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PURIFICATION *IN ABSENTIA*: ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ZOROASTRIAN RITUAL PRACTICE[1]

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1. *Introduction*

Purification rituals have been a prominent part of Zoroastrian religious life throughout its history.[2] These rituals include daily rituals, designed and intended for the preservation and restoration of purity after all acts involving impure substances, and rituals that are performed irregularly and were designed for special circumstances. Among the former category, for instance, are the rituals framing the act of urinating, which consist of digging a hole in the ground, reciting the first part of the prescribed texts (three paces removed from the place), squatting to pass water, stepping away (again three paces), reciting the second part of the prescribed texts and washing the hands with the urine of a bull (*gōmēz* or *pādyāb*) and water. These, and rituals in similar circumstances, had a double function: they protected the

[1] The investigations were supported by the Foundation for Research in Philosophy and Theology (SFT), which is subsidized by the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Research (NWO). Abbreviations used are: Dd. = *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*; Dk(M). = *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan); *PhlVd.* = Pahlavi Vendīdād; *REA* = *Riwāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān; SDB* = *Ṣad dar-e bondaheš; SDN* = *Ṣad dar-e naṣr; Vd.* = *Vendīdād*; YF = *Mādayān ī Ẏōišt ī Frīyān; Ẏt.* = *Ẏašt.*

[2] For introductions to the subject, cf. M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism I: The Early Period* (= *HZ* I), Leiden 1975, 294–324; J.K. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism. Triumph over Evil*, Austin 1989. The contemporary Parsi ritual practice is described in J.J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, Bombay 1922, 86–177; the contemporary Irani practice is described by M. Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford 1977 (Lanham 1989[2]), 92–138. Reflections of Zoroastrian purity rules in classical literature are discussed in A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133), Leiden 1997, 414–420. The most important publications from a theoretical perspective are A.V. Williams, "The Body and the Boundaries of Zoroastrian Spirituality", *Religion* 19 (1989), 227–239; *id.*, "Zoroastrian and Judaic Purity Laws. Reflections on the Viability of a Sociological Interpretation", in S. Shaked & A. Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica III. Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, Jerusalem 1994, 72–89; *id.*, "Zoroastrianism and the Body", in S. Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*, Cambridge 1997, 155–166. For a comparative perspective, cf. S. Soroudi, "The Concept of Jewish Impurity and its Reflection in Persian and Judeo-Persian Traditions", in: Shaked & Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica III*, 142–170.

person from loss of purity and they protected the person's surroundings from being defiled, by neutralizing the evil from which the impure substances derive their danger. The three main elements of these rituals are: 1) marking off a limited area to prevent the spread of pollution; 2) reciting prescribed prayers to withstand the powers of evil who always accompany pollution; and 3) applying purifying substances to the body or to the objects that require purification, in order to both physically cleanse them and to neutralize the impurity.

These three elements are also present in purification rituals of the second category, those designed to eliminate more serious, irregularly occurring, pollution. For seriously polluted items (mainly the clothes worn by a polluted person), a ritual known as "six months" was prescribed.[3] For polluted men and women the main purification ritual was the *barašnūm ī nō šab*, the "*barašnūm* of nine nights." This is the most powerful and most important purification ritual, the only ritual that is capable of removing the most serious pollution, that contracted through contact with dead matter (*nasā*).[4] It is this ritual, or rather a development in this ritual, that is the focus of the present article. The main structure of the ritual and of its early interpretations presuppose the presence of the actual candidate, in order to remove his/her pollution and assure his/her re-integration into the community through an elaborate purification ceremony. At an unknown point in time, however, the ritual came to be performed vicariously: instead of cleansing the body that actually carried the impurity, someone else's body could be cleansed and so restore the purity of a body that had never been physically purified. This vicarious *barašnūm* was mainly undergone for the purification of the soul of a deceased relative and this adds yet another new element to the ritual: not only does the vicarious *barašnūm* transcend the individuality of living persons, by purifying one person through another, it also transcends the gap between the living and the dead, provided the right links have been established. It is not too difficult to imagine the reasons for this development: the ritual is physically exacting and requires a ten day period of isolation; people who are seriously ill

[3] The ritual is usually referred to by its Avestan name *xšuuaš* [*måŋhó*] (e.g. *REA* 16; *PhlVd.* 9.32add.). The foundation text for this ritual is *Vd.* 7.15. It consists of ablutions and prayers, together with a period of exposure (to the sun) of six months.

[4] For a description of the ritual, cf. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 23–52 (with references); Modi, *Religious Ceremonies*, 102–157.

or who have to attend their farms or businesses must have found it extremely difficult to make themselves available for the ritual. Likewise, the care of the souls of deceased relatives has contributed to the development of undergoing the purification for the sake of the soul of a loved one.[5] These practical motivations, however, cannot explain how the ritual by proxy was rationalised; it is this question that we shall try to discuss. In order to do that, we must first discuss some methodological problems.

The nature of the written sources for Zoroastrianism is such that it is impossible to write a history of that faith similar to histories of, for example, Christianity, Buddhism or Islam.[6] In the ancient and early medieval periods, Zoroastrianism was an oral religious tradition. Even in periods when Iranians were well acquainted with the art of writing and used writing for administrative and economic purposes, religious traditions and, it seems, literature were not written down. This changed gradually in the Sasanian period, when repeated attempts were made to collect and write down the sacred traditions, but the majority of texts were written down only in the Islamic period, particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. The texts that were written down from the late Sasanian period up to the tenth century are in two languages, Avestan and Pahlavi. The texts in Avestan are usually referred to as the "sacred books" of the Zoroastrians and for the majority of these texts, this is an apt description: they are the foundation texts of Zoroastrianism and all other texts invoke their authority. The *Avesta* cannot be dated in its entirety, nor can any of its constituent components be dated with confidence. It is generally assumed, for sound linguistic and historical reasons, that its most ancient layer (written in a separate dialect called *Gathic* or *Old Avestan*) is to be dated around 1000 B.C.E. The vast majority of texts, however, is written in *Late Avestan*; linguistic methods for the dating of these texts are notoriously unreliable, but it is generally thought that Avestan texts cannot have been composed later than 300 B.C.E., because by then Avestan had become a dead language for the majority of (and possibly all) Zoroastrians.[7]

[5] Boyce, *HZ* I, 317–319.

[6] For an overview of the problems, cf. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 39–75.

[7] P.G. Kreyenbroek, "The Zoroastrian Tradition from an Oralist's Point of View", *K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Second International Congress Proceedings*, Bombay 1996, 221–237.

The texts in Pahlavi reflect the transmission of Zoroastrian theology and lore in the vernacular, at least for the Zoroastrians of Western Iran. They consist of an exegetical translation of (parts of) the Avesta (*Zand*), which in all likelihood grew together with the tradition and preserves early layers of scriptural exegesis, and a large collection of theological works. Although most scholars agree that among these texts there are many which contain or reflect older traditions, it is undeniable that these texts were not just committed to writing in the ninth century, but were (severely) edited. They thus reflect, first and foremost, the situation of Zoroastrianism in the ninth century; one may attempt to extract from them information on Zoroastrianism in earlier periods, but such an attempt carries with it an element of speculation.[8]

After the tenth century, most Zoroastrian literature was written in Persian. Persian Zoroastrian literature mainly covers the period from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Some Persian Zoroastrian texts, most notably the two prose *Ṣad dar* texts and the *Zarātuštnāmeh* are a few to several centuries older.[9] Here again we have a gap of several centuries in our documentation, from the 10th to the 15th century, at least for the theological Zoroastrian texts.

