that descend on the Earth as an attempt of Angra Mino to disrupt the smooth progress of the creations of Ahura Mazda.

When the composition of a man's body is such that the anasers have more of gava than dravao, his body attracts the good waves - Asere Roshni. When there is a preponderance of dravao over gava in the body, the man attracts the bad waves.

However, even in the case of a man who has more gava components than Dravao, there is another event which occurs which is known as *Khiza* – the Principle of Gradual Deterioration. Khiza implies the gradual decay of any matter on this earth. For example, take a clean handkerchief and put it in a sterile, clean room. Even then, after some time, the handkerchief will appear to get dirty, or yellow. This process whereby matter of all types passes through a form of constant decay is known as Khiza and occurs because the Earth itself is made up of good and evil. Thus is the case of that man whose gava component is higher than the dravao, even this

component faces the innate pollution which the Earth gives out, and this Khiza causes his gava to decline.

The position of the Priest in the Zoroastrian religion is unique. A true *Athravan* is described as being one whose gava component is of the highest calibre and whose dravao component is miniscule, and kept under strict control. The Athravan is an important ally of Ahura Mazda and His Amesha Spentas and Yazatas in their fight against evil. His position is all the more unique since he is also a human and hence subject to the pulls and pressures of everyday family life. Thus the Athravan faces challenges from many fronts. Through his strict practice of the spiritual disciplines (*Tarikats*) laid down in the Religion, the Athravan keeps the attack of dravao, which is personified in the Avesta as *Druj Nasu* – the Demon of Pollution, at bay. His heightened state of consciousness, which is a result of his having undergone the complete *Navar* and *Maratab* rituals, keeps him ever alert to fight against the onslaught of evil in any form. Yet even this highly advanced spiritual entity and ally of Ahura Mazda is subject to the Law of Khiza. Just as a spotless handkerchief gets dirty regardless of how clean an environment it is placed in, so also the gava component of the Athravan's anasers becomes murky with the passage of time. This goes on for a period of six months, after which there is a real danger of the gava element becoming polluted by Khiza. Hence it is prescribed that the Bareshnum should be undergone by the Athravan once every six months.

Thus the Bareshnum is to be understood as the process whereby the spiritual batteries of the Athravan get recharged, so that he may continue his fight against evil.

Having understood the basic need for the Bareshnum, we now try to understand the process itself. As we saw earlier, the process starts with the two officiating priests performing a Yasna ceremony in the morning. The performance of the Yasna firstly cleanses their own body of the effects of any Khiza of the past 3 days. Secondly, the ceremony invests in them the authority to pass on their own heightened state of consciousness to another priest.

The implements of the ceremony also need some explanation. The sacred Nirang which is obtained through the performance of the Nirangdin ceremony is the greatest spiritual purifier known to man. The potency of the Nirang is further multiplied by the addition of the sacred ash of the Atash Behram fire. Similarly, the sacred Av, which too is obtained through the Nirangdin ceremony also has very high spiritual cleansing properties. The juice of the leaves of the pomegranate tree cleanses the internal body system both physically as well as spiritually. The Navgreh is one of the most important tools of the priest. In all pictures of the Prophet Zarathushtra, we observe that he is shown holding a stick. If we observe closely (and if the picture is accurate), we see that the stick which Prophet Zarathushtra holds also has nine knots on it. The Navgreh was one of the tools with which Zarathushtra defeated Angra Mino. The physical Navgreh that is used by the priests also has nine knots. This Navgreh symbolises the derivation of authority of the priest – right from Zarathushtra himself. Similarly, the nine knots of the stick act as nine filtration points, or road blocks, through which no evil or Khiza effects may pass, when the priest touches the candidate to give him the Nirang. That is why care is taken that the candidate only touches the metal spoon. The second Navgreh, with the nail at its end is used to draw the karshas or spiritual boundaries through which again no defilement may pass.

