

# THE PARSEE VOICE

Vol. IV. Nos. 3 &amp; 4

November–December 2006

*For Private Circulation*

## **Parsees, Stop Denigrating The Dakhmas!**

*Know Nature's Mysteries Behind A Consecrated Dakhma*

**Zoroastrians Do Not Have A Choice Except Dokhmenashini,  
which Has Been Injuncted By Ahura Mazda Himself!**

**Ample Evidence From The Vendidad**

**Dakhmas Are Not Mere Repositories For The Zoroastrian Dead –  
Complete Mismanagement & Failure To Safeguard  
The Dakhmas By The BPP – Root Cause For The Present Crisis**

In the last few months, a few letters and articles have appeared in the Parsee press against the Dakhmas in Mumbai, giving the impression that they are only repositories for the dead. Some have even gone to the extent of considering them as garbage dumps. Nothing can be further from the truth!

Before taking up the mystery of a consecrated Dakhma, it should be emphasised that the blame for the present chaotic conditions at Mumbai's Doongerwadi should be laid squarely at the door of the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. They themselves

have allowed things to come to such a sorry pass in the last five years, that as pointed out by us earlier, they allowed the use of just

about two Dakhmas at a time out of the four available. On top of it, they listened to the advice of those, who thought themselves to be cleverer than Nature herself!

The net result is for all to see. The Parsee community has been in a tizzy about the fate of the departed souls of their friends and relatives. All sorts of

suggestions are made: the worst and the most anti-religious being to opt for cremation or burial, as if the choice is ours!!

### **SCOOP!**

While this issue was in the press, a not-so-little bird chirped that 5 of the BPP trustees have firmly decided **not** to give any part of Doongerwadi land for rituals to those who opt for either cremation or burial. The remaining trustee (you know who!) dissented. We compliment the five trustees for their bold stand and once again urge them to open up all the four Dakhmas and use the pavis therein.

The Parsee Voice can go into the details of why a Mazdayasni Zoroastrian soul has to unquestioningly go for the **Dakhma**, so that on **Chaharum** day, it can sing, "Get me to the **Chinvat** on time".

But, for the present, we shall talk in detail as to what exactly is a consecrated **Dakhma**, what purpose does it serve on its own, how it helps propel the physical body's elements to **Chinvat**, why it is as sacred an institution for the Zoroastrians as a **Fire Temple**, and above all, why it is certainly not a mere repository for the dead and obviously not a garbage dump!

It is, therefore, very necessary to explain and emphasise the absolute indispensability of a consecrated **Dakhma** for the evolution of the Zoroastrian soul, as ordained in the **Vendidad**, Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

**I. The Good Earth:** The drama of life and death of a human being is very necessary for **Frasho-Kereiti (Frashogird)** or salvation to be brought nearer. For life to be sustained, the main source is crops/corn that the good earth provides. The earth – or if you like Mother Earth – has beneath it, a very powerful Divine Force, called **Spenta Armaity** or **Spendarmad Ameshaspand**, operating to bring that salvation near.

In what can be called the **Latent Earth**, the **Zem**, of the **Avesta**, besides **Spendarmad Ameshaspand**, there are her other co-workers, like **Zamyad Yazad**, **Mino Aneran**, etc., all of whom help the evolution of life, and, therefore, of the soul. One is reminded of what the Red Indian Chief Seattle told George Washington, when the latter offered to buy off his land:

**"Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.**

**If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.**

**The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth.**

**Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a stand in it,**

**Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself".**

Thus, whenever there is a disorder or disturbance created by humans in the working of **Armaity** in the **Latent Earth**, the Earth according to the **Vendidad**, is displeased. **The main such disorder is created by dead bodies buried either in the ground or kept on the ground, with a tomb over it.**

Why is the Earth displeased? Because that portion of the earth doesn't get any sunlight. **Armaity**, therefore, finds it cumbersome to perform her normal functions. Just imagine! If one body is buried, a battalion of microbes and maggots cling to the corpse. What must be happening if hundreds of thousands of bodies are buried is beyond comprehension!