All this is well known to specialists and most students of Zoroastrianism have fully assimilated the severe restrictions placed on their efforts at reconstructing the history of that faith by the sources. For non-specialists, the situation may require an illustration. If we attempt to research the history of the *barašnūm*, for instance, we have the following important sources: 1) the *Vendīdād*, an undatable text, but certainly not later than 300 B.C.E.; 2) the long gloss to *Pahlavi Vendīdād* 9.32,[10] reflecting presumably the Sasanian tradition; 3) the *Epistles of Mānuščihr*, a collection of three letters from the late ninth century, discussing (and rejecting) a suggested simplification of the *barašnūm*;[11] 4) scattered references in other Pahlavi texts, mainly from

[8] This subject is discussed at length by S. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation. Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran*, London 1994.

[9] For the date of the *Ṣad dar*, cf. below; for the date of the *Zarātuštnāmeh*, cf. F. de Blois, *Persian Literature. A Bio-Bibliographical Survey V.1 (Poetry to ca. A.D. 1100)*, London 1992, 171–176 (early eleventh century C.E.).

[10] For this text, cf. E.W. West, *Pahlavi Texts II: The Dādistān-ī Dīnīk and the Epistles of Mānūšķīhar* (Sacred Books of the East 18), Oxford 1882 (many reprints), 446–452; B.T. Anklesaria, *Pahlavi Vendīdād*, Bombay 1949, 242–247.

[11] Translated in full by West, *Pahlavi Texts II*, 279–366. This is probably the most

the tenth century (*Šāyest nē-Šāyest; Pahlavi Rivāyat of Ādur-Farnbāg; Rivāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān* etc.); 5) references to the ritual in the *Ṣad dar* texts (13th–14th c.?); 6) references to the ritual in the *Persian Rivāyats* (15th–18th c.);[12] 7) descriptions of the ritual from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Between these various sources, there are considerable periods of silence. These may occasionally be relieved by references to the ritual in non-Zoroastrian sources, as in the sixth-century *Histories* of Agathias (for which, see below). Sometimes, archaeology or art history may have preserved some information (not in the case of the *barašnūm*). Having collected all these sources, we then proceed to an inventory of their content. The references in Pahlavi and Persian Zoroastrian literature mainly consist of special cases discussed by religious authorities: if, for instance, it starts to rain during the ritual, what should be done? If the woman undergoing the ritual discovers that her menstruation has started, what should she do? If someone has a sore in his mouth and swallows some blood together with his food, should he undergo the *barašnūm*?

Having collected all texts and having processed all cases, it is tempting to put them in a continuing historical narrative. Here we face the following problem: if we find a novel idea in one of the sources, should we attribute it to the approximate period of the source or could it be a much earlier idea that only came to be recorded in that period? There is no satisfactory solution to that problem, but there are some rules which we may choose to apply. The volume of texts on the *barašnūm* is such that it is unlikely that an idea that is encountered for the first time in the Persian Zoroastrian texts can be assumed to have been current in the time of the *Vendīdād*. As a rule of thumb, therefore, we may suggest that if a certain aspect of the *barašnūm* is not evident from the *Vendīdād* or from Pahlavi literature, it is unlikely to have been part of pre-Islamic Zoroastrianism. It may be worthwile, moreover, to attempt to embed such novel ideas first within the approximate period in which they make their first appearance. If we do that, we must make a fundamental distinction between

difficult of all Pahlavi texts; West's translation aptly conveys its main arguments, but is otherwise very unreliable.

[12] Especially important in this respect is the last of the great *Rivāyats*, the *Ithoter*, half of which is devoted to the *barašnūm*: cf. M. Vitalone, *The Persian Revāyat "Ithoter." Zoroastrian Rituals in the Eighteenth Century* (Istituto Universitario Orientale, Dipartimento di studi Asatici, Series Minor 49), Napoli 1996.

the Pahlavi texts and the Persian texts. The former are clearly part of the oral period of Zoroastrian history and literature, the latter are clearly part of its written period. In Pahlavi texts, therefore, particularly in translations of the Avesta, we can expect to find earlier layers of Zoroastrian ideas or rituals; this option seems to be excluded for most Persian texts.

Rituals carry and convey many associations and interpretations. There is a diachronic aspect to this diversity in the sense that a ritual and its interpretation develop throughout the history of its performance and the reflections on its importance. There is also a synchronic layering: priestly views of the ritual may be radically different from lay views; male views may differ from female views; mainstream ideas may differ from esoteric interpretations etc. As a final *caveat* it is important to notice that the vast majority of Zoroastrian literature enables us to see the priestly views only. This concerns primarily the interpretation of the ritual, for there are no differences in the actual performance of the ritual. But in the main, we only know what priests felt lay Zoroastrians should (not) do or believe and this imposes yet another restriction on our interpretative strategies: theologians and other priestly authorities are wont to systematize and spiritualize aspects of their trade which among lay members of the faith may have carried highly diverse and less spiritual connotations.

This lengthy introduction was necessary, I feel, to discuss the most recent interpretation of the *barašnūm*. In a monograph devoted mainly to this subject, Jamsheed K. Choksy has argued that the *barašnūm* was developed by Zoroastrian priests "to ensure ritual purity of both the body and the soul," that the ritual, in other words, was a spiritual as well as a bodily purification.[13] In order to strengthen his case for this interpretation, he has developed a general interpretation of Zoroastrianism through the ages, according to which theology and ritual are both vehicles of "meaning" and are permanently fused in order to remind believers of where they stand in the battle against evil. Following the (possible) symbolic meanings of all elements in the ritual, he places them in a structure which is based on two pillars: Zoroastrian cosmogony and cosmology on the one hand and the links between spiritual (*mēnōg*) and material (*gētīg*) realities on the

[13] Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 23.

other.[14] The unifying factor in this code of symbols is the concept of "homologies," the idea that

> Microcosm is viewed [. . .] as an alloform of the macrocosm, matter as an alloform of spirit, and humanity as a corporeal alloform of the divine. Because of such alloformic association in meaning, through homology and analogy, Zoroastrians perceive no disjunction between the tangible activities of rituals and the symbolic meanings of these activities, just as they see no dichotomy between the material and the spiritual states. As a result of this cosmic interconnection ultimately based on meaning, the importance of each Zoroastrian rite lies in a fusion of actions, liturgies, and beliefs with religious symbols.[15]

In other words, every religious act and every religious utterance of a Zoroastrian in one way or another reflects an identical "grammar" of that religion, which can best be reconstructed in terms of its views of cosmic history (cosmogony and eschatology and the cosmology based on these).

The main objection to this approach is the fact that it is quintessentially unhistorical. By stating explicitly that "The specific pattern described by the purification rituals is timeless,"[16] Choksy suggests that in all manifestations and interpretations of the ritual, an identical basic pattern of "meaning" can be perceived. A subsidiary consequence of this approach is that it elevates a specific interpretation of Zoroastrianism, based on modern perceptions of that faith and on the lacunary evidence for its earlier stages, to a normative model for that religion. This model, of course, is both priestly and "orthodox," in the sense that it is based on what emerged as the *communis opinio* of Zoroastrian priests in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E.[17]

There is some room, I believe, to question this approach. One of its main elements, the idea that the *barašnūm* was intended to purify

[14] For the latter subject, cf. S. Shaked, "The Notions *mēnōg* and *gētīg* in the Pahlavi Texts and their Relation to Eschatology", *Acta Orientalia* 33 (1971), 59–107.

