

Jamshedi Navruz on March 21st, Fasal (Seasons) and Fasli calendar:

Part I

Zarathushtis have been celebrating Navruz, which falls around March 21st since time immemorial, since our Peshdad King Jamshed celebrated it first and which is known as **Jamshedi Navruz!** Jamshed Padshah celebrated this day as the New (nav) Day (ruz) because it is the Spring Equinox when the time of the day and night are equal in length and after the long winter months, warmth returns and the planting of seeds (life) begin. The concept of spring or Renewal of Life (in March) is universally celebrated by other religions too. It is the universal celebration of new life returning to earth after winter is over! The Christians celebrate it with Easter (eggs symbolize new life); the Hindus celebrate it with Holi (sprinkling colors to signify the rebirth of vegetation). The Shi'i Muslims in Iran and throughout the world have retained the ancient **Zarathushti** custom of celebrating Navruz or, 'Nourouz' around the 21st March.

Jamshed Padshah (Avestan "Yima") is mentioned in the Zamyad Yasht (Karda VII. 31 to 38); Vendidad (Fragard II); and he is also mentioned in the Gathas (Ahunavad Gatha, Y. 32.8)! Accordingly, no one can deny the existence of Jamshed Padshah as a historical figure; also due to the fact that the New Year he started is identified as "Jamshedi Navruz"! As some have speculated, Jamshed Padshah and the Peshdad Dynasty were not "mythological", but historical! The Pak Avesta was written in absolute pre-history; written history began only recently compared to the several millennia of history of the ancient civilizations unrecorded by historians in writing! It is held that Jamshed Padshah must have lived about 11000 to 9000 B. C. during the Peshdad Dynasty.

Dasturji Hormazdyar Dastur Kayoji Mirza has written in Outlines of Parsi History (OPH), Bombay 1987: "It appears that ancient literature, astronomy, and modern science have combined in an effort to ascertain, with reasonable certainty, the place and age in which king Jamshid must have lived. The ancient accounts of 'evil winter, flood, deluge', refer to what is known as glaciation or ice age in geology. Long ago (in 1903) B. G. Tilak based his arguments on Avesta, Vedic and astronomical evidences and arrived at the conclusion that the ancient homeland of the Aryan people was situated near the North Pole or somewhere in the Arctic Circle, which homeland was destroyed by glaciation (Tilak, Arctic Home in the Vedas, pp. 453-458)." The last glaciation took place somewhere around 11000 B.C. during which, according to the Pak Avesta, Jamshed Padshah was advised by Ahura Mazda to build a "var" to survive the deluge.

Navruz does not happen precisely at the same time and on March 21st because every year the Earth orbits around the Sun not in a precise round circle but in an oval egg-shape orbit. Consequently some minor variations in the astronomical calculations are normal and accepted as far as the precise astronomical moment of the Spring Equinox is concerned. This may explain why the English Gregorian calendar and the

calculation of 365 days plus the quarter day are also not accurate. The word "Fasli" comes from "fasal" or **seasons**. Avestan words "yairya" mean season and "saredh" mean a "year". At the time of the Spring Equinox, approximately March 21st, it is the correct time to celebrate the seasonal Jamshedi Navruz (New Day) although we do not follow the Fasli Calendar. The Parsis in India follow **two** New Years - one which is Jamshedi Navruz around March 21st and the other falls sometime in August, also called Parsi New Year or Navruz. The Kadmis also follow their New Year a month earlier to the Parsi New Year. The last day of the Parsi New Year is called "Pateti" meaning prayers are offered to repent, i.e. "patet or *pashemani karvi*" for the mistakes committed during the past year and to resolve not to repeat the same mistakes and also to rededicate oneself in the service of Ahura Mazda.

In ancient Iran, and till the end of the Sassanian Empire, two systems of time-reckoning were **simultaneously** used: the Oshmurtik Sal wherein the fixed year of 365 days (12 months of 30 days each, plus the addition of extra 5 Gatha days) was used; and the Vihezakik Sal wherein the year had the fixed days as the Oshmurtik Sal but with an extra intercalation of a **month** every **120 years**. This extra month was called the "*kabizeh*". Due to not maintaining the "*kabizeh*" periodically every 120 years, we have a difference between the two religious calendars of the Kadmis and the Shahenshahis. However, we are not unique in following different calendars! The Christians have different calendars; the Orthodox Greeks as well as some other Christian sects follow and celebrate their New Year differently, around January 6th! The Budhists also have two calendars.