Part-VII

Having seen the basic needs of the implements, we now try to evaluate the process of activating the Bareshnum gah. The priests first arrive and draw a karsha to keep all their implements. Then Priest A has a bath, to further cleanse himself. While he is doing so, Priest B pours a little Av on Priest A's clothes, so that even they may be further cleansed. Then A puts on his clothes and does the Kusti. Now he takes both the Navgreh – the small one in his left hand and the big one in his right hand and walks to the first set of three stones marked E and places the big Navgreh on them and recites the Dasturi formula. By this process, the Priest A sets into motion the process of activating the karshas of the Bareshnum gah. The Dasturi traces the authority of Priest A – from the current high priest, to the last great *Rainidar* – the repairer of the religion – Dastur Adurbad Mahrespand, to the greatest and first Athravan – Prophet Zarathushtra, to the Yazata Sarosh, to the Amesha Spentas, and finally to Dadar Ahura Mazda Himself. This is not some ego trip, but is an appeal of Priest A to all these worthies to come and witness this divine event which is taking place, and to shower their own blessings on the candidate so that he may purify himself and become once again a part of the great machinery of Ahura Mazda taking the entire creation towards *Frashokereiti*. The Dasturi formula now attracts the blessings of these great spiritual entities, which blessings are caught by the Navgreh in the hand of Priest A and then start circulating in his own body and the Navgreh.

Having derived his authority, and now fully armed with the purifying currents of Ahura Mazda and his Amesha Spentas and Prophet Zarathushtra himself, the priest now walks to point F and traces the first rectangle FGHI which encircles the entire Bareshnum gah area. This process immediately isolates the entire Bareshnum gah area from its immediate vicinity and puts it in direct contact with the higher realms.

The main feature of the Bareshnum gah is the 10 sets of 5 stones through which the candidate passes through the ceremony. If we observe closely, these are actually 9 sets. The 7th set – where sand is applied is an extension of the first 6 sets and not an independent set by itself. These 9 sets correspond to the nine parts of the human body detailed above. Thus the process of jumping from one set to another is to be understood as the process of purifying and cleansing each part of the human body from the effects of Khiza.

Each of these 9 sets has five stones. The number five denotes two things – firstly the help of the Yazata Sarosh in the ceremony, and secondly the 5 senses. Just as we have the five physical senses – touch, taste, sight, hearing and speech, so also we have 5 spiritual senses. Thus the five stones denote that the priest uses the help of the Yazata Sarosh to cleanse the 5 spiritual senses of the candidate of the effects of Khiza.

These nine sets of 5 stones are separated from each other by 10 sets of three stones each, over which the candidate jumps to reach the next set of five stones. The number three denotes the threefold journey of man:

1. Separation from Ahura Mazda
2. Practicing the faith so as to realise the separation
3. Moving back to Ahura Mazda on the strength of his practice of the religion.

Thus we have 9 sets of 5 stones = 45(ignoring the intermediate step of application of sand) and 9 sets of 3 stones separating them = 27 (again ignoring the set of 3 stones for the sand application), giving us a total of 72, which denotes the 72 different levels of purity that an Athravan has to pass through to reach the highest pinnacle of excellence. The digits of both 45 and 27 sum up to 9 which not only signify the 9 parts of the human body but also the mystical completion of man's journey.

Now the Priest activates the 3 different sets of 5 stones each, which correspond to the three groups of the nine parts of the human body. Hence he first isolates the three sets of five stones that correspond to the Physical group of bodies – Tanu, Gaetha and Azde (see table above) by drawing three karshas around sets (i), (ii) and (iii), thereby creating rectangle JKLM. Then the Priest creates rectangle NOPQ, which isolates the Physical and ultra-physical groups of bodies. Then Priest A creates rectangle RSTU which cover all the three groups of the human body. Finally, he draws rectangle VWXY which correspond to the ultra-physical group of bodies – Keherp, Ushtan-aap and Tevishi.

While this is happening, Priest B has made the candidate recite the Jamvani baj. The recitation of the Baj activates the spiritual energy centres within the candidate – called *chakhras*. Then the candidate chews the pomegranate leaves and swallows the juice. The juice cleans the internal body system and makes it ready to receive the strongest cleansing agent – the Nirang, which is then swallowed three times. Having thus internally cleansed himself, the candidate sits in pavi C and recites the Patet prayer.

Part VIII

Now starts the actual process of cleansing each part of the nine parts of the candidate, who comes and sits one the first set of five stones (i). The candidate puts his right hand on his head so as to cover it since he will be reciting Avesta prayers during the process. Then Priest A comes and places the small Navgreh on his hand, over which C puts his left hand, and they both recite the baj of Sarosh, calling on him to help them in this process. Then Priest A gets the Nirang and pours three streams of Nirang using the metal spoon of the Navgreh. Using the first stream C cleans both his hands up to the elbows, and then using the other two streams he methodically cleans each part of his body as per the routine given above. What is the significance of this procedure? As we are now well aware, the Bareshnum is the process whereby the Nasu – spiritual pollution attached to the candidate is removed. For this to happen in a proper manner, a three pronged attack is mounted using the Bareshnum. This attack is as under:

1. Trap the Druj Nasu
2. Herd the Nasu through the 9 parts and the 16 energy centres (chakhras)
3. Attack and exterminate the Druj Nasu.