[15] Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 111.

[16] Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 137.

[17] We know, for instance, that a great variety of cosmogonical and eschatological ideas existed in Sasanian Zoroastrianism (S. Shaked, "The Myth of Zurvan. Cosmogony and Eschatology" in: I. Gruenwald, S. Shaked & G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Messiah and Christos. Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (Fs. D. Flusser; Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 32), Tübingen 1992, 219–240; De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 57–63). There can be no doubt that Zoroastrians who believed in these alternative cosmogonies also underwent the *barašnūm*, but for them, its symbolism may have been totally different.

the soul, is attested only in ninth-century highly complex priestly sources, and even in those, it is not the most prominent interpretation. The stress rather seems to be on two different aspects: the physical removal of the pollution and the integration of the purified person into the society of his/her co-religionists. In order to shed some more light on these matters, we will focus on an unusual development in the performance of the *barašnūm* and attempt to place this development in the context of similar developments in post-Sasanian Zoroastrianism. First, we shall have a look at the ritual itself and at its early interpretations; then, the evidence for the vicarious *barašnūm* will be discussed and the main problem in its interpretation will be outlined. In order to tackle this problem, we shall look at a comparable case (the confession of sins) and then focus on the synchronic evidence from the *Ṣad dar* texts only. This, it is hoped, will provide us with enough background material to place the vicarious *barašnūm* in the context of the development of the Zoroastrian tradition.

2. *The* barašnūm ī nō šab (barašnūm *of nine nights*): *a description of the ritual*[18]

The *barašnūm* (the name is derived from Avestan *barəšnu-*, "top") is the most elaborate and most powerful Zoroastrian purification ritual. It takes place in a specifically marked off area, the *barašnūm-gāh*. This *barašnūm-gāh* must be located on dry, barren land from which all vegetation has been taken away. First, nine pits were dug, presumably going from North (the location of Hell) to South (the location of Heaven). The first six pits were marked off from the final three by an extra space. The nine pits were then marked off from the outside world by the drawing of a set of furrows. The pits themselves were covered with rubble or stones and stones were placed in the space between pits 6 and 7 (and on the place where the candidate entered the *barašnūmgāh*). The main purifier (*yōjdahragar*) had to be a consecrated priest of known probity, who had himself under-

[18] Cf. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 23–52; Modi, *Religious Ceremonies*, 102–157; Boyce, *Persian Stronghold*, 111–138; *ead.*, "Barašnom", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3 (1989), 756–757; for photos of the ritual, cf. J. Bauer, *Symbolik des Parsismus. Tafelband* (Symbolik der Religionen 18), Stuttgart 1973, pl. 95; S.S. Hartman, *Parsism. The Religion of Zoroaster* (Iconography of Religions 14.4), Leiden 1980, pl. xix–xx (for the *barašnūm-gāh*) and xxviii–xxx (for the ritual).

gone the ritual. The priest wore his clean priestly vestments and held a container made of lead or iron on a stick with nine knots. The candidate entered the *barašnūmgāh* and texts were recited. Then the candidate had to enter the first pit and the priest handed him cow urine (*gōmēz*) in the container. The candidate had to wash his hands with *gōmēz* and then went on to cleanse all parts of his body (in a prescribed order, at the advice of the priest) with the *gōmēz*, beginning with the head and ending with the right, and then the left big toe. At that point, the demonic power of the corpse-pollution left the body of the candidate. The candidate then had to look at or touch a dog[19] and move on to the second pit, where the whole process started again. After he had completed his cleansing in the sixth pit, the candidate squatted in the space between pits number 6 and 7 and cleansed his body with dust, waiting for all traces of *gōmēz* to dry up. Then the candidate could enter the next pit, where his body was cleansed with water, once in pit number 7, twice in pit number 8 and three times in pit number 9. Having left the last pit, the body was fumigated with fragrant woods and plants and the candidate was transported to a place of seclusion (*armēštgāh*). There, he had to spend nine nights in isolation, during which he also underwent several minor ablutions. On the tenth day, he was allowed to leave the place of seclusion and was considered pure.

Such is the main structure of the *barašnūm*. Most elements of the ritual are well-known from other Zoroastrian purification rituals: selecting the proper place (away from fire and water and areas of human habitation); marking off the area by drawing furrows in order to prevent the pollution from spreading; the efficacy of reciting the proper Avestan formula; the presence of the dog; the purifying substances (*gōmēz*, dust and water); and the isolation of the candidate. Most of these elements are similar to prescriptions for dealing with less serious pollutions (reciting the proper texts; ablutions) or for dealing with corpses (isolation; showing the corpse to the dog).

What is striking in most of these rituals is the physicality of the pollution and its purification: loss of purity comes about through

[19] The presence of the dog during the ritual is due to the fact that the gaze of the dog chases the demons associated with a corpse away. Its presence is mandatory in ceremonies connected with corpses: the dog must be brought to look at the corpse (a ceremony called *sagdīd*).

contact with polluting substances. Pollution is an affliction of the body, caused by physical contact between the body and the source of pollution. The Zoroastrian concept of contact must be taken in a somewhat wider sense than usual: it includes eye-contact, for certain impurities are transferred by looking,[20] and it also includes indirect contact, for instance through intermediary utensils. This is the main reason for the nine-knotted stick: the nine knots on the stick prevent the impurity of the candidate undergoing the *barašnūm* from rising up to the priest and thus causing him loss of purity.

In early interpretations of the *barašnūm*[21] there is no indication of the fact that this ritual was intended for anything else than the removal of a serious pollution. There is no indication of the fact that the purification was held to be a spiritual cleansing rather than a physical one, nor is there any reason to believe that candidates could undergo the ritual for the sake of gaining spiritual merit. The *barašnūm*, it seems, was a ritual remedy against the bodily affliction known as impurity. The impurity itself had profound spiritual and social consequences, for it meant that a person could not engage in any contact with other Zoroastrians and could not perform his/her religious duties. Purity is a prerequisite for performing any religious act and those religious acts performed in a state of pollution are turned into their reverse: they harm the powers of good instead of strenghtening them and as a consequence they endanger the spiritual well-being of a person rather than support it.

In the sixth century C.E., the Byzantine lawyer Agathias noticed that Persians who unexpectedly recovered from a serious, life-threatening disease, were shunned by their fellow Persians: "[. . .] everyone turns away from him and avoids him as though he is accursed and still in the service of the infernal powers. He is not allowed to resume his former way of life until the pollution, as it were, of his expected

[20] The most famous case in this respect is the look of a woman in *menses*. A menstruating woman should not look at a fire, for instance, because she will pollute it. One of the clearest texts in this respect is *Dēnkard* 3.26 (DkM. 21). There it is written that only menstruating women have a "corpse-contaminated gaze" (*nasušōmand wēnišn*), because they are the only ones to be afflicted with *Nasu*, the demon of the corpse, while alive.