It is accepted by many scholars including Muslim Iranian scholars that Persepolis was especially built by Cyrus and Darius, the two Great Achaemenians, as a Zarathushti Religious Center for religious events, the Spring Equinox, "Navruz", being one such major celebration. The portals were built in such a way that on the precise moment of the Spring Equinox, always around March 21st, the first rays of the rising Sun hit the entrance to the main Hallway and spread light on the throne of the King. **This precise moment celebrated the astronomical event when the Sun passed through all the 12 signs of the zodiac and returned once more to the first sign of the Aries, in March. This is the exact moment when Navruz occurs.**

In Iran each New Year beginning in March was given a specific color as well an animal as the mascot for the year. A table, "haft seen" is also laid out with seven symbolic food items to welcome spring, the growth of new "life"! This practice is generally forgotten among the Parsis of India.

An Explanation about the 3 different calendars - Kadmi, Shahenshahi and Fasli:

The following is explained by late Dasturji Hormazdyar Dastur Kayoji Mirza in Outlines of Parsi History (OPH), Bombay 1987, pages 436 to 448 with regard to the 3 calendars:

Generally the ancient festivals were the seasonal festivals, based on seasonal changes and harvesting time. In ancient Iran, a year was divided into two parts: “ten months of winter, two months of summer” – indicating the climatic conditions prevailing in the northernmost countries of the North Pole (the Arctic was known as the original homeland of the Aryans as also supported by B.G. Tilak.) In later times, a year was divided into “seven months of summer, five of winter” – indicating the climatic conditions prevailing in some of the countries of Central Asia, most probably the countries of the Avesta people who migrated south from the north Polar regions, after the last glaciation or ice age took place sometime during Jamshed Padshah’s reign.

The following two systems of time-reckoning were in **simultaneous** use in the Sassanian times among the Zarathushtis. (1) Sal**Oshmurtik** or the year of 365 days, i.e. 12 months of 30 days each with extra five “Gatha” days after the end of the 12 months. (2) Sal **Vihezakik**, a ‘shifting’ or leap year. It had 365 days (as in the Oshmurtik year) **with an intercalation of a month every 120 years**. In ancient Iran, this intercalation was carried out under royal patronage according to the guidance and advice of the council of the learned men of the realm.

At present only the first system of time-reckoning, the Oshmurtik, is in use among the Parsi-Irani Zarathushtis in Iran as well as in India. The religious year, therefore, has 365 days, i.e. 12 months, each of 30 days, and extra five “Gatha” days are added at the end of the 12th month, Asfandarmad.

At present there are three sects or groups among the Parsis of India: Shahenshahi “of imperial (reckoning)”; Kadmi “of ancient (reckoning)” and Fasli “of seasonal (reckoning)”. This last group is a new group which did not exist in Iran or India until about the last 2 or centuries.

Dasturji Mirza writes, “The **last** intercalation under Iranian sovereignty was affected in 406 A. C. during the reign of Sasanian Emperor Yazdgard I (399-420). **On this occasion, two months were intercalated – one that was due and the other in anticipation of troubled time in the coming century when the next intercalation was due**. In 406, therefore, the five Gatha days were transferred from after the end of Shahrevar month and were placed after the end of Avan month, where they remained for six centuries thereafter. Due to political instability and disorder in Iran, and later the Arab invasion and overthrow of the Empire, the practice of intercalation fell into disuse.

“In 1006 A. C. **four** intercalations were due; **and it appears that in that year four months were intercalated, and the Gatha days, which were after the end of the Avan month at that time, were shifted and placed after the end of the 12th month Asfandarmad**. Hence the Oshmurtik year coincided with the Vihezakik year. Since then there was no difference between the two systems, or really speaking only the Oshmurtik year remained in practice.” (OPH, p. 443)

The difference of a month between the two calendars of Iran and that of India was first noticed in 1721 when Jamasp Vilayati, a priest of Iran, came to Surat. Later, the matter came to a head when Jamshid, a Zarathushti resident of Iran, came to Surat in 1736. He explained that the Zarathushtis of Iran were ahead of their co-religionists in India by a month in commencing their year and observing religious festivals and functions. They are known as Kadmi (*Qadimi*) 'of the ancient (reckoning)'. The corresponding term used in Iran is *bastani* 'ancient'. "The said difference of one month between the Zoroastrian calendar of India and that of Iran may be explained by the assumption that the forefathers of the Zoroastrians of India intercalated a month after the downfall of the Sasanian Empire either in Khorasan (where they lived in exile) or after their arrival in India. Evidently, this must have happened after 1006 A.C. and in India. But no record or even oral tradition has been preserved." (OPH, p. 444)

