



STŪM

STŪM (Av. *staoma-*, MPers. *stūm*, *satūm*, *stum*, Pers. *satumi*, Guj. *astam*) “(ritual of) praise” in Zoroastrianism, in serving as a means of commemorating the mortal soul (Av. *uruuan-*, MPers. *ruwān*, Pers. and Gujerati *ravān*) and the immortal spirit (Av. *frauuaši-*, MPers. *frawahr*, Guj. *farōhar*) of each Zoroastrian (Figure 1). It persists in contemporary Indian practice and also has an equivalent Iranian rite.

The *stūm* is an outer ritual, that is, one performed in the outer precinct of a fire temple or even in a clean area of a home, often on a carpet or table. The ritual’s name comes from Av. *stav-* (Pahl. *stūdan*, *stāyīdan*, *stāy-*, Pazand *stāīdan*, Pers. *sotudan*, *setudan*; cf. Skt. *stóm-* < IE **st-*, **st(ə)*) “to praise, to profess.” It is mentioned in the first line of recitation, derived from Y.26.1: *ašāunqam vaṇuhīš sūrā spəntā frauuašaiiō staomi* “I praise the good, strong, holy immortal spirits of the orderly ones.” Its practice is attested during late medieval and premodern times by references in the Persian Rivāyats (composed 1478-1773 CE) and the *Rahbar-i dīn-i Jarthushtī* (composed in Gujarati by Dastur Erachji Sohrabji Meherjirana in 1869).

The act of performing this ritual itself is termed *Stūm-nō kardō* by Parsis, while the ceremony with consecration of a food offering is termed *Stūm-nu bhōnu*. The offerings (Av. *miiazda-*, MPers. *mēzd*, Pers. and Guj. *myazd*), usually cooked food items or raw fruits, plus the scents of those items were thought to attract the *frauuaši-* (see FRAVAŠĪ) to gather together (cf. Yt. 13.64) to be propitiated (Y. 26.7) by living Zoroastrians who seek their blessing (Yt. 13.51). So the *stūm* became an obligatory performance for the dead (Modi, 1937, pp.



402-4). The *stūm* can be performed for living persons too as a preemptive ritual to ensure that the religious path to the afterlife has been prepared properly for an individual's mortal soul and immortal spirit in case death transpires within a setting where funerary rites cannot be performed appropriately. In that situation, the corporeal existence (MPers. *zīndag-ruwān*, Guj. *zinda-rawān*) of the person(s) whose *uruuan-* and *frauuāši-* are honored prior to death is mentioned. Parsi practice permits the *stūm* for a living person to be performed in conjunction with a year-long *zinda-ravān* and when the *gāhānbār* (*gāhambār*) feasts are celebrated (Modi, 1937, pp. 417-18).

The *stūm* consists of five stages: *šnūman* (Av. *xšnūmaine-*) or dedicatory formula, *Yasna* 26 or the rite proper, the *dībāca* or prefatory recitation, a series of propitiatory recitations, and the *bāj* (MPers. *wāz*) which serves as a closing recitation.

Recitation of the *šnūman* (Meherjirana 1954, pp. 613-27) should be dedicated by the magus to the *yazata-* (MPers. *yazad*) or worship-worthy spirit in whose name the *stūm* is performed. This *šnūman* consists of *Sīrōza* 1.1 (or litany for the spirits presiding over the days of month) honoring Ahura Mazdā and the Aməša Spəntas, together with *Sīrōza* 1.19 honoring the *ardā fravaš* or all righteous immortal spirits: *ahurahe mazdā^oraēuuatō x^varənaŋuhātō aməšanqəm spəntanqəm* “For Ahura Mazdā the radiant and glorious, for the Aməša Spəntas,” and *ašāunqəm frauuāšinqəm uyranqəm aiβiθūranqəm* “For the mighty, victorious, immortal spirits of the righteous ones.” In addition, a *šnūman* can be performed in honor of Sraoša without mention of Ahura Mazdā at the beginning because that *yazata* manifests *maqθra.spənta-* (MPers. *mānsar-spand*, *māraspand*), “the holy word” and is in charge of prayer itself (Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 91; Kreyenbroek, 1985, pp. 29-130, 143-45).