[21] The main early interpretations of the *barašnūm* are the foundation text of the ritual in *Vd.* 8 and 9, together with its Pahlavi commentary (including a lenghty description of the ritual that is not part of the Avestan text).

death has been exorcised (*ἀποκαθαρθείη*) by the Magi, and he can take in exchange, so to speak, his renewal of life."[22] The "exorcism" to which Agathias refers is undoubtedly the *barašnūm*; his reference to this ritual is the only surviving evidence for the performance of the *barašnūm* in the Sasanian period. Agathias, moreover, suitably stresses the second important aspect of the *barašnūm*: it is a ritual of (re-)integration: a person who has suffered a pollution of the highest category (and this apparently includes various serious diseases) is *ipso facto* incapable of establishing contact with his fellow Zoroastrians. This mechanism of isolation is well known from Zoroastrian literature. It has been recorded by non-Zoroastrian observers, too: in the 5th century B.C.E., Herodotus (*Histories* 1.138) already observed that anyone who suffers from leprosy cannot mingle with other Persians; the same observation can also be found in a passage from Ctesias.[23] In the Avesta, whoever suffers from a serious disease (sometimes referred to as "the sign of Angra Mainyu" (*Vd.* 2.29)) is excluded from participation in rituals (Yt. 5.92–93) and may not enter the *war* that Yima makes, a Zoroastrian Noah's ark. He is, moreover, referred to as *vitərətō.tanū-*, "whose body is kept away" or "whose body is isolated." The oldest function of the *armēštgāh*, the place of seclusion where candidates for the *barašnūm* spend the nine nights of isolation, presumably was to isolate sufferers from certain diseases.

The only way of being re-integrated into the community was to undergo the *barašnūm*: no other purification ritual could take its place in this matter. This is also evident from later literature, where the *barašnūm* is compulsory for anyone converting to Zoroastrianism and for apostate Zoroastrians who wish to return to the faith.[24] The *barašnūm* is the only ritual capable of removing the most serious pollution.

These two things, the physical removal of pollution and the re-integration into the Zoroastrian community, remained the core aspects of the *barašnūm* up to the early Islamic period. In certain Pahlavi texts, however, we see that the *barašnūm* also came to be understood

[22] Agathias, *Historiae* 2.22.7, translated by A. Cameron, "Agathias on the Sassanians", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–24 (1969–1970), 69–183, pp. 78–79. For the passage, cf. also De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 229–250.

[23] Quoted by Photius, *Library* 72.42–45; cf. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 241–242.

[24] B.N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others. Their Version with Introduction and Notes*, Bombay 1932, 275–276.

as a ritual intended for the "purification" of the soul. This presupposes, of course, the idea that the soul can be polluted, which is alien to early Zoroastrianism.

An illustration of the "spiritualisation" of the ritual is the way in which the prescription of *Vd.* 8.97–103 was received in the later tradition. This text treats the subject of a person who has touched a corpse in a field. If dogs or vultures have already eaten of the corpse, there is no problem: he can purify himself with thirty ablutions. But if dogs and vultures have not yet eaten of the corpse, this person cannot purify himself. Therefore, he must perform fifteen ablutions and then run a mile; then, he must run until he finds someone else; when he finds someone, he must shout with a loud voice: "I have come into contact with a corpse, without intent of mind, speech or deeds; will you be able to purify me?" When that person refuses, he will share in a third of that "deed." The passage goes on in the same manner, until three persons have refused, share in the "deed" and the polluted person can finally purify himself.[25] Although the process of sharing the deed is not entirely clear, the main thrust of the passage is evident: someone has contracted the most serious pollution, is unable to purify himself and therefore unable to be touched; therefore, he has to warn someone else beforehand by calling out in a loud voice and describing the state he is in; subsequently, with the help of the other, he can be purified.

The *Pahlavi Vendīdād* to this passage characteristically makes the ritual aspects of the procedure explicit: the washing is referred to with a technical Avestan term (the "fifteen") and the phrase the polluted person must shout is interpreted as meaning "I am unable to wash myself" and at the end, although the Avesta clearly suggests that after the third refusal, he can purify himself and will be pure, the *PhlVd.* suggests that his purity is less than what is required: "There is one who says: he may perform any work (he wishes), but he must abstain from the worship of the gods."[26]

The passage from the *PhlVd.* is quoted by Manušcihr, with a considerable difference: Manušcihr interprets the passage as meaning

[25] For the passage, cf. J. Kellens, *Les noms-racines de l'Avesta*, Wiesbaden 1974, 173–174.

[26] *ast kē ēdōn gowēd kārīh hamē ōh kunišn u-š az yazišn i yazadān ōh pahrēzišn* (*PhlVd.* 8.103).

that the polluted person cannot perform any virtues, and that therefore his body must be purified, so that he will be able to purify his soul.[27] Part of his argument is devoted to the idea that only the properly performed *barašnūm* can purify the soul of a candidate and that this purification of the soul can only be accomplished through a purification of the body.[28]

From this estimate to the idea that the *barašnūm* is *more* a purification of the soul than a purification of the body is only a small step. Evidence for such an interpretation is only available from the Persian Zoroastrian texts, which are also the first texts to reveal the existence of the vicarious *barašnūm*.

3. *The vicarious* barašnūm

At a certain moment in the development of Zoroastrian rituals, the possibility arose to undergo the *barašnūm* vicariously: someone else could undergo the *barašnūm* for the purification of others. The evidence for this development is late. Its earliest clear attestations are in the *Ṣad dar* texts. This version of the ritual apparently became very popular and spread rapidly. The development seems to be contemporary with a distinction made in the ritual between the *barašnūm* for the removal of pollution (*rīman barašnūm ī nō šab*) and the *barašnūm* which was undergone to attain greater ritual purity or to acquire spiritual merit.[29] The latter version of the ritual was clearly an innovation, but in order to distinguish between the two, the former version of the ritual was altered: it now included the consumption of three sips of *gōmēz* and the recitation of the confession of sins.

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[27] Manušcihr, *Epistle* 1.2.11: "From this it is clear that he whose body is not purified-as long as he has not been cleansed-is incapable of acquiring virtue through his thoughts, words and deeds, and he is not able to purify his soul; so, even for the purity of the soul, purity of the body is indispensable" (*ciyōn aziš paydāgīhēd kū ka ān kē-š tan nē yōjdahr tā ka-š be šōyēd pad menišn ud gōwišn ud kunišn kirbag xwāstan nē tuwān u-š ruwān yōjdahrēnīdan nē tuwān; ēg pad-iz yōjdahrīh ī ruwān awizīrišnīg ast az ān ī tan yōjdahrīh*). For the passage (details of which are obscure), cf. also M.F. Kanga, "A Study of the first two Chapters of the first Epistle of Manuščihr Gōšn-Jamān", *Proceedings of the twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists*, vol. 2, New Delhi 1968, 218–225.

[28] His arguments are summed up in the third *Epistle*, which is studied by M.F. Kanga, "Sitīkar Nāmak i Manuščihr Gōšnjamān. A Critical Study", in: *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg* 1 (Acta Iranica 4), Leiden etc. 1975, 445–456.

[29] Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 39–40.