However, while the difference between the Shahenshahi and Kadmi calendars are based only on the intercalation of a month after the downfall of the Empire, and since the last intercalation in 1006, regarding the Fasli calendar wherein a sixth Gatha called "Awardadsalgah" is added every fourth year, **several indisputable reasons are given by Dasturji Mirza why the Fasli reckoning is baseless.**

Some reasons given are:

1) The Awardadsalgah jashan was performed every year on Roz Khordad, Mah Aspandarmad of the Shahenshahi calendar and was performed only in India and only by the Shahenshahi priests. It was **unknown** in Iran and therefore never celebrated in Iran by the Kadmi priests. It is reasonably concluded that this jashan was instituted when the last intercalation of a month was affected by the forefathers of the Parsis of India, in remembrance of the New Year Day, Navruz, they abandoned while intercalating a month in India. (The last five Gatha days were shifted in 1006 A.C. from the end of Avan Mah to the end of Asfandarmad Mah and Navruz – the New Year - came to be celebrated from Adar Mah and Hormazd Roz to Farvardin Mah and Hormazd Roz.)

2) Awardadsalgah was performed on **Roz Khordad**, Mah Asfandarmad (of the Shahenshahi calendar) and had connection with Roz Khordad, named after the Ameshaspand Khordad!

3) The *khshnuman* of Awardadsalgah is **not** found in the Siroja or in any other authentic Avesta-Pahlavi writings.

4) The Awardadsalgah Jashan was performed every year and NOT every four years!

5) "Khordad" is referred to as "**awardad**" in Pazend and "gas" or "gah" is used for time in general.

6) In the Avesta, Pahlavi and later writings always the Five Gathas are expressly mentioned, and the names of the five Gathas are given, never six or the sixth Gatha day!

7) Importantly, the mode of intercalation of one day after four years was NEVER practiced by the Zarathushtis in Iran or in India. The Denkart expressly states: (Denkart, edited by Madon, p.404 lines 22-23): “Day calculation should not be affected till a month becomes complete; it should not be neglected for more than five months.” Here, day-intercalation is clearly and expressly forbidden, and month-intercalation is advocated. This is also supported by Al-Biruni, the Muslim historian, in Months of the Persians, p. 54.

8) In 1963, Professor Mary Boyce of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, stayed in Kerman to study the religious practices of the Zarathushtis. Writing on *Jashan-i Sade*, she observes: “Since the 1920’s both Tehran and Kerman have used the **jalali** calendar (called *Fasli* by the Parsis, *bastani* in Tehran and Kerman, and *jadid* in Yazd); **whereas Yazd, after using this calendar for about a year, reverted in the main to the old religious calendar (called *qadim* in Yazd and India, and *na-dorost* in Tehran)! Since *sade* is newly established in Yazd, this festival is observed there according to the *jalali* calendar.” (OPH, p.448.)**

9) The **Jalali (Fasli) calendar** was primarily instituted for revenue purposes in 1079 A.C. by Sultan Jalalu’d-din Malikshah, the King of Iran, on the advice of his grand vazier Omar Khayyam. It was tied down to the Christian Gregorian Calendar, the New Year day was fixed always falling on March 21st, and the ancient Iranian name of Jamshedi Navruz was applied to it. (OPH, p. 451.)

It is very important to note that those Parsi-Irani Zarathushtis who follow the current Fasli calendar are following the Jalali calendar instituted by Jalalu’d-din Malikshah in 1079 A.C. and not any religious calendar followed by the Parsi or Irani Zarathushtis! Only the Shahenshahi and the Kadmi calendars are religiously legal and which are followed since time immemorial, since the time of Jamshed Padshah! Recently, the word “change” has swept over the community but change has to be progressive and not religiously detrimental! **The Jalali (Fasli) calendar is the Muslim calendar and has no religious “alat” established!** Believing it to be correct seasonally, some Parsis asked Ustad Saheb Behramshah Shroff to set up a new Fasli *alat* but Ustad Saheb himself could not do so and acknowledged that there is NO Fasli *alat*; in the absence of which, if we follow the Fasli calendar, the continuity which is maintained religiously with our ancestors (and with rituals) since time immemorial is lost! Ustad Saheb himself did **not** follow the Fasli calendar. (Jehangirji S. Chiniwala, *Ilm-e Kshnoom-ni Maktab-ni Tavarikh*, with special reference to p. 109 and 114)

