

## 2017 SSZ conference

Over 50 persons participated in the 2017 SSZ (Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism) conference, November 3 – 5, at the darbe mehr, supported by ZAC and WZO. The conference was kicked off with a “Meet and Greet” evening on Friday evening, after our monthly Humbandagi prayers, to socialize with the distinguished speakers and guests and enjoy the hearty potluck buffet.

On Saturday, after a hearty breakfast of “Spicy Omelet sliders” (*Parsi Poro*), lox and bagels and more, the program opened with a Benediction by **Mobedyar Boman Damkevala** and a Monajat (specially written, in English) by **Mani Rao**. Participants were then welcomed by ZAC President **Er. Rayomand Ravji**. Of special mention was the presence of the **Rev. B. Herbert Martin**, President-designate of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago. **Rohinton Rivetna** explained the Vision of SSZ, which is to revive the tradition of learning and scholarship within our Zarathushti community, and urged all – academics, priests, educationists, lay scholars, students, and above all, community members -- to participate in these conferences.

As a token of appreciation for **Pallan Ichaporia**, who inspired the founding of SSZ, helped organize and participated in SSZ conferences in earlier years, SSZ presented a plaque to him in absentia, for “Services rendered ... to the cause of Zoroastrian studies.” Due to ill health, he is now unable to participate.

The morning session was chaired by **Jim Engineer**. **Fariborz Rahnamoon**, who has spent a lifetime researching the religion (visit [www.ancientiran.com](http://www.ancientiran.com)) in *Time to Visit the Gathas*, revisited the Gathas by “putting aside prejudices” and “looking at things as they are.” He then spoke on *The Mazdayasni Calendar*, that he proposes be adopted by Zoroastrians worldwide. He has proven it to be the most astronomically correct calendar, in synch with the seasons, and needs no adjustment for 110,000 years.

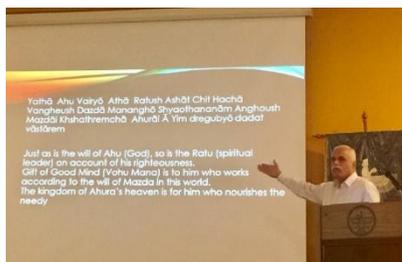


**Dr. Kiersten Neumann**, curator at The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, spoke on *Achaemenid Art and Artisans* focusing on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis. She showed how the craftsmen of the reliefs, expressed, through their art, certain cultural and socio-political concepts and codes of the Achaemenid royal court. **Joseph Peterson** has been studying religious texts for decades. He gave an *Overview of the Avesta.org Website*, which

he created in 1995, to share his vast collection of rare texts which he has digitized. Over the years, it has grown to also include events, newsletters, more texts, prayers, translations, annotations -- over 11,000 files and 300 audio recordings. Spurred by the tremendous interest worldwide, Joe is continuing his passion to improve the site with more rare texts, mobile device support, more epub, searchable pdfs, more videos and other improvements.

During lunch (of delicious chicken tikka and beef kabob wraps, samosas, puff pattice, fondue, dips and desserts ) there was a showing of the films: *Zoroastrian Heritage* and *Zoroastrianism 101*.

The afternoon session was chaired by **Jamshed Rivetna**. **Er. Tehemton Mirza**, Vice President of the



North American Mobeds Council, and an accomplished orator, gave an inspirational message, sermon style, on *Live Your Prayers*. It is important to understand our prayers, and, most importantly, to “live them.” How we “act” is more important than what we pray to God. He explained that Zoroastrian prayers are not authoritative – they are statements of *facts, truths, wisdom*, for spiritual growth, with many layers of meanings, and provide an ‘instruction manual’ for living a Good Life.

**Prof. Martin Schwartz** taught Iranian Studies at Columbia (1968 – 1970) and University of California from 1970 until his retirement as Prof. Emeritus in 2011. He has published widely on ground-breaking studies of Avestan, Achaemenid and Sasanian Zoroastrianism. He made his presentation via ZOOM. In ***Basics of the Gathas*** he gave a general description of the Gathas – their poetic style and content, and their importance for all religions and philosophies of the world. In ***The Gathas: Not primitive ritualism, not pre-modern rationalism, but poetic ethico-mystical mentalism***, Prof. Schwartz explained his foremost discoveries of striking intricacies in the compositional style of the Gathas.

Next, **Fariborz Rahnmoon** gave a very interesting account with photographs of his recent visit to Kurdistan ***In Search of Zarathushti Kurds***, who claim that Zarathushtra was a Kurd for he was a Magi and Magi were a tribe among the Madhs, ancestors of the Kurds. They do not seek permission to become Zarathushtis, for they believe they are from the original stock.



In the ***Panel Discussion on the Gathas***, moderated by **Dastur Kersey Antia** and **all the Speakers**, Next Generation Panelists **Er. Rayomand Ravji, Cyrus Rivetna, Pervin Taleyarkhan, Kamal Saher** and **Khursheed Ichaporja** discussed their understanding of the Gathas, what they had learned from the Speakers, and how they could apply the teachings of the Gathas in their lives.

During the Social Hour that followed, participants had an opportunity to network and socialize over drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

On Sunday morning, several speakers, mobeds and community members gathered for a ***Roundtable Discussion***. The agenda covered: Importance of Mobeds' role in educating and inspiring the community (to be shared with NAMC); Critique of the 2017 Conference; Planning for the 2018 Conference; SSZ Organizational improvements; Establishment of "Center for Zoroastrian Studies", and other topics. After lunch, several conference participants car-pooled for a ***Visit to the Oriental Institute***, and were given a very interesting tour of the Persian exhibits.

The event raised \$411 for ZAC from registration fees and donations.

**Grateful Thanks** to Rohinton Rivetna for spear-heading this annual conference; to ZAC for hosting the conference and for donation of \$500; to WZO and Kayomars Mehta for donation of \$500; to speakers, session chairs and panelists for taking the time from their busy schedules to come and enlighten us.

Grateful thanks also to the food volunteers: Dilshad Antia (milk), Zerine Dadabhoy (fruits), Zenobia Damania (sausage roll, kale salad, brownies), Bachi Damkevala (bean dip and tortillas, artichoke dip and crackers), Jehangir Darukhanavala (bagels & cream cheese), Niloufer Darukhanavala (mini quiche, samosas), Jeraz Engineer (soft drinks), Aban Grant (artichoke dip, cake), Anahita Gonda (cake, spanokopita), Nergish Mehta (meat-balls), Hosi Mehta (wine), Perviz Patel (soft-drinks), Cyrus Press (orange juice, ice), Zarin Press (khaman dokhla, baked beans), Mani Rao (samosas), Cyrus Rivetna (beer), Roshan Rivetna (cheese tray, crab fondue, Parsi poro, puff pattice, kabob wraps, spinach bowl, sandwiches, mawa cakes, cheese biscuits), Tami Rivetna (buffalo chicken dip), Taleyarkhans (whiskey), Dinaz Weber (chicken tikka wraps).

We are also deeply grateful to Zarin Karanjia and Zarin Press for help with Registration; to Bomi Damkevala for being the photographer; to Jehangir Darukhanavala for being the scribe, writing the report, and collecting all presentations for the website; to Eric Rustomji for his IT help and for his help, with Olga Louchakova-Schwartz, to organize and record Prof. Schwartz' ZOOM session which is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvlanpHeoB0>. All the presentations will be on the SSZ website ([www.s-s-z.org](http://www.s-s-z.org)) for which we are grateful to Yazdi Tantra and his IT firm on-lyne.com.