Two varieties of the vicarious *barašnūm* are known: one performed for a deceased person and one performed for a living person. The two versions are described in the *Ṣad dar* texts as follows:

> And with regard to the things they asked about the *barašnūm*, let them know that it is revealed in the religion that as long as the child is in its mother's womb, its food comes from the mother's womb; this is the reason that the woman is pregnant and does not menstruate. That which is the menstruation is intended so that the menstruation is the part which the child eats; and then it comes out and grows up and it is compulsory for him to undergo the *barašnūm*, so that he will be purified of that pollution. For just as the body is purified from pollution through water, the soul can be made pure with that ritual. If he has not undergone the *barašnūm* and leaves this world, their soul gives off an unpleasant scent and a large stench, just like the stench that comes from a corpse that lies for a month in summer; the Amšāsfands will be scared by that stench and cannot approach that soul and will not be able to make up his account and they will not allow him near the Cinwad bridge until the time that his child, if he has one, will undergo the *barašnūm* in his place and in his name, and will recite the confession of sins: then, that stench will diminish from his soul and after that, the Amšāsfands will make up his account and will bring him to his own (destined) place. Everyone must undergo the *barašnūm*. (*SDB* 72)

This text clearly shows the vicarious performance of the *barašnūm* for the sake of the soul of a deceased relative: the candidate by proxy is the son of the deceased man and the ritual is undergone in order to restore the purity of the soul of the deceased. The other passage has the same reasons for prescribing the *barašnūm*, but its description of the vicarious performance of that ritual is different:

> It is compulsory for men and women to undergo the *barašnūm*, because man eats the menstrual blood in his mother's womb. For that reason, he must undergo the *barašnūm* once, so that he will be purified of that pollution. For if he reaches the age of fifteen and has not undergone the *barašnūm*, the glory and purity of everything he touches diminishes and it is not fitting for him to touch the *drōn* [a cake used in several rituals, A.J.] or anything pure.
>
> It is revealed in the religion that if someone dies without having undergone the *barašnūm*, his soul stinks as badly as carrion after a month in summer and when his soul reaches the Cinwad bridge, the Amšāsfands and gods flee from the stench of that soul and will not be able to make up his account; he will stay at the Cinwad bridge and will not be able to cross and he will be very sorry, but it will do him no good.

> And if someone should undergo the *barašnūm*, but is unable to and does not do it, even if he applies *pādyāb* to his head a thousand times, he will not be purified from that pollution. **Nasrušt* is that pollution which is found in veins and sinews and flesh and bones; without the proper religious rite, nothing will be purified again.
>
> And also that person who undergoes the *barašnūm* for someone else,[30] must be a man who loves his own soul, speaks the truth and refrains (from sin), so that he occupies himself with purity and modesty; if, heaven forbid, deceit becomes apparent in him, in that reprehension, the priests must loosen (?) him one by one and give him as food to the dogs. They must look for someone who is purer and more abstinent, so that this sin of his will not (continue to) be produced. (*SDN* 36)

Here, it seems, the vicarious *barašnūm* can be undergone by anyone who conforms to certain moral standards. There is no mention of the performance of the *barašnūm* for a deceased person only. The structure, at any rate, is simple: a person who is not able to undergo the ritual personally (either because he is dead, or for other reasons), can ask someone else to undergo it for him and thus be cleansed.

Besides the ritual itself, another novel element is worth noticing: the idea that every person must undergo the *barašnūm*, because every person is polluted because of the fact that he eats the menstruation when he is in the mother's womb. This, too, seems to be a new idea in Persian Zoroastrian literature. Earlier Zoroastrian literature does not usually think in such terms of "collective" pollution. A parallel from the same texts is the idea that a woman, no matter how scrupulously she has observed the rules for menstruation, is always guilty of breaking these and should perform certain rituals to atone for these sins.[31]

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[30] There is no particular term used to refer to the vicarious variety of the ritual. In this text, it is referred to as the *barašnom-e mardomān*, "the *barašnom* of people." This particular usage recalls similar expressions (such as *zan-e kasān*, "the wife of persons," meaning "someone else's wife") which identify the qualified noun as belonging to someone else. The expression should therefore mean "the *barašnom* undergone for the sake of someone else." A similar expression is also found in *Nērangestān* 22.2, where a woman is said to be allowed to worship "at her own fire" (*pad ān ī xwēš*), but a child is allowed to worship "at someone else's fire" (*pad ān ī kasān*). Cf. F.M. Kotwal & Ph.G. Kreyenbroek, *The Hērbedestān and Nērangestān II: Nērangestān. Fragard 1* (Studia Iranica Cahier 16), Paris 1995, *ad locum*. The *Ithoter* 15 simply refers to the ritual as the *barašnūm* "for the intention of NN" (*be-niyyat-e folān*).

[31] E.g. SDN 41 (also SDB 41), where the ritual is called *daštān-gonāh* ("the sin of menstruation"): every woman must perform twelve of these, one each for the sins with which she has hurt heaven, the sun, the moon, fire, water, earth, wind, Khurdād (guardian of water), Mordād (guardian of plants), *xordak-gāh* (? Sraoša according to

The innovations in the vicarious performance of the *barašnūm* are perhaps best illustrated by looking at an earlier example and at the later practice. The vicarious *barašnūm* is never mentioned in Pahlavi literature. In fact, the long gloss on the *barašnūm* in *PhlVd.* 9.32, seems to argue against the existence of this variety of the ritual. There, it is said that "if he is unable to wash because of lack of strength, someone else must sit (in the pit) with him."[32] In the *Persian Rivāyats*, the evidence for the vicarious *barašnūm* is overwhelming, at least for the sake of a deceased person. In a list of rituals to be performed when someone older than fifteen has died, the *barašnūm*, undergone by a priest for the sake of the soul of the deceased, figures as a standard element.[33] The believers are urged, moreover, to undergo the *barašnūm* once every year[34] and a person who has not undergone the *barašnūm*, may not participate in the communal rituals.[35]

The *Ithoter* (late eighteenth century) carefully distinguishes for whose intention the ritual is performed; a priest who becomes impure must undergo the ritual twice: once for the restoration of his own purity and once vicariously for someone else.[36] In modern Parsi practice, the *barašnūm* is exclusively undergone by priests, either for their own ritual purity or vicariously, for the purity of others.[37]

The vicarious *barašnūm* for the soul of a deceased person fits in very well with a whole range of soul-services that grew in post-Sasanian transformations of Zoroastrianism.[38] These have been the subject of controversy, both in academic literature and among modern Zoroastrians themselves, because they seem to clash with what many scholars have perceived to be one of the fundamental elements of

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Dhabhar, *Persian Riwayats*, 220, n. 1), and polluting substances. The same ritual was later called *dwāzdah-homāst*: cf. Dhabhar, *Persian Rivāyats*, 219–221. It consists of twelve celebrations of the *Vendīdād* (which include 144 *Yasnas*!).

[32] *ud ka-š wad-zōrīh rāy be nē tuwān šustan, ā-š kas-ē abāg nišīnišn* (Anklesaria, *Pahlavi Vendidād*, 246).

[33] Dhabhar, *Persian Riwayats*, 176–178.

[34] Dhabhar, *Persian Riwayats*, 392.

[35] Dhabhar, *Persian Riwayats*, 323.

[36] *Ithoter* 5.7. The *Ithoter* (15.1–4) does stress, however, that it is not compulsory to undergo the *barašnūm* for the soul of a deceased relative.

[37] Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 40–42; for the Irani practice, where lay Zoroastrians still may undergo the *barašnūm*, cf. Boyce, *Persian Stronghold*, 111–114.

[38] M. Boyce, "Soul-services in Traditional Zoroastrianism and Late English Medieval Christianity: A Brief Comparison", in: H. Preißler & H. Seiwert (eds.), *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte. Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag*, Marburg 1994, 389–398.

Zoroastrian throughout the ages: the idea that every person will be held responsible only for his/her actions performed when he/she was alive.