The first prong is to trap the Nasu inside the body so that it may not come out and defile anything else. The main entry point of the Nasu is through the hands. Hence it is necessary to seal the extremities of the hands so that the Druj may not slip out from them. The sealing process is done by the application of Nirang on the hands up to the elbows. Hence the Vendidad itself is very insistent on this point. If this is not properly done, the Vendidad says, the whole process thereafter is useless. Once the extremities of the hands are sealed, the Druj cannot escape out of the body. Hence it now starts attacking each of the 16 energy centres – the chakhras which are

located at different parts of the body. The attack starts at the first energy centre – the *Lahiyaan* chakra – located on the top of the head. Hence the application of Nirang starts from the top of the head. From there the Druj is pushed out by the application of the Nirang and hence flees to the fourth chakra located between the eyebrows. The application of Nirang on that part forces the Druj to flee to the back of the head where chakras 2 and 3 are located. In this manner, the Druj is first weakened and then driven out of each chakra through the successive applications of Nirang at the various parts of the body as detailed above. Finally, the Druj is driven to the 16th and last chakra which is located in the soles of the feet. There the last application of Nirang exerts such tremendous pressure on the Druj that it is made completely harmless and it is pushed out through the left toe and exiled from the body.

At this point, Priest A returns to his pavi and Priest B comes out of his pavi with the dog, and then C touches the left ear of the dog with his left hand. What is the significance of this arcane practice? We are aware that the dog plays an important role in our religion, especially at the time of death. One whole chapter out of the 22 chapters of the Vendidad is devoted to the dog. The dog is one of the most important creations of Ahura Mazda and an important facet in the trip to Frashokereiti. The most important part of the dog is his eyes. The subtle wavelengths that are emitted by the dog's eyes are like poison to the Druj Nasu. Hence the dog is used at all times when Druj Nasu is to be contained. After death, the human body starts decomposing at a very rapid rate and the strength of Druj Nasu increases by leaps and bounds. The Druj attempts to confuse the disoriented Ruvan of the deceased person. At this time, the *Sagdid* ('seeing of the dog') ceremony is performed and the vibrations emerging from the dog's eyes keep the Druj Nasu in check. Similarly, during the Bareshnum ceremony, we have seen that the Druj Nasu has been chased out of the body through the application of the Nirang in the proper order. Now this weakened Nasu is further attacked by the vibrations emitted by the dog's eyes, so as to render it completely ineffective. The touching of the ear is not only to focus the attention of the dog to the body of the candidate, but also creates a contact between the chakra situated in the dog's ear and the candidate himself.

Part-IX

After this, Priest A comes out of his pavi and recites the 'Kem na Mazda' prayer and chanting '*Nemascha ya Armaitish izacha*' points the Navgreh to the next set of five stones. C also repeats the formula and jumps over the intervening set of three stones to the next set of five stones. The significance of this act is that the process of applying Nirang over the body, the force of the Bareshnum gah, the eyesight of the dog and the effects of the *Manthras* have all contributed to ridding the first part of the body – the *Tanu* – of the Druj Nasu and the effects of Khiza. Thus with this important practice of the religion – the process of the Bareshnum ceremony, C has qualified to progress to the next stage. Hence the priest points out the next set of 5 stones, so that the process of cleansing the second body may now start.

Now the same process of cleansing is repeated at the first 6 sets of 5 stones, corresponding to the first 6 parts of the human body – the physical and the ultra-physical group. Now the candidate goes on to the seventh set of five stones where he is given 15 applications of sand. What is the significance of this step? As we have said earlier, the seventh stage where sand is applied is actually not a separate step but an extension of the first 6 steps. The application of the Nirang in the first 6 steps has resulted in the weakening and subsequent removal of the Druj Nasu from the

first 6 parts of the body. Now, this process is intensified with the application of a further catalyst – sand. The application of sand does two things – firstly it dries off the Nirang on the body. Secondly, the rubbing action of the sand forces the Nirang to further permeate into the body through the skin, causing even more havoc for Druj Nasu. Hence the seventh set of 5 stones is actually a minor halt in the whole Bareshnum process and not a set in itself. Here the candidate consolidates his victories over the Druj Nasu and ensures that not a single part of his body is susceptible to any further attacks.