Some believe that we may observe gahambars and some rituals according to the Shahenshahi, Kadmi and also according to the seasons (Fasli roj-mah, i.e. the Fasli calendar). Conversely, others maintain that if a mobed who is ordained as navar and maretab according to the Shahenshahi or Kadmi calendar, prays the seasonal gahambars, other rituals or muktad according to the Fasli calendar, when he recites the name of the month and day as per the Fasli calendar, his own continuity to follow the roz-mah according to either Shahenshahi or Kadmi calendar, in whichever calendar he was initiated in, is broken! Also, the day and mah named after the Fasli calendar which the mobed prays has no significance because the mobed is ordained according to, and follows either of the two calendars, Shahenshahi or Kadmi, he is initiated in! This mixing of roz-mah from one calendar to another creates disturbance in the alat. Because there is no Fasli alat as yet established, no mobed is authentically initiated according to the Fasli (Jalali) calendar. Therefore, it is better to stick to either the Shahenshahi or Kadmi calendars for rituals and daily prayers.

Hope this will explain the reasons behind the three calendars; mostly why the Kadmi and the Shahenshahi calendars differ by a month! Both are valid religiously and followed since centuries. **The Kadmi are the 'old', the ancient, genuine and true Zarathushtis of Iran! They are not a "new" sect, nor are they following a newer calendar but have always existed side by side with the Shahenshahis! The difference is only in the calculation of a month - which is the result of intercalation - but the difference in the two calendars is not religious!**

'Nourouz' Mubarak to all and May the New Year bring lots of happiness, good health and unity to all Parsi-Irani Zarathushtis!

Atha jamyat yatha afrinami!

Pervin J. Mistry

(Posted previously on March 4, 2012, Roj Farvardin and Mah Meher, YZ 1381).

Part II

Question subsequently broached by a reader:

"Regarding the meanings of the Gahambars. E.g. - Tir mahino Tir Roj, the Tirgan gahambar which means the season of extreme heat and rain. According to the Fasli calendar this falls in June but according to Shehanshahi calendar it falls in December - dead of winter.

"Bundahisn XXV 20 states that 'the auspicious month Farvartin, the month Artavahist and the month Horvadat are spring; the month Tir, the month Amerodat and the month Satrarori are summer; the month Mitro, the month Avan and the month Ataro are autumn; the month Dae, the month Vohuman and the month Spendarmat are winter'."

Therefore, as a consequential result,

"Our 12 religious months and their meaning coincide more with the Fasli calendar instead of the Kadmi and Shehanshahi Calendars, with regard to time of year and seasons and also with regard to what is quoted above in the Bundahisn. Doesn't this mean that, this is what was intended when the calendar was created first to coincide with the seasons and over time because of the intercalations as determined by the Denkart has caused the meaning of our calendar to be out of sync with seasons?"

Reply to the above question: Indeed, the Fasli calendar is the **Jalali** calendar, started in 1079 by Omar Khayyam who was a Sufi saint, renowned for his Rubaiyat, an astronomer and an astrologer plus a very learned historian, mathematician and scientist. He must have been aware of the two calendars – Oshmurtik and Vihezakik - which Iran followed till the end of the Sassanian Empire, and he brought the Arabic calendar in accordance to the seasonal festivals. But, our religion was taboo in Iran after the Arab conquest. Hence, cleverly, the Jalali calendar was brought to be in synchrony with the Gregorian calendar which brought Navruz on or around 21st March, as per the astronomical calculations of the Spring Equinox which Jamshed Padshah had started. While our two calendars, Oshmurtik and Vihezakik, were seasonal prior to 1006 A.D., the **current** Shahenshahi and Kadmi calendars are not seasonal due to missing the intercalations.