The general idea is this: the good and evil thoughts, words and deeds of every person are added to his account. When he dies, the soul will go to the Cinwad bridge, where he will meet the gods Sraoša, Mithra and Rašnu, who put his good and evil thoughts, words and deeds in a pair of scales and weigh them. The outcome of this weighing alone decides whether the soul will go to heaven, hell or the place of mixture. Even though the soul will want to change something, he will not be able to do so. This general structure can be observed throughout Zoroastrian literature and it does indeed compromise our understanding of the vicarious *barašnūm*. A second problem in understanding the development of the vicarious *barašnūm* is the earlier stress on the necessity of the physical cleansing. When the ritual is performed vicariously, this means that someone whose body is pure is cleansed and that this cleansing removes the pollution from the body of someone who is polluted, but unable to undergo the ritual himself. We have seen already that the *barašnūm* came to be considered a ritual for spiritual cleansing, but even if we grant such a spiritual interpretation, we would still face the difficulty of interpreting a physically exacting ritual intended for the bodily and spiritual purification of someone else.

Other scholars have given practical reasons for the development of the vicarious *barašnūm*: the care for the soul of a deceased relative, the impossibility for some persons to leave their business or work for a period of ten days. But this does not explain sufficiently how the ritual was perceived to work. There are no straightforward answers to that question in Zoroastrian literature. The best we can do, at the moment, is compare the vicarious *barašnūm* with other vicarious rituals, for the dead and for the living, and to see if the sudden occurrence of that ritual is somehow consistent with other developments in Zoroastrianism from roughly the same period.

4. *The vicarious confession of sins*

Confession of sins, in all likelihood, was an integral part of Zoroastrian observance from its early days.[39] Early sources suggest that persons

[39] For the confession of sins, cf. J.P. Asmussen, "The Avestan Terms *apaitita-*,

who had sinned had to confess their sins to a priest, who judged them and administered punishment (corporeal punishment; fines; rituals etc.). After that, the sin was considered to have been annulled. Various distinctions were made: sins that affected someone else (apart from the sinner and the gods) had to be settled with that person.[40] A distinction was also made between voluntary and involuntary sins and certain sins could not be annulled, even when confessed. Up to the late Sasanian period, it seems, this system remained intact.[41] We have, however, no less than seven versions of a very long fixed confession of sins, known as the *Patita* or *Petīt*. The titles of these confessions partly indicate their use: there is a general confession of sins for someone who wishes to expiate his sins before a priest (*Petīt pašēmānīh*); a confession one can recite privately for the expiation of one's sins (*petīt īxwad*); and a confession of sins for the expiation of the sins of a deceased person (*petīt ī wīdardagān*). These texts are known in Pahlavi and Pāzand versions; the status of a seventh version (in Pāzand only), the *Petīt Irānī*, is unclear.

There are no indications to suggest that these texts are old, even though they contain earlier layers, as there are no indications that the recitation of a fixed catalogue of sins is an ancient ritual in Zoroastrianism. But from the moment we find evidence for the recitation of this fixed text (in late Pahlavi literature), the evidence is overwhelming. Particularly in the *Ṣad dar* texts, the recitation of *petīt* is a prominent part of Zoroastrian daily observance. It is said that it removes all sins and will prevent someone from going to hell; parts of it should be recited daily, before going to sleep (that way, every breath one takes while asleep will cause a sin of a particular category to disappear); a man's last words should be a formula from the *petīt* and after a person's death, the *petīt* should be recited for him. In many cases, the recitation of this text will have been a vicarious recitation, whether the person is alive or not. Not every Zoroastrian knew this text by heart, and he could go before a priest and ask

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paitita- and *paititi-* and their Significance in the Religio-Historical Development of Zoroastrianism", in: *idem; X*^{v}*āstvānīft. Studies in Manichaeism* (Acta Theologica Danica 7), Copenhagen 1965, 26–112.

[40] This is the sin known as *hamēmālān* or *hamēmārān*; cf. S. Shaked, "'For the Sake of the Soul': A Zoroastrian Idea in Transmission into Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 15–32, pp. 21–22.

[41] Cf. Dk 6.123; E31d, for which, cf. S. Shaked, *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages (Dēnkard VI)*, Boulder 1979, *ad locum*.

the priest to recite the text for him; he himself should then recite shorter prayers simultaneously, but the recitation of the text in his intention did remove his sins.

The parallels with the vicarious *barašnūm* can easily be detected: from a ritual of personal confession, designed to deal with a particular sin, the *petīt* developed into a vicariously performed ritual, benefiting the living or the dead, in which another person confessed a fixed list of all possible sins, hoping that the particular sins the person actually committed were included. If that was not the case, the formula also contained phrases to include all sins that had not been listed separately. From a ritual that was to be performed for a specific occasion, moreover, the *petīt* developed into a ritual that was to be performed regularly, at least once during a lifetime, and repeatedly (vicariously) after death. The *petīt* was later included in the rituals to be performed during the *barašnūm*.

5. *Linking a person: the world of the* Ṣad dar *Texts*

The main obstacle for a satisfactory understanding of the vicarious *barašnūm* is the presumed autonomy of the individual. Both physically, in the sense that his own body is *not* actually washed, and spiritually, in the sense that he is to benefit from things he has not done himself, this autonomy is compromised. The problem is partly caused, it seems, by the modern positive evaluation of the whole idea of the autonomous individual. This is clear, for instance, from some of the more violent responses to the confession of sins, both in Western and in Parsi scholarly literature.[42]

It would be untrue to state that the whole idea of the autonomous individual in his unique responsibility for his own soul is absent from

[42] R. Pettazzoni, "Confession of Sins in Zoroastrian Religion", *Papers on Indo-Iranian and other Subjects* (Fs. J.J. Modi), Bombay 1930, 437–441 ("As a matter of fact, confession of sins seems to be rather incongruent with the very spirit of Zoroastrian religion in its genuine form" [*sic*], p. 437); C.E. Pavry, *Iranian Studies*, Bombay 1927, 168–193 ("the foolish and unZoroastrian idea that a dead man's sins could be atoned for by the recital of the Patet and by other prayers by strangers", p. 175); J.M. Unvala, "Patêt or the Confession of Sins", *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 2 (1926), 89–93; Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 42 ("Such practice conflicts with the Zoroastrian doctrine that each individual is responsible for his or her own fate through actions performed while alive").

Zoroastrianism. From the earliest period of the faith we have information to support the presence of this idea in certain varieties of Zoroastrianism. One of the key elements of it is the fact that men and women are both equally responsible for their own salvation, an idea found in the earliest layer of the Avesta.[43] The basic pattern of the story of what happens to the soul after death also underlines the idea of every person's own responsibility for his own salvation: he/she will be judged according to the thoughts, words and deeds he performed while alive.[44] The importance of the idea of the individual in Zoroastrianism has at times been overrated, however, and no serious attempt seems to have been made to study the way the individual is perceived in Zoroastrian texts. Zoroastrian literature bears massive evidence to the effect that Zoroastrians in the pre-modern period did not perceive themselves as strictly autonomous individuals, but on the contrary viewed themselves as individuals linked in various distinct ways with their fellow Zoroastrians. It is likely, I would suggest, that these linkages provided Zoroastrians (at least implicitly) with the option of developing the vicarious *barašnūm*.