The candidate now moves on to the eighth set of five stones where the application is of Av, the sacred consecrated water from the Nirangdin ceremony. What has happened so far? The Druj Nasu outside the body has been made totally harmless. The Nasu inside the body has been systematically gathered and cornered and made ineffective. However, it refuses to leave the body. The Nasu has seeped out of the pores of the skin and is now resting on the outside parts of the body. This has to be washed away and sent down to the Earth. Hence instead of using Nirang, Av is used. The number of applications of Av and the presence of the dog is increased at every succeeding set of five stones as the Nasu is wiped out from every part of the body, thereby ensuring that by the time the candidate reaches the tenth set of five stones, not an iota of Nasu remains on the body.

Hence on the tenth set of five stones, the candidate is declared free from Druj Nasu and the effects of Khiza. Hence the sacred formula is recited: *'Zadeh nashesh sar-o-tan pak ashahi Ruvan. Sag Asho, herbad pak (3).'* i.e., 'The pollution has been destroyed. The body has been cleansed and the soul made righteous. The dog has become righteous and the priest has become pure.'

After understanding the deep rationale behind the Bareshnum ceremony, we now turn to the conditions that have to be observed for the nine nights. The most odd, and certainly the most difficult is the total abstinence from water. The candidate is not allowed the use of water for any purpose, save and except for drinking. Before we understand the rationale behind this, we need to understand the element of water. As we know, water is the universal cleanser, as well as the most efficient thirst quencher. These properties in water are due to the presence of certain spiritual powers that are embedded in the physical element of water. These powers are called '*Frado*' in Avesta. There are six specific Frado in water, the names of which are given in the Ava Nyaesh, as *Adu, Wanthwa, Gaetha, Khshaeta, Zantu* and *Danghu Frado*. Each Frado has a specific function. Now coming back to the conditions of the Bareshnum retreat of nine nights, the reason for abstinence from water is this: The process of progressing through each set of five stones manages to trap the Druj Nasu inside the body and gently bring it out of the body and 'earth it' with the ground. After this process, the candidate sits in a secluded place for those nine nights and totally immerses himself in prayer. In each and every gah, in addition to the normal set of prayers that he has to recite, an additional Patet prayer is also to be recited. The object of this exercise is not only to observe the proper tarikat of prayer but also to ensure that the Nasu does not attempt to strike back. During these days, due to the action of the sun's rays, the physical dirt and grime which is present in every human oozes out from the skin of the candidate and creates a filmy layer of pollution on the surface of the body. The object is to make any residual Nasu in the body come out. At this time, if water is used, the dissipating effect of some of the Frado powers in the water, coupled with the spreading effect of the sun's rays magnifies

this pollution to such great levels that the ground is not able to absorb this pollution. Hence the use of water is prohibited. However, by the end of the third night, the level of this filmy layer assumes proportions that can give rise to fresh pollution. Hence on the fourth, seventh and tenth mornings, the Navsho bath is given to the candidate, where the recitation of specific prayers ensures that only the cleansing Frado of the water is activated and the creation of karshas around the candidate ensures that the pollution does not spread out. Similarly, when the candidate drinks water, the process of prayer before that (the Jamvani baj) ensures that only the thirst quenching Frado of the water is activated, whereas the other Frado are suppressed.

The other conditions of the retreat are all pointers to the single objective of the ceremony – to totally cleanse the Athravan's body of the effects of Khiza accumulated in the six months preceding the Bareshnum, and to remove any vestige of the Druj Nasu from his body. It is only such Athravans – those whose gava element is of the highest calibre, and whose Dravao is completely suppressed, those who are the real descendants and authorised representatives of the Yazata Sarosh and Prophet Zarathushtra that can perform the highest ceremonies like the Yasna, the Vendidad, Vispered, Nirangdin etc. It is impossible to explain the feeling that these rarefied individuals have when they arise from the Bareshnum and after they perform these majestic ceremonies. Only those who have been through the process or those who are close enough to interact with such individuals can realise that the Bareshnum is a miraculous event, a transformation that can happen only to those privileged enough to undergo it. My attempt in this essay has been to make those not fortunate enough to undergo the process understand the reasons behind it and unravel the mysteries of the religion through the correct application of taavil.

Courtesy : Hushang Vakil