Next, *Y.* 26.1-11 is recited. The first stanza is omitted in the *stūm*. So this prayer begins with the words *staomi zbaiemi* “I praise, I invoke,” followed by the names of *frauuāši-*: Ahura Mazdā, Aməša Spəntas, the earliest devotees, of Gayo Marətan (see [GAYŌMART](#)), the legendary first androgyne, Zarathushtra, Kavi Vištāspa (see [KAYĀNIĀN ix](#)), and Isat̄.vāstra, the eldest son of Zarathushtra, of living, dead, and future Zoroastrians, and finally of the Saoshyant (Av. *Saošiant-*, MPers. *Sōšāns*) or future savior (see [ASTVAT̄,ERETA](#)).

Then the *dībāca* is whispered by the priest in *bāj* or undertone, because it is a Pazand passage recited between two sections of the Avestan scripture (Kotwal



and Boyd, 1991, pp. 149-53). The *dībāca* recounts the hope that through the good thoughts, good words, and good deeds of living Zoroastrians—especially those persons commissioning and performing the ritual—the *stūm* would be efficacious and religiosity will be spread throughout the world. It seeks to please the *frauuaši-* through the offering so they will reciprocate by bestowing joy, prosperity, and wellbeing to residents of the province, city, town, or village named in the recitation. After Ahura Mazdā, the Aməša Spəntas (as a group), and all the *frauuaši-* are invoked, the deceased or living individual on whose behalf the *stūm* occurs is named; so is he or she who commissioned the ritual (if different from the person being honored). The names of Zarathushtra and, often, other legendary and historical Zoroastrians like Gayo Marətan, Saoshyant, *Ādurbād ī Maraspand*, and Neryosangh Dhaval also can be invoked in *bāj* with the words: *nāmcīštī anaošah ravān ravāni ...* [name of individual] ... *aēdar yāt bāt* “May the soul of ... [name of individual] ... be especially remembered here among the immortal souls.” Each person’s religious title of *ērvad* (MPers. *hērbed*, “teacher priest, theologian”), *ostā* (Pers. *ostād* “teacher” < MPers. *hāwišt*, “disciple, pupil”), and *behdīn* (MPers. *wehdēn*, “member of the good religion”) is prefixed to his or her name. Then *hamā ašō farōhar* “all the righteous immortal spirits” are *aēdar yāt bāt* “remembered here” again in connection with especial mention of the particular Zoroastrian for whose soul and immortal spirit the ritual has been commissioned. The collective immortal spirits of Zoroastrians past, present, and future, of family members, of the societal classes, and of people on every continent will be invoked, as well, in order to expand the sphere of devotion to include the good deeds of all devotees.

Next, a series of propitiatory recitations are undertaken by the priest, commencing with *Y. 26.11.1* (the rest of 26.11 is not recited during the *stūm* ritual) *vīspā frauuašaiiō ašāunqm yazamaide iristanqm uruuqnō yazamaide yā ašaonqm frauuašaiiō* “We venerate all the immortal spirits of the righteous ones, we venerate the souls of the deceased, who are the immortal spirits of the righteous ones.” *Y. 6.19 ašāunqm vaṇuhīš sūrā spəntā frauuašaiiō yazamaide* “We venerate the good, strong, holy immortal spirits of the righteous ones” and *Y. 6.20.1 vīspe ašauuanō yazata yazamaide* “We venerate all the righteous veneration-worthy spirits” follow. *Y. 6.20.2* is skipped, because it refers to the *ratu-* or spiritual chiefs of ritual. *Y. 6.20.3* is recited, however, with variation according to the *gāh* or period (watch) of the day, followed by the *Yeṛjhē hātqm* prayer (*Y. 27.15.3*) *yeṛjhē hātqm āat yesnē paitī vaṇhō mazdā ahurō vaēθā ašāt hacā yāñhqm cā tqscā tāścā yazamaide* “In



accordance with order, Ahura Mazdā knows those male and female entities who are better for veneration. We venerate those male and female entities.” Then the priest utters, in *bāj*, a short Pazand formula based on the *Xwaršēd Niyāyišn* (*Niyāyišn* 1.16.2): *hōrmezd i xʼadāe i aβazūnī mardum mardum sardagq hamā sardagq hambāyast i vahq vaem vahə dīn i māzdayasnq āgāhī āstuuqñī nēkī rasqñāṭ ēduṇ bāṭ* “Lord Ahura Mazdā, increaser of people, the human species, all species, and all good coreligionists, may knowledge, steadfastness [of belief], and virtue come to the good ones of the Mazdean religion. So may it be.”