This can perhaps best be illustrated with materials from the *Ṣad dar* texts. This will provide us with a synchronic perspective of the period in which the vicarious *barašnūm* is first attested in Zoroastrian literature. There are various texts called *Ṣad dar*, "a hundred chapters," of which the two most important are the *Ṣad dar-e naṯr*, "the prose *Ṣad dar*," and the *Ṣad dar-e bondaheš*, "the *Ṣad dar* [beginning with the story] of creation."[45] The other, versified, texts are dependent on these. The date of these texts has not been established. They seem to be intermediary texts between the Pahlavi works of the ninth and tenth centuries and the Persian Rivāyats of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. This is evident from the fact that they frequently quote passages from Pahlavi texts[46] and are in turn frequently quoted

[43] A. de Jong, "Jeh the Primal Whore? Observations on Zoroastrian Misogyny", in: R. Kloppenborg & W.J. Hanegraaff (eds.), *Female Stereotypes in Religious Traditions* (Studies in the History of Religions 66), Leiden 1995, 15–41, pp. 23–25 (with references).

[44] A generous selection of texts on this subject is given by M. Molé, "Le jugement des morts dans l'Iran préislamique", in: *Le jugement des morts* (Sources orientales 4), Paris 1961, 145–175.

[45] These two texts were published by B.N. Dhabhar, *Saddar Nasr and Saddar Bundehesh*, Bombay 1909; a translation of the *SDN* can be found in E.W. West, *Pahlavi Texts III* (SBE 24), Oxford 1885 (many reprints), 255–361; the *SDB* is translated in Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats*, 497–578.

[46] Cf., for instance, A.V. Williams, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (Hist.Fil.Medd.Dan.Vid.Selsk. 60), Copenhagen 1990, vol. 1, 18–19.

in the *Persian Rivāyats*. They seem to be intermediary in another sense too: they show the clearest evidence for certain transformations of Zoroastrianism in the Islamic period. The influence of Islamic terminology and ideas is considerable: Islamic words and names are used instead of the traditional Zoroastrian terms.[47] The pantheon has also been reformulated in these texts: there is only one god (*īzad* or *yazdān*), who is accompanied by innumerable lesser divine beings who are called *amšāsfand* (a term traditionally reserved for the Zoroastrian Heptad, but here used for all (former) deities)[48] or *ferešte* ("angel"). A clear example of Islamic influence is the notion that God sent a plurality of prophets to the world to instruct mankind (*SDB* 74).[49]

The rituals discussed in these texts are all "personal" rituals, some of which appear to be new. Of some rituals that have been attested (however sparsely) in Pahlavi literature, they give the earliest full descriptions.[50] On the whole, the focus of the *Ṣad dar* texts is very much on the other world; countless passages stress the transience of this world and urge the believers to be prepared for the judgement of their souls. Two other aspects, finally, are worth being noticed. Occasionally, we find a completely different type of religiosity, resembling Gnostic ideas or perhaps Islamic mysticism, for instance in the phrase "he who knows himself, knows God."[51] The texts also reflect the situation of Zoroastrians under Islamic rule: it is said, for instance, that anyone who remains loyal to the faith *in this time*, will never go to hell (SDB 73).

The texts we are going to discuss are traditional in the sense that they are fully based in knowledge of the tradition. At the same time,

[47] Examples are *tafsīr* (= *Zand*); *tawbah* (repentance); *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl* (permitted and not permitted); *šefāʿat* (intercession); certain epithets of God (*taʿālā; ʿazza wa-jalla; tabārok*).

[48] Cf. *SDN* 87, where all calendar deities from Ohrmazd to Anīrān are called *amšāsfand*, or *SDB* 54 and 83 (Gošūrūn); 99 (Sroš), etc.

[49] This idea is of course ultimately of Manichaean origin, but in these texts it is undoubtedly due to Islamic views on the prophets. G. Widengren's attempt to find a Zoroastrian Iranian background for the notion of a plurality of prophets (*The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God. Studies in Iranian and Manichaean Religion* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1945:5), Uppsala/Leipzig 1945, 62–71) is unconvincing.

[50] For example the *gētī-xarīd* (discussed already by Mānuščihr, *Dd.* 78.4–5; 79); the *zende-rawān* (*Dd.* 80; *YF* 126 (Weinreich); or the *dwāzdah-homāst* (*Dd.* 80.15).

[51] *SDB* 74.3: "And it is said in the religion that a man who knows himself, knows God" (*wa andar dīn gūyad ke xʷīštan-šenās mardom īzad-šenās*).

they show quite different aspects of living Zoroastrianism than the Pahlavi books do. One of the areas where they follow traditional Zoroastrianism but, in the multitude of passages, give the impression of being innovative, is the way people and their virtues and sins are linked. The link between the spiritual and the material realities is well known in Zoroastrianism and has been discussed fairly often. Its basic idea, that any action performed in the material world is also performed in the spiritual world, underlies most Zoroastrian conceptions of sins, virtues and their retribution. But there are other links, too: those joining together men and women, their relatives (dead or alive) and their fellow Zoroastrians. These links, when established, influence the account of a person's sins and virtues: they can add to it and they remove from it and the individual sometimes can do nothing about it. The following list of instances is far from exhaustive.

a) *Parents and children*

Parents and children are linked in various ways. It is the duty of parents to instruct their children properly in the religion. The religious education of children is the responsibility of three persons: the father, the mother and a priest. Parents, who are adviced not to hit their children when they are very young (or only with a slender stick; SDB 86), must teach them in a gentle manner what is a sin and what a virtue. Up to the age of four or eight, the sins of children are not counted, and up to the age of fifteen, they are counted but less severely (SDB 86). Since children are instructed by their parents, all sins and virtues they perform are counted as if they were performed by their parents.[52] At the same time, children are supposed to obey their parents. If they do not obey them, they will have a miserable life on this earth and will have no hope of reaching heaven but will be sent to hell: "(Even) if the Amšāsfands are satisfied with that soul and release it, but the father and mother complain about him and will not be satisfied, the soul of that person will go to hell." (SDB 69.11). When a son disobeys his father three times, he becomes *margarzān* ("worthy of death," the most severe state of sin) and deserves to be killed (SDB 34.7). The contentment of Ohrmazd is linked with the contentment of the parents and the

[52] SDN 18; 51; 63; SDB 5; 29; 36; 61; 69; 86; 87. This is one of the most popular themes in these texts.

priest; whenever children hurt their parents or their priest, they hurt Ohrmazd and no virtue they perform will reach the spiritual beings. Every day, children have to ask their parents and the priest what to think, speak and do (SDN 40).

As is well known, having children is a duty for Zoroastrians. It is not just a good deed, but having a son is indispensable for every Zoroastrian, because mankind is indispensable for the fight against evil. A person who does not have children cannot cross the bridge and will therefore have to remain before the bridge; such a person is called *borīde pol* ("someone who is cut off from the bridge"): "If someone does not have a child, he is called *borīde pol*, which means that the way to the other world is cut off for him, and he cannot go to the other world. It does not matter how many good deeds and virtues he has performed, he will stay before the Bridge, he will not be able to cross the Cinwad-bridge and his account will not be made up. And every Amšāsfand who comes across that place asks this thing first: "Have you produced a replacement for yourself in that world or not?" And because he has not produced one, they will pass him by and his soul will stay there, at the Bridge, full of pain and grief." (SDN 18.5–8).

