

The Calendars

The Achaemenians (559 - 331 B.C.)

During Achaemenian times, there existed a 360-day calendar of 12 months with each month comprising of 30 days. Four days of each month were dedicated to Ohrmazd and these days were deemed to be the days of rest.

- Day 1 – Ohrmazd
- Day 8 – Daē pa Ādur
- Day 15 – Daē pa Mihr
- Day 23 – Daē pa Dēn.

It seems from Achaemenian times that each day of the month was dedicated to a *Yazata* for the dual purpose of worship and devotion. The Achaemenians introduced twelve new festivals to celebrate the important days on which the day and month names of the *Yazata* coincided (*Guj. parabs*); for example, Mihr rōz Mihr māh, Ābān rōz Ābān māh. Besides these days, the Achaemenians are known to have celebrated the seven great festivals which were linked to the seven *Amesha Spentas*, who in turn were regarded as the guardians of the seven physical creations. The first six festivals came to be known as *Gāhāmbārs* whilst the seventh festival which fell in spring, became the important festival of *NōRōz* and was celebrated by the Achaemenians and Babylonians to mark the beginning of their respective New Years. Concurrent with the Achaemenian and Babylonian calendars was an Egyptian one based upon a 365-day solar cycle.

The Seleucids (312 - 248 B.C.)

The Seleucids are known to have started an important practice by dating their calendar from an era when their dynasty was founded (312/311 B.C.). Before Seleucid times, the dating of the calendar used to start afresh upon the coronation of each king.

The Parthians (248 B.C. - 224 A.C.)

The Parthians continued with the Seleucid practice of dating, except that due to intercalation lapses, the spring New Year day slipped

back into the autumn. They however continued to follow a 360-day calendar inspite of the fact that the Romans had changed their calendar to a 365-day one in 46 A.C.

The Error:

It was in Parthian times that the date of birth of Zarathushtra was wrongly computed.

From the Babylonians, the Parthians had gleaned that a great event had taken place 228 years before the end of the era of Alexander the 'Accursed' (311 B.C.). They thus added another 228 years to the 311 B.C. date and arrived at a figure of 539 B.C. In fact, this was the year in which Cyrus had conquered the Babylonians and hence it was an important memory that lingered in the minds of the Iranians. The Parthians wrongly assumed the 539 B.C. date to be the year in which the prophet was believed to have received his first revelation. They then added another 30 years to the 539 B.C. date on the grounds that according to the oral tradition, Zarathushtra was 30 years of age when he received his first revelation. They thus calculated the prophet's date of birth to be 569 B.C., or 258 years before the era of Alexander (i.e. $311 + 258 = 569$ B.C.).

The Sasanians (224 - 652 A.C.)

The first Sasanian king was Ardashīr I (224 - 240 A.C.), who implemented important reforms in the Zoroastrian calendar. He changed the old 360-day calendar to a 365-day one, by adding five extra days which later came to be known as the *Gāthā* days. It is believed that in the third century B.C., due to intercalation lapses, the Zoroastrian New Year day was celebrated in the autumn instead of in the spring. Ardashīr's calendar reforms seem to have had a far-reaching effect on his people who initially rejected his new calendar as it affected their religious sentiments.

This resulted in two calendars – one decreed by the king, and the other older one which was followed by the majority of the people. In the

king's calendar after Anērān rōz Spendārmad māh there were five additional *Gāthā* days, whilst in the people's calendar after Anērān rōz Spendārmad māh the next day was Ohrmazd rōz Fravardīn māh, which in turn

marked the beginning of the New Year. Owing to the addition of the five *Gāthā* days, the king's calendar was five days behind the people's calendar. Thus at the end of the first year of reform, the following anomaly arose.

At the End of the First Year

The People's Old Calendar

Day 360 Rōz Anērān (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 1 Rōz Ohrmazd (Old *NōRōz*)
 Day 2 Rōz Vahman
 Day 3 Rōz Ardvahisht
 Day 4 Rōz Shahrewar
 Day 5 Rōz Spendārmad
 Day 6 Rōz Hordād (New *NōRōz*)

The King's New Calendar

Day 360 Rōz Anērān (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 361 *Gāthā* 1 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 362 *Gāthā* 2 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 363 *Gāthā* 3 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 364 *Gāthā* 4 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 365 *Gāthā* 5 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 1 Rōz Ohrmazd (New *NōRōz*)

In the old calendar, the festival of *Fravardīgān* (*Guj. Muktād*) was celebrated for one day as it was traditionally believed that the spirits of the dead always returned to their spiritual abode on the dawn of Ohrmazd rōz Fravardīn māh. In the king's new calendar due to the additional five *Gāthā* days, the people had to wait for six days before the *fravashis* returned

to their spiritual world.