The *bāj* or closing recitation commences thereafter. First, the *Ahunawar* (q.v.) prayer is chanted twice. Then comes *yasnəmca vahməmca aojasca zauuarəca āfrīnāmi* “I bless the veneration, adoration, power, and ability of” plus the name of the yazata in whose honor the *stūm* ritual is being performed, followed by one *Ašəm vohū* (q.v.) prayer. Thereafter, the standard unit of four prayers—namely, *Ahmāi raēšca*, *Hazaṇrəm*, *Jasa mē avaṇhe Mazdā*, and *Kərfə muzd*—are to be recited to conclude the *stūm* ritual.

The ritual is conducted in the presence of a holy fire on a small altar (Guj. *āfrīngānyu*, *afargānyu*) to which sandalwood (Guj. *sukhar*, *sukhad*) and frankincense (Guj. *lōbān*) are offered by the magus. Family members of the person for whose soul the ritual is undertaken offer sandalwood and incense to the fire afterwards. The food offering, representing the sacrifice, is placed before the priest, next to the fire vase before the ritual commences.

In Iran an equivalent ritual called *yašt-i šavgīra* “hymn of the night period” used to be conducted during the 1960s in memory of a deceased Zoroastrian’s mortal soul and immortal spirit during the *ušahin gāh* of the third night after the fourth *drōn* service in honor of *ardā fravaš* has been performed. It seems to have parallels as well with the four *bāj* services performed by Parsis in India (Modi, 1937, p. 81). This custom may have arisen from late medieval practice, where recitation of the *stūm* was substituted if the *drōn* service in honor of *ardā fravaš* and *faroxši* could not be performed (Persian Rivāyats: Unvala, ed., I, p. 502; Boyce, 1977, pp. 154-55; Boyce and Kotwal, 1999, pp. 311-12; Choksy, 1996, p. 554). Zoroastrians in the region of Yazd included cloth for the ritual undershirt (MPers. *šabīg*, Pers. *sedra*, *šiv*, *šabī*, Guj. *sudra*), a ritual cord (MPers. *kustīg* [q.v.], Pers. *kōštī*, Guj. *kustī*), and a silver coin or ring among the offerings to be consecrated.

Parsis perform a *stūm* with its food offering on the fourth day after death,



following the *yasna*, *āfrīnagān*, and *bāj* rituals, during the *hāwan gāh* around midmorning. The priests who undertook the rites in honor of Sraoša during the three preceding days for the spiritual welfare of the deceased person are requested to honor Ahura Mazdā and the departed soul by gratefully consuming the food after taking the *bāj of Ohrmazd*. Other Zoroastrians may partake as well, because the food items are a charitable good deed. Another *stūm-nu bhōnu* is performed during the *uzērin gāh* or evening. The *stūm* also can be performed by Parsis three times each day—in the early morning and midmorning (*hāwan gāh*) and in the early evening (*uzērin gāh*)—on the fifth through tenth days after the death occurred. Further *stūm* rituals for the soul of a deceased or living individual may be commissioned on monthly and annual anniversaries of a death.

The ritual is popular too on the six *gāhāmbār* (see [GĀHĀNBĀR](#))—especially on the all souls’ days (Av. *hamaspaθmaēdaīia-*, Pahl. *frawardīgān*, N.Pers. *panjī*, Guj. *muktād*). Other occasions for undertaking a *stūm* include *frawardīn rōz* or day of the immortal spirits (which is the nineteenth day of each month), *jašn* (Guj. *jašan*) or festival days (where the day and month dedicated to a divine entity coincide). Traditionalist Parsi men and women still pay priests to perform the ritual on the day before their marriage (Guj. *varadh patra* < *varadh* “ancestor” + *patra* “correspondence”) in honor of bygone relative (Modi, 1937, p. 20). Magi, relatives, and friends consume the consecrated food on each occasion, except at the *varadh patra*, when it is reserved for family members and their friends.

