

Iranian Months, Their Origins and Origin of the Names

By: Massoume Price

The names of the 12 Persian months are taken from the ancient Zoroastrian texts and the origins are deeply rooted in their belief system. The Lord of Wisdom in order to defeat the hostile spirits creates many forces and beings to help him. There are three groups of metaphysical beings, some are more important than others. The first group is the six Amesha Spenta. With the Lord of wisdom they form the seven Holy Immortals that protect the first seven creations when the material world (Geety) is created. They are the protectors of sky, waters, earth, fire, plants, animals and humans.

Six of the twelve months are in their names. Khashtira Vairya (**Shahrevar**), is the lord of sky, all stones, metals, warriors and the protector of the poor and the weak. It means the desirable dominion (**Keshvar e Arezoo Shodeh**). Shahr is country or land and Var means desirable. Asha Vahishta (**Ordibehesht**) lord of fire and noontime heat means the ultimate righteousness (Behtarin Rasty). Asha has many meanings - righteousness, law, purity, sacred (Asha Zardosht) are only some of the commonly used ones.

Vohu Manah (**Bahman**) protector of animals means good purpose (**Nik Nahad**). He was a powerful symbol of creative goodness and is the divinity personifying the principle of Asha (cosmic order). Haurvatat (**Khordad**) protects all waters and means health or wholeness (**Rasaei & Kamali**).

Spenta Armaiti (**Esphand / Espandarmaz**) a female deity who protects mother earth is Holy Devotion (**Foroutani Moghadas**). Espand means holy and Armaiti equals devotion and unconditional love. She is also the guardian of herdsmen and farmers. She is identified by the Greeks as Demeter and in Armenia is known as Spendaramet. Ameretat (**Mordad**) supporter of all plant life represents immortality (**Na mira**). Mar (marg in modern Persian) means death, 'a' at the beginning of any word changes the meaning into the opposite. Mordad means death, while Amordad means immortality. Mordad is used wrongly in modern calendar and should be Amordad.

These immortals also represent different aspects of Ahura Mazda's attributes. One of their functions is to transfer these attributes to humans. For example Vohu Manah (**Bahman**) is a symbol of "Good Purpose". Zoroastrians through Bahman Yasht (Prayers specific to Bahman) would discipline themselves to always mean good and have noble purposes. Ordibehesht Yasht (Yasht means prayer) will teach Zoroastrians to follow righteousness, one of Lord of Wisdom's attributes.

The second group of metaphysical beings are Yazata (Eyzad), 'a being worthy of worship'. There are many of them. Good forces in nature and all deeds and attributes beneficial to humans have their own Eyzad. Azar, Aban, Khorshid, Mihr, Tir and Bahram are some of the best known Eyzads. **Azar** (Atar/Adur) is yazata of fire (Agni in Indian Rig-Veda). It is one of the most important of all Eyzads. In Avestan Mythology it helps legendary king Takhmorup (Tahmoureth) and Yima Khshaeta (Jamshid) to overcome many obstacles. The word has become synonymous with fire (**Atash**) in modern Persian.

Aban, is Avestan 'Apas', 'Api' in middle Persian and 'Ap' in Phalavi. It means water (**Aub**, in modern Persian). It is the protector Eyzad of the 'waters' and an assistant to Spenta Armaiti. **Mihr** is Mithra in Avesta and Mitrah in Phahlavi. It is the yazata of the covenant and of loyalty. It has come from the word mei, meaning exchange. In Avesta he is the protector of '**Payman e Dousti**' (contract of friendship). In modern Persian it means love and kindness. He is the lord of ordeal by fire (walking through fire to prove innocence, story of Siavash in Shahnameh) and presides over judgment of the soul at death. Ancient Greeks identified him with Apollo.

Tiri, **Tir** (Tishtrya), is assimilation from Babylonian Nabu, lord of scribe and of the planet Mercury into Avestan mythology. It means the swift one (**Tond va chabok**) and protects rain. In Persian-Islamic mythology Tir (Attarod in Arabic) is still the lord of scribe (Setareh Dabir).

The last groups of Metaphysical beings are Farevashi or 'Forouhars', the guardian angels created by Ahura Mazda to protect living beings after the material world (Geety) was created. These are protectors of humans from birth to death and it is roughly translated as guardian. The word has become synonymous with fereshteh in modern Persian. **Farvardin**, is the descent of Farevashi to earth in order to visit and help their human counter parts. It also means '**Farr e Din**', glory of religious consciousness. A major festival celebrating departed souls it was changed into

celebrating guardian angels coming to earth before the start of the New Year. Farvardegan is '**Jashn e Farevashi**' and it still celebrated by Zoroastrians today. '**Day**' (dadar) means creator (**Afaridegar**). The whole month was dedicated to Ahura Mazda. The eight, fifteenth and twenty-third of every month were also called 'Day'. The first day of this month was celebrated as 'Khoram Ruz' a feast of charity, people were expected to be charitable and help others.

The twelve deities have survived as months of the year in modern Persian calendar. In the Islamic period the same structure was taken and transformed into the Iranian version of Shiite Islam. Twelve Imams replaced Yazata and Saoshyant; the last saviour was changed into the Time Lord, Imam Zaman. However the meanings, the importance of following and practicing divine attributes as part of the monthly rituals are lost. So are the joys, monthly feasts and celebrations associated with them.