In the following year the king decreed that *NōRōz* was to be celebrated at the end of 365 days, and so the people were made to add on five more days to their old calendar. Thus at the end of the second year, there was greater confusion.

At the End of the Second Year

The People's Old Calendar

Day 360 Rōz Anērān (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 361 *Gāthā* 1 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 362 *Gāthā* 2 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 363 *Gāthā* 3 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 364 *Gāthā* 4 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 365 *Gāthā* 5 (*Fravardīgān*)

Day 1 Rōz Ohrmazd (Old *NōRōz*)
 Day 2 Rōz Vahman
 Day 3 Rōz Ardvahisht
 Day 4 Rōz Shahrewar
 Day 5 Rōz Spendārmad
 Day 6 Rōz Hordād (New *NōRōz*)

The King's New Calendar

Day 355 Rōz Ashi (Eve of *Fravardīgān*)
 Day 356 Rōz Ashtād (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 357 Rōz Asmān (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 358 Rōz Zamyād (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 359 Rōz Mahraspand (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 360 Rōz Anērān (*Fravardīgān*)

Day 361 *Gāthā* 1 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 362 *Gāthā* 2 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 363 *Gāthā* 3 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 364 *Gāthā* 4 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 365 *Gāthā* 5 (*Fravardīgān*)
 Day 1 Rōz Ohrmazd (New *NōRōz*)

The king's calendar reform created unforeseen additional problems. Anērān rōz of the old calendar coincided with Ashi rōz of the king's calendar due to the initial five-day difference at the end of the first year. The difference of five days remained in the minds of the people and so all the festivals were celebrated twice, as no one wanted to arouse the displeasure of the departed spirits. Thus the festival of *Fravardīgān* at the end of the second year was celebrated according to the people's calendar for six days, from Anērān rōz *Spendārmad māh* to the dawn of Ohrmazd rōz *Fravardīn māh*. In the king's calendar however, the festival was celebrated for ten days, beginning from Ashtād rōz *Spendārmad māh* to the dawn of Ohrmazd

rōz of the New Year.

At the end of the third year a compromise was reached and it was decided to synchronize the two calendars, with Ohrmazd rōz *Fravardīn māh* coinciding in both. It was also agreed to maintain the festival of *Fravardīgān* for ten days. Some traditionalists extended the *Fravardīgān* festival to Hordād rōz *Fravardīn māh* on the grounds that Ohrmazd rōz of the new calendar corresponded to Hordād rōz of the old calendar. Hence Ohrmazd rōz *Fravardīn māh* came to be known as the Lesser *NōRōz* while Hordād rōz *Fravardīn māh* came to be celebrated as the Greater *NōRōz* (*Guj. Khordad Sal*).

At the End of the Third Year

(The Synchronized Calendar)		
<i>Spendārmad māh</i>	Day 355 Rōz Ashi	
<i>Lesser Fravardīgān</i>	Day 356 Rōz Ashtād Day 357 Rōz Asmān Day 358 Rōz Zamyād Day 359 Rōz Mahraspand Day 360 Rōz Anērān	} <i>Muktād Period</i> ¹
<i>Greater Fravardīgān</i>	Day 361 <i>Gāthā</i> 1 Day 362 <i>Gāthā</i> 2 Day 363 <i>Gāthā</i> 3 Day 364 <i>Gāthā</i> 4 Day 365 <i>Gāthā</i> 5	
<i>Fravardīn māh</i>	Day 1 Ohrmazd (<i>Lesser NōRōz</i>) Day 2 Vahman Day 3 Ardvahisht Day 4 Shahrewar Day 5 Spendārmad Day 6 Hordād (<i>Greater NōRōz—Khordad Sal</i>)	