In contemporary Parsi practice, the traditional food offering for the early morning *stūm* consists of sweet dishes (Guj. *mīthī vāñī*), porridge (Guj. *khīr*), and well water (Guj. *kuvā-nu pāñī*) in a metal vessel placed in the center of the individual items of the offering. The midmorning food offering may include rice and lentils or split peas with sheep, goat, or chicken meat (Guj. *gosht-nu dhānshāk*) or without meat (Guj. *dhānshāk*), meatballs (Guj. *kabāb*), fried fish (Guj. *tarelī machhī*), gourd with meat (Guj. *dōdhī-nu gosht*), a vegetable salad with radishes plus limes and lemons (Guj. *kachumbar-linbu*), wine, and a pot of well water. At the early evening ritual, the consecrated meal comprises thin flat wheat bread (Guj. *rōtlī, rōtī*), potatoes with meat (Guj. *papetā-nu gosht*), fried fish, cream custard, wine, and a pot of well water. Some orthodox families, at locales like Navsari, Surat, and Udvada, continue to follow this pattern of food offerings. The more common custom among Parsi families in large Indian cities and in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Western countries is to



prepare a sweet, a couple of fried eggs, a flat bread, and a pot of water, or even more frequently to purchase and present fruits in lieu of cooked food, for the early morning *stūm*. A couple of cooked dishes and a pot of water constitute the offerings for the midmorning and early evening *stūm*. The *varadh patra* offering, less frequent in recent years, may include large crisp cream of wheat doughnuts (Guj. *varadh-varān*), vermicelli (Guj. *sev*), fried fish, and pieces of unrefined palm sugar or jaggery with wafers (Guj. *gol-pāpdī*, *gor-pāprī*). All purity laws relating to preparation of food should be followed for each offering—including ensuring that the metal cooking utensils and containers are clean and that the food is cooked at home by Zoroastrians (Choksy, 1989, pp. 103-4). Moreover, if the site where the ritual is to be conducted is outside the home—such as at a fire temple—then purity of the offerings must be ensured during transportation. Consequently, fruits are often substituted for cooked food, as the issue of loss of ritual purity does not arise.

Essentially a soliloquy of remembrance, the *stūm* ritual links living Zoroastrians to deceased coreligionists by reminding them that righteousness during life ensures salvation after death (Kotwal and Choksy, 2004).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

M. Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford, 1977; repr., Lanham, Md., 1989.

M. Boyce, “The Absorption of the Fravašis into Zoroastrianism,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricum* 48, 1995, pp. 25-36.

M. Boyce and F. M. Kotwal, “Farōkši,” in *EIr.* IX, 1999, pp. 311-12.

J. K. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism: Triumph over Evil*, Austin, 1989.

Idem, “Drōn,” in *EIr.* VII, 1996, pp. 554-55.

F. M. Kotwal and J. W. Boyd, *A Persian Offering, The Yasna: A Zoroastrian High Liturgy*, *Studia Iranica*, cahier 8, Paris, 1991.



F. M. Kotwal and J. K. Choksy, “To Praise the Souls of the Deceased and the Immortal Spirits of the Righteous Ones: The Staomi or Stūm Ritual’s History and Functions,” in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, Studies in the History of Religions, vol. 102, ed. M. Stausberg, Leiden, 2004, pp. 389-401.

Ph. G. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition*, Leiden, 1985.

R. D. Meherjirana, *Āfrīngānō, āfrīnō, frawaši stōmnā kardā temaj bājdharnā sāthē*, Bombay, 1954; repr., 1988, 1991.

J. J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, 2nd ed., Bombay, 1937; repr., Bombay, Society for the Promotion of Zoroastrian Religious Knowledge and Education, 1986.

M. R. Unvala, ed., *Dârâb Hormazyâr’s Rivâyat*, 2 vols., Bombay, 1922.