What actually happens in Nature is that **Armaity** and her co-workers have to leave their normal functions and concentrate on tackling the **Asar-e-Tariqi** or the **Currents of the Dark Forces** that are created there! It is **Spendarmad Ameshaspand**, therefore, who is responsible for controlling and keeping within limits all the mess and waste matter that is thrown on earth. If corpses are buried, she has to work overtime to nullify the resultant adverse effects. **One of these subtle effects includes the growth of rampant materialism.**

In ancient Zoroastrian Iran, corpses were never allowed to be buried. After the fall of the **Sassanian Empire** and **Yazdegard III**, there were satrapies still governed by Zoroastrians in **Tabaristan**, **Khorasan**, etc. for nearly 100 years! In those provinces, burial of corpses was strictly forbidden. If **Christians**, **Jews**, etc. had to bury their dead, they were asked to go to the borders of these provinces for burial!

**II. The Exalted Earth:** The Zoroastrian religion, therefore, enjoins that to construct a **Dakhma**, the land or that portion of the earth, to be selected, has to be one which is on an elevated-cum-exalted plane: "O Holy Creator of the material world! Where are we to carry the bodies of the dead? O Ahura Mazda! Where are we to place them?" Ahura Mazda replied, "O Spitama Zarathushtra, on the most elevated

place" (**Barezishtaeshwacha paiti Gatushwa**) - Vendidad VI. 44 - 45.

Thus, in present times, tops of hills (Malabar Hill, for example) are selected for the construction of the Towers of Silence. **There, the terrestrial magnetism works without hindrance; there, in the atmosphere flows the Vayu Veh (the benevolent wind); there, the rays of the Sun fall straight and direct...**

On that part of the earth, rituals in honour of **Zamyad Yazad**, like **Baaj** and **Afringan** are performed on **Roj Zamyad** and on the **hamkaras** of **Zamyad (Amardad, Rashne, and Astad Roj)**, right till the time that land reaches the state when the **Tana** ceremony will be performed.

On that vast portion of the elevated land, where the **Dakhma** will come up, **gospands** like goats, lambs, etc. are set free to graze for a minimum period of seven months! The urine and excreta (**taro** and **gobar**) of the innocent animals help destroy pockets of sprites and dark forces, if any and make the whole area peaceful and pure. [In this regard, it is very pertinent to point out that some years ago, when in Chernobyl, Russia, there was a leakage of radioactivity, scientists were pleasantly surprised to find that houses which were splattered with the urine and **gobar** of cattle, there was hardly any adverse radiation found!]

Such a land thereafter, is washed with flowing water, so that it is ready for the "digging the ground" ceremony. This ceremony is very important, as it lays the foundation for the **Tana** ceremony which is to follow.

Ervad Dr. Jivanji J. Modi describes the "digging the ground" ritual as under:

"In the centre of the spot chosen for a Tower, a priest encloses a certain place with a *pavi* and thereon performs the **Baj** ceremonies in honour of **Sroasha**, the guardian angel guiding the souls of the deceased, of Ahura Mazda, of **Spenta Armaiti** - the Archangel presiding over land... of **Ardafrosh** i.e. all the departed souls and of **Haft Ameshaspands**, i.e. the seven archangels. Having performed the prayers and

ceremonies the priest digs with his own hands, a part of the ground required for the tower."

**The whole purpose of performing these various Baj, where the Dakhma is to come up, is to create such currents both on the ground and in the air, so that the area virtually becomes the residence of Divine Entities (Yazads). This part of the earth is now encircled by magnetic circuits (Kash). The body of a departed Zarthoshti which will be later laid in the pavi, which, in turn is connected by a silvery thread to the soul in the bungli, will get a feel of what lies in store for it on Chinvat! That is the beauty and efficacy of the talesam of the Dakhma, which is to come up.**

After the **Baj** ceremonies, the priest digs the ground reciting the **Yatha Ahu Vairyo** prayer.

### III. The Tana Ceremony or Laying the Foundation

Thereafter, the other portion of the ground is excavated by the labourers. Once that is done, two properly ordained priests perform the **Tana** ceremony. This is the foundation laying ceremony, the most fascinating and interesting, which is unique to the construction of **Dakhmas** in India.