Due to the intercalation of the five extra days introduced in the reign of Ardashūr I, King Hošmuzd I (272 - 273 A.C.) decreed that all the former one-day festivals should be celebrated for six days in order to satisfy the sentiments of both factions. The traditionalists were happy

with this compromise as they believed that the old feast days were included in the celebration, whilst the reformists felt that their objective had also been achieved through the introduction of the 365-day solar calendar. However, no provision was made to intercalate the

1. Some Zoroastrians celebrate the "festival of all souls" (*muktād*) from the dawn of Ashi rōz *Spendārmad māh* till the dawn of Amurdād rōz *Fravardīn māh*, which according to the Gregorian calendar totals eighteen days.

extra quarter day of the solar year. Therefore in the sixth century A.C., *NōRōz* once again slipped back to the summer (July), instead of falling in spring (March).

In the reign of King Kobad I (488 - 531 A.C.), the second major calendar reform took place. It was decided to shift *NōRōz* to whatever month that would fall during the spring of the year in order to bring back the festival of *NōRōz* to the spring season. They discovered that the start of spring coincided with the ninth month of *Ādur* and hence *NōRōz* was celebrated on Ohrmazd *rōz* *Ādur māh* instead of Ohrmazd *rōz* *Fravardīn māh*. This reform must have taken place some time between 507 A.C. and 511 A.C. As a result, in the actual year of change, *NōRōz* had to be postponed by a full eight months. Similarly all the *Gāhāmbār* festival months also had to be re-organized due to this reform. The *Fravardīgān* festival in Kobad's reign was celebrated therefore from the 26th day of *Ābān māh* to the first day of *Ādur māh*, instead of, from the 26th day of *Spendārmad māh* to the first day of *Fravardīn māh*. Hence during this period the *Gāhāmbār* festivals were celebrated for five instead of six days. It was also decided to intercalate one month every 120 years in order to ensure that *Ādur māh* always coincided with the spring season.

The Historical Evolution of the Zoroastrian Calendars

The *Shenshai* calendar dates back to the coronation of the last Zoroastrian Sasanian King, Yazdegird III in 631/2 A.C. and not, as is commonly believed, from the date of the arrival of the first 'Parsi pilgrim fathers' to India.

Due to intercalation lapses, *NōRōz* continued to fall back one month every 120 years. However, in 1006 A.C., the first day of *Fravardīn māh* in fact once again coincided with the advent of spring; in other words, the calendar was restored naturally to its original correctness. In 1129 A.C., the Parsis in India remembered to intercalate one month in order to

maintain Ohrmazd *rōz* as the first day of *Fravardīn māh* and to coincide it with the start of spring. The Irani Zoroastrians forgot to make this intercalation.

In 1720 A.C., an Irani *dastur* named Jāmāsp Vilayati came from Kerman to advise his Parsi counterparts in India. In due course they discussed the calendar difference of one month between the Parsi and Irani calendars, but the priests could not come to any conclusion.

In 1746 A.C., a group of priests from Surat decided to adopt the Irani calendar and so they came to be known as the *Kadmi*, the "ancient ones". Thus the *Kadmi* calendar came into effect and is followed to this day by predominantly Irani Zoroastrians. A one month calendar difference continues to exist between the *Kadmi* and *Shenshai* calendars, owing to an intercalation oversight in 1129 A.C.

During the early part of the twentieth century, Mr. Khurshedji Cama was troubled by the calendar problems which divided the community. In spite of two calendars, the New Year was still celebrated in the autumn instead of being celebrated in the spring. In 1906 A.C. the "Zartoshti Fasli Sal Mandal" was founded to propagate the idea of a spring *NōRōz*. The members decided to add one extra day every four years, as is the practice followed in the Gregorian calendar, in order to prevent *Fravardīn māh* from slipping back one month in every 120 years. This movement led to the birth of the *Fasli* calendar according to which the New Year is celebrated on the 21st of March – the spring equinox. This calendar is followed today by a small percentage of Zoroastrians in different parts of the world. *NōRōz*, however, in both the *Shenshai* and *Kadmi* calendars, continues to slip back as no intercalation has been implemented in order to maintain the traditional celebration of the *NōRōz* festival in spring.

The Zoroastrians thus have three calendars – the *Shenshai*, *Kadmi* and *Fasli* – a license for Zoroastrians to be additionally merry!

