

BANDAGI AND ITS PURPOSE

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We must carefully examine the word "Bandagi" which we most commonly and carelessly translate into English as "Prayer". A Zoroastrian's Bandagi is not a mere Prayer, it is the powerful means for a communion with Ahura Mazda.

The word prayer does not convey the full sense or purpose of Bandagi, simply because Prayer conveys and connotes to pray for something, to ask for something, to entreat with urgency, to solicity strenuously or to beseech. Bandagi on the other hand connotes the idea of one's duty and obligation to God if we take the word from Banda - the servant (of God) and it conveys the idea of bond, friendship tying together (with God) if we take from Bandan - to bind. Thus it conveys our subservient status with respect to God, our obligation and duty to offer thanks to Him for all the benefits and bounties we receive and thereby express our gratitude and of our goal to be for ever tied to Him in firm friendship with unbreakable bonds of love. But how seldom do we think in these terms while performing our "Bandagi". Because we have firmly fixed the idea that Bandagi is "prayer" - many seem to carry the idea to its logical end, namely that we should pray only when we want to ask God for some favours or when we are in trouble.

It is we who are weak, it is we who are impure, and therefore know not how to use them. And that is because we have not learnt to offer our Bandagi. This offering is a daily process - nay an hourly process. It is not just for one day in the year. It is an experience for every moment of our life.

In these days, we teach our children a lot of mundane things; how to dress well, how to appear smart, how to eat in style, and so on, but we pay scant attention to teaching them how to clothe and feed their spirits and their soul. The purpose of Bandagi is stated in Yasna 33 - to drive away from within us disobedience to Ahura and all other evils which besiege our heart.

Let us offer our Bandagi with firm and resolute faith in Ahura Mazda, in His wisdom to grant us what is for our own good and in this omnipotence to protect us from all evil.

Hardships and difficulties, trials and tribulations are for all mortals - even our beloved and revered prophet was not free from them. Yet what did he do? Flee from them - certainly not. His greatest weapon was the Holy Manthra - Yatha Ahu Vairyo of our sacred avesta. Thus he smote all evil with the powers of the Bandagi and what else did he do - he prayed for the strength of mind and body to overcome all difficulties. Philips Brooks aptly summarizes this when he admonishes "Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men!! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks." The powers of a sincere Bandagi are truly great.

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The Dinkard lays stress on the following three things people ought to do everyday:

- Perform good deeds
- Drive away demons of putrefaction from their body (druj parhez)
- Profess faith in religion.