101 cotton threads are woven into one strong cord and 301 iron nails weighing 4 maunds are brought there. The 101 threads are woven while reciting the 101 names of Ahura Mazda. The cord is then purified, using well water, and finally dried. To hold this thread, the priests have to fix in the excavated ground 301 nails of different sizes and weights. The biggest and the heaviest nail, weighing one maund (about 20 kgs.) goes in the centre of the **bhandar** or dry well. This will support the collective **talesam** of the **Dakhma**.

In the four corners, four nails of 1/4 maund are pegged, which will support the talismanic forces around the wall of the **Dakhma**.

36 iron nails of 1 maund (20 kgs.), which will be pegged in the four directions of the compass. These will ensure that no *reemani* (defilement/putridity) touches the corpses kept on the

*pavis*. Each of these nails has its upper part slightly curved

256 nails - 32 on each side of the four gutters or drains, i.e. 64 for each gutter. These take care of the 4 *Anasars* (basic elements) from which atoms of a human being are made.

Finally, 4 nails of the same size as the 256 above are struck at the mouths of the four drains.

All the nails are washed with **Taro** and later with well water. Thereafter they are dried and consecrated with a **darun** ceremony in honour of Sarosh Yazad.

The total weight of the 301 nails would add up to 4 maunds or more than 80 kilos!

(The Parsee Voice will publish a diagram of the Tana of a Dakhma in the next issue.)

#### Deep significance of the Nails and the cord or thread that passes through them

After death, it is enjoined that the *anasars* of a Zoroastrian's body, both physical and ultra-physical, have to be entrusted to **Daham Yazad**, who is the Custodian of all *anasars*. What exactly is an *anasar*? Simply put, it is any one of the four basic elements of which the atoms of our bodies are made. An *anasar*, therefore, contains the seed of 'destruction'. It is not perennial. It is bound by Time and Space, unlike the spiritual parts like the soul and the **Fravashi**. This feature of the **Anasar** is called *Khshafan* in Avesta, meaning darkness, i.e. ignorance and fallibility.

So, the principle is, these *anasars* must be despatched to **Daham Yazad**, post-haste after death. The subtle vibratory energy radiating from all the *anasars* is collected by the direct rays of the Sun and propelled towards **Daham Yazad**. In the initial thrust that propels the *anasars*, the *talesam* of the **Dakhma** helps the rays of the Sun. The *Tana* ceremony and the 256 nails plus the 4 nails pegged at the head of the four gutters, in particular, assist the **Dakhma's** *talesam* in qualifying for the upward thrust! In other words, the **Dakhma** itself becomes the co-worker (*Hamkar*) of Daham Yazad.

Notice that the number 4 stands out prominently where the iron nails are concerned. Total number of nails, 301. Total weight of all the nails, 4 maunds. 4 nails for the four corners of the **Dakhma** (South East, South West, North East and North West). 256 nails also add up to the number 4 ( $2+5+6=13$ ;  $1+3=4$ ).

Number 4 indicates the 4 *anasars* (Fire, Air, Water and Earth) of which our bodily atoms are made.

But it is the 36 nails (number 9, which means "perfection") which will surround the 3 *pavis* to be built, which establish contact with Nature's 36 types of electricity (one of them being that of lightning). This fortifies the *talesam* that will operate here. It is this *talesam* created by the 36 nails that works on the *leelo naso* (flesh, skin, etc.) This *leelo naso* is the one strengthened by the *nasa druj* and Ahriman's power. This is exactly why the 3 *pavis* for the males, females and children are made, in which the electro-magnetic circuit of the 36 nails plus Nature's 36 kinds of electricity will operate. It is for this reason that the dead body of a Zoroastrian lying in the *pavi* is NEVER DEFILED, even if it rains!!

Similarly, the 256 + 4 nails pegged, as mentioned above, work on the bones and fluid, like blood, etc.