Appendix 1

Gāhāmbār: A Community Togetherness

Festivals in Zoroastrianism fulfill a dual role in which the participants are enjoined to propitiate and worship, as well as are encouraged to be joyous and happy. "On the day of Ohrmazd drink wine and make merry, on the day of Vahman put on new clothes, on the day of Ardvahisht go to the fire temple, on the day of Shahrewar rejoice...."²

In Zoroastrianism, there are seven great festivals of the year which are linked to the seven physical creations whose overseers are the heptad of the Bounteous Immortals (*Av. Amesha Spentas*). In Sasanian times (224–

652 A.C.) the first six festivals came to be known as *Gāhāmbārs*, though it is believed that it was Zarathushtra himself who founded the six festivals in ancient Iran. *Gāhāmbārs* are celebrated by Zoroastrians as a part of their religious duty, for it is believed that it is through the harmony and well-being experienced in the physical world that man is promised a glimpse of the spiritual world.

In Zoroastrianism, a *Gāhāmbār* is also generally endowed in the memory of a departed soul which is invoked during the *Gāhāmbār jashan*. Traditionally, special food is served to both the rich and poor alike, who come together in order to share the spirit of oneness within the religion.

Each *Gāhāmbār* is celebrated in honour of one of the creations:


<i>Gāhāmbār</i>	Creation	<i>Amesha Spenta</i>
<i>Maidyōizarēmaya</i>	Sky	Khshathra Vairya (Sovereign Kingdom)
<i>Maidyōlshēma</i>	Water	Haurvatāt (Perfection)
<i>Paitish-hahya</i>	Earth	Spenta Ārmaiti (Holy Devotion)
<i>Ayāthrima</i>	Plants	Ameretāt (Immortality)
<i>Maidyāirya</i>	Cattle	Vohu Manah (Good Mind)
<i>Hamaspathmaēdaya</i>	Man	Spenta Mainyu (Bounteous Spirit)

NōRōz: A Resurgence of Life

The most important celebration of the Zoroastrian year is the seventh festival which is associated with the seventh creation fire, which in turn is linked to the Best Truth – Asha Vahishta. The seventh festival is the last convivial occasion of the old year, but it also marks the beginning of spring in the new year and hence it came to be known later as *NōRōz* – the "new day". Spring time in the cycle of life is an important period as it represents the annual resurgence of life and therefore it is deemed to be a day of renewal, hope and joy.

According to tradition, the festival is believed to have been founded by the prophet himself, who it is held received his revelation on *NōRōz*. It is associated with the mythical King Jamshēd who it is said ruled the world during a "golden age" which will once again be restored at the end of time, and so *NōRōz* has come to be seen as both a day of remembrance as well as promise. The prefix Jamshēd was added to the word *NōRōz* in the late nineteenth century and hence the festival came to be known as Jamshēdi *NōRōz*, which according to the legend is the day on which Jamshēd forced the *dēvs* to carry him through the air from Mount Damavand to Babylon.

² *The Pahlavi Texts* pp 119-122, tr. by Zaehner, *Teachings of the Magi*, pp 107-8.



It is on *NōRōz* that Rapithwin, the Lord of Noon, re-emerges from inside the earth after an absence of five months³ during which he is believed to have kept the seeds warm and the waters flowing in order that life may emerge with the advent of spring. Rapithwin is also seen as the Lord of Future Time, when it is promised that the world will be restored to a perfect state after which the bodies of the dead will resurrect and re-link with their counterparts, the spirit and soul. Likewise, *NōRōz* is seen as the potential resurrection somewhat similar to the traditional Christian Easter. Legend has it that history began from *NōRōz* when the sun first moved across the horizon. It is therefore celebrated as the day of new life and joy, a day on which gifts are exchanged amongst friends, as well as according to the *Shāhnāmē*, it is the great day of reconciliations.

The seven great festivals of the Zoroastrian devotional year enable man to be joyous and harmonious through the act of worship and celebration in order to experience the inherent goodness of the material world.

3. It is owing to his absence that Zoroastrians propitiate a second *Hāvan gāh* instead of the Rapithwin *gāh* during the last five months of the Zoroastrian calendar.

*Iranian dignitaries on their way to a NōRōz reception
(c. 5th century B.C.)*