Our calendars DID coincide with the seasons till 1006 A.C.! **Denkart is correct because it refers to the calendar we followed, which was correct till 1006 A.C.!** The Denkart was written sometime during the **ninth century by Atarfarnbag Farrokhzad and Aturpat Hemit** and therefore, what it says is correct! **It is only afterwards, due to lagging behind in our kabizeh, that our Kadmi and Shahenshahi calendars are currently not "seasonal"!** Please note that the Fasli calendar started by Omar Khayyam in 1079 was also closer to the date of the Oshmurtik calendar when we stopped the *kabizeh* due to unfortunate circumstances! Those who remained in Iran faced inhumane persecutions and could not openly observe all the religious rites; also most of our learned priests and men were killed, books destroyed, and, those who left Iran and moved to India somewhere around the 8th century A.C. also faced challenges in settling down and observing all the religious rites.

But, the hardships we went through in the 8th century A.D. and thereafter, should not mean we change the two existing calendars, Shahenshahi and Kadmi, arbitrarily! It involves *alat*, meaning the necessary religious implements which are required to start a new calendar. *Alat* is a material or a living object in which spiritual energies are awakened through kinetics (i.e. kriyakam) accompanied by the sounds

(frequencies/vibrations) of the holy *manthra*. *Alat* is established through continuity over age-long usage by which the spiritual forces are awakened and become innate. Therefore, even after moving to India, *alat* was brought from Iran to set up our first Atash-Behram, the Pak Iranshah to maintain continuity with Iran's old fire(s)! **We do not have Fasli*alat* because it was never a religious calendar of the Parsi-Irani Zarathushtis in Iran or in India!**

One salient point to remember about the Jalali calendar is that it was used to collect the hated Jiziya Tax for revenue purposes by the Muslims from all the non-Muslims. This was stopped in 1882 only after Maneckji Limji Hataria went to Iran, with help from the British and the Zarathushtis of India, after which the Irani Zarathushtis were spared from this hated tax by the Qajar rulers!

Do remember please that 1) the Denkart was written in the **ninth century** when we were still very close to following the seasonal calendar; the writers of Denkart had NO idea that the community will not be able to follow the *kabizeh* and therefore move away from the seasons as far as we have! 2) **We do not have Fasli *alat* because it was never a commonly used “Zarathushti” calendar!** It is not that important to follow the precise seasons because all our days and months are named after the Divinities and the Divinities respond to our sincere prayers when we invoke them with a pure heart and faith in our *manthravani*! WE DO PRAY Hormazd Yasht, Ardibehesht Yasht, Sarosh Yasht and other Yashts and Niyayeshes daily even though it may not be Hormazd Roz (to pray Hormazd Yasht on this specific day only); or, Ardibehesht Roz or Mah for praying Ardibehesht Yasht, etc. We pray our manthra, addressing the different Divinities, irrespective of the seasons, roz or mah! Over time, our calendars will again coincide with the seasons and hopefully from then on, we can start celebrating the *kabizeh* every 120 years as mandated by the religious Texts which categorically forbid us to add the *kabizeh* every 4 years!

Second Question: *“Since the last intercalation happened in 1006 A.C, seems like we have missed 8 intercalations. If we had those then our new year currently would be Adar mahino as per Shahenshahi calendar. Because the 8 intercalations would move the 5 Gatha days 8 times to end of Avan mahino. Is that not correct? As per the article, it is mentioned in the Denkart (pg 404. line 22-23) that we have to intercalate a month every 120 years and that we should not neglect it for more than 5 months. We have already neglected for 8 months, so does that not render our calendars legally invalid because we have ignored what was mentioned in the Denkat?”*

No, not having observed the intercalation does not render our calendar(s) legally or religiously invalid because of the reasons given in #2 of the above explanation. When this calendar controversy had erupted in the early 1990's, the Dasturjis had categorically said no to adding the *kabizeh* now and also not to follow the Fasli calendar! Even if we do accept the Fasli calendar, it too is not seasonally precise! Each year Nourouz does not occur on precisely the 21st of march; it occurs between March 19th and March 21st. We have neglected full 8 months (i.e. full 8 *kabizehs*), why not wait for just 4 more and follow the religious **continuity** which is more important than setting up a new calendar which in itself is not very precise

and is devoid of any religious *alat* or continuity! As per the religious rules, we cannot observe more than 5 *kabizehs* together, at one time! So, if we do the 5 *kabizehs* we will still run short of 3 more! If we change to the Fasli calendar, the religious *baaj-rozgar* of our departed souls will be also out of sync with the prayers we have been offering on particular days according to the Kadmi or Shahenshahi calendars. Hence, it is better to let Nature take its course now instead of creating more disorder in the *alat* and in the continuity of rituals, and also *baaj-rozgar* of our departed.

Hope the explanation will put an end to the calendar controversy.

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