Thereafter, the ground for the surrounding wall of the **Dakhma** for the **Bhandar** and for the four drains is dug. On the appointed day, two lawfully ordained priests (those who have recently passed through the *bareshnum* ceremony) perform the *panch taye khub* in honour of the **Yazad** presiding on the day in the **Bhandar** and take the *baj* of Sarosh. The two priests then strike the nails in the ground, reciting one *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* while hitting on each nail. Thus, the priests recite in all 301 *Yatha Ahu Vairyos*.

Then the priests commence the passing of the consecrated cord either through or around the nails. This ritual is done by the two ordained priests maintaining their *paivand* throughout.

**IV. Construction of the Dakhma:** Now comes the actual construction of the stone **Dakhma** by labourers. The **Dakhma's** height is about 15 feet.

In the interior, there are three concentric circles of *pavis*, the outermost being for the males, the one in the centre for females and the smallest one next to the **Bhandar** for the children.

**V. Consecration of the Dakhma:** In the **Bhandar**, temporary *pavis* are drawn for the performance of the *pav mahal* or inner liturgical ceremonies, like the *Yasna* and the *Vendidad*, all in honour of **Sarosh Yazad** for three consecutive days and nights. On the 4th day, a special *Yasna* ceremony is performed in honour of **Ahura Mazda**.

Then, on the 4th day itself **Baj** and **Afringan** each, is performed in honour of **Ohrmazd**, **Ardafravash**, **Spendarmard**, **Daham** and **Sarosh**. Community members assemble there to witness the rituals. After they are over, they throw into the **bhandar** coins and valuables.

As the late **Ervad Dr. Jivanji Modi** wrote: "At first sight, the details may appear irksome, but from the standpoint of sanitation and health, most of them... appear essential and indispensable. Every precaution is enjoined, so that, in disposing of the dead body no contamination or injury may result to the living".

**"Thus at the bottom of all religious injunctions and restrictions in connection with the funeral ceremonies and the disposal of the body, lies the sanitary principle of segregation, prevention of**

**contamination and infection and the idea of observing simplicity and equality"**.

**The Role of The Present Bombay Parsi Panchayet:**

Consecrated **Dakhmas** must be allowed to function as Nature and the Zoroastrian religion have enjoined. In Mumbai today, the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet, who are responsible for safeguarding them and for their upkeep, have no compunctions in putting spokes in the wheel of Nature's machinery. None of them has the foggiest notion of what a consecrated **Dakhma** is and how and why it should be treated like a Fire Temple.

It is because of this ignorance about the tremendous potential of a consecrated **Dakhma** in performing the vital role of despatching the atoms of the dead body to their lawful places, that the trustees have totally neglected and miserably failed in carrying out their duty as administrators and managers of the **Dakhmas**.

We emphatically reiterate that the **BPP** trustees must open up all the four **Dakhmas** - **Bisney**, **Sethna**, **Banaji** and **Anjuman** - and use all or most of the *pavis* therein, so that nearly 900 dead bodies can be placed on them. Otherwise they commit a breach of trust! We also reiterate that vultures are not at all central to **Dokhmenashini**. The consecrated **Dakhmas** plus **Khurshed Nagirashni** can work wonders. We bet! Most of us don't even know what solar radiation is and what it can do. For that, wait till our next issue.

## Bizarre Happening!

On the morning of 4th January, we blinked in utter surprise! The "Pyedust" in the Bombay Samachar gave the name as "Perin Nelyekat Chakara" nee Havaladar. Is that a Parsee or an Irani name? we wondered. The funeral of the 82-year-old lady was at the **Wadia Bungli**.

The picture became clear in the "Tribute" column of the Times of India. The name was **Perin Narayan**, wife of **N.C. Narayan**. That explained the "N.C." initials.

The **Uthamna** was also held at the **Wadia Bungli**. The bizarre aspect about this funeral was that, while full-fledged Parsee Zoroastrians, including **Dhan Baria**, stupidly clamoured for cremation or burial, this Parsee lady who had joined in union with a non-Parsee man, after death at the age of 82, still opted for **Dokhmenashini**. *Topsy-turveyed* times, indeed!

It's a different matter that we disagree with the arrangement made by the **BPP** trustees for Parsee women "married" outside the community, whose bodies are brought to **Doongerwadi** after death.