The only solution for these souls is to appoint an adoptive son to them. This adoptive son is known as *stūr* and may be a son from a lesser wife, or from a relative (SDN 54), who should be properly appointed by the priests (SDB 62). The actions performed by the adoptive son, just as actions performed by the natural son, also accrue to the merit of the adoptive father (SDN 18). "For relatives, no deed is more necessary than this one, and whenever they are appointed as *stūr* of someone, it is just like they have brought a dead man back to life and to that merit there is no limit." (SDN 18.19)

Certain types of merit and sins are passed on through the generations: the unrepented sin of a *mehr-drūj* (Phl. *mihrōdrūz*, "someone who breaks a covenant, does not keep his word") is passed on to the next generation (*SDN* 25.4). The same applies to spiritual merit: not only the virtues of one's children are added to one's own account, but also of their children and their children's children (*SDB* 61). One of the myriads of descendants may be the one who will ask God for forgiveness for the sins of his ancestor: someone who has been confined to hell will have a black mark on his forehead at the resurrection and one of his descendants may finally convince Ohrmazd to remove that mark (*SDB* 61.5).

The function of most of these texts, of course, is to express the importance of having children. They do so by stressing how the fate of the individual soul depends on his ancestors and his descendants, who through their actions may influence his well-being.

b) *Husbands and wives*

Women's lives in these texts are described exclusively in the terms of their family relations.[53] Their best chance of accumulating merit is having children. When a girl is nine, she must be engaged, when she is twelve, she must be given to her husband. If not, every time she menstruates and washes herself, one *tanāfūr* sin is added to the father's account and this is weighed first at the Cinwad bridge (SDB 63). If a woman herself refuses to be married, she will be sent to hell permanently (*ibidem*). Once married, the woman should not perform the daily religious duties as men do, but they should worship their husband and prostrate themselves nine times before him: "In the good, pure religion of the Mazdā-worshippers women are not ordered to pray (*nīyāyeš kardan*), for their prayer is this, that three times every day, in the morning, at the afternoon prayer and at the evening prayer, they stand before their own husband, fold their arms and say: "What do you think, so that I shall think the same and what do you need, so that I shall say it and what do you need so that I shall do it; what do you command?" (SDN 59.1–2).[54]

Women are expected to think, speak and do whatever their husbands order them, "for the contentment of Ohrmazd is linked with that of the husband." (SDN 59.3) If they do not have a husband, they should go before their father, brother or whichever man is in charge (SDB 85.8). Whenever the husband is not satisfied, the wife cannot go to heaven. If a woman does not obey her husband, he is not obliged to feed her; in general, the husband should treat his wife as his child (SDB 34.4–5).

c) *Laymen and priests*

Outside the family bounds, the first and most important relation people can have is that with their priest.[55] In texts discussing this rela-

[53] Cf. De Jong, "Jeh the Primal Whore?", 18–23.

[54] More or less the same ideas are found in SDB 69.

[55] For this subject, cf. Ph.G. Kreyenbroek, "On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), 1–15.

tion, obedience again is the key term. Everyone must choose his or her priest, who is in spiritual authority (*dastwar/dastūr*) over him/her. No virtue performed without this spiritual guidance will be added to one's account (SDN 8). Everyone must go before their priests and listen to them and do what they are told, and they should not question their authority (SDN 97). Anyone who does not perform a certain duty, because he has not asked what to do, will have a double sin: one for not doing it and one for not asking it (SDB 6).

d) *Owners and slaves*

If one buys a slave, one should not sell him to an unbeliever. If one does sell him, every sin of that slave is added to the account of the seller (SDB 30).

e) *Owners and animals*

Even between humans and animals, some relations require attention. Even though everyone must always be careful to abstain from sin, one should be particularly careful when one has eaten meat. If one eats meat and sins, every sin that the animal commits (has committed) goes to the account of that person (SDN 23).

f) *Charity and the "deserving poor"*

An important and highly unsafe relation is that between the bestower and the receiver of charity. The main idea here is that one has to be sure that the person to whom something is given really deserves it. There is great merit, for instance, in feeding someone who is hungry,[56] but only if he is deserving (*arzānī*), because his virtues and his sins are transferred to the person who fed him. Both options are actually found; sometimes it is said that the virtues of the person who has received charity are added to the account of the giver, but not the sins (SDN 20) and sometimes both virtues and sins are said to be added to the account of the giver (SDN 29). Not giving something to someone who is worthy is a great sin. Giving something is

[56] The merit of charity is often symbolised by the idea that there are 33 ways leading to heaven: if someone has been generous in charity, he can choose any of these 33 ways, if not, only one way will be open to him (*SDN* 79; *SDB* 74). Generosity for the sake of the performance of a ritual is worth twice the amount of merit: once for the ritual and once for the priest (*SDB* 74).

a great merit, that will continue to increase as long as one lives (SDB 87.11–12). Giving something to someone who is not worthy is a great sin, for it equals destroying that which was given (SDN 29; SDB 74).

g) *The* hamēmālān *sin*

In the *Ṣad dar* texts, we frequently come across the idea of remaining before the bridge. We saw one case of it in the section on children: someone who has no children will remain before the bridge, because he did not produce a substitute in this world; therefore, he will not be accepted into the other world and is called *borīde-pol.* But this is not the only group of souls waiting before the bridge. All persons who have wronged their fellow men and have not resolved these wrongdoings will also remain before the bridge, until the person they harmed dies and his soul arrives at the bridge: then and there their conflict is resolved. The main example that is given of this belief, is the case of a man who slept with someone else's wife. He will have to wait before the bridge, until the husband arrives; then, he is punished for seducing the woman and when the husband is satisfied, his account will be made up. Some of his merit, moreover, will be transferred to the account of the husband. Similarly, in the case of thieves, whatever they stole is taken back from them fourfold and their merit is transferred to the account of their victims.

h) *The transfer of merit, intercession, and the* ganj-e hamīše-sūd

A particular class among the souls of the deceased are those who, according to the system, would not be permitted to go to heaven, but have performed one particular good deed, for which they will be admitted to heaven. This can be done in various ways: a god or several gods can intercede before Ohrmazd on behalf of the deceased person's soul: Ohrmazd can then show his benevolence, punish the sinner before the bridge and admit him into heaven (SDB 40, the intercession is performed by Srōš if the proper rituals in his honour have been performed; SDB 42, the intercession is performed by the Spirit of the Gāthās, who has transformed himself into a wall which bars the way to hell). The intercession can also be done by the souls in heaven, for instance for all those who remain faithful to Zoroastrianism in this difficult time (SDB 73).

Another way for a sinner to be admitted into heaven is to benefit

from the transfer of merit: we have seen this already in the preceding section: if one has been wronged in one way or another, the merit of the wrongdoer is transferred to the account of the sinner and this may tip the balance (e.g. SDB 64, for theft; SDB 65, for slander; 71, for robbery with violence). Should the wrongdoer have no merit to dispense, it is taken from the heavenly store-house of merit known as the *ganj-e hamīše-sūd*, "the treasure of everlasting benefit." This was built up by the collective effort of all those who have done good works. It is at the discretion of those who dwell in Paradise to dispense merit from it. The souls of the deceased can also dispense their own merit to such a soul, as they are said to do to the faithful in these times of hardship (SDB 73) or to anyone who has celebrated the *gētī-xarīd* ritual (SDB 42).

i) *Rituals for the dead and for the living*

We have already seen many examples of the fear of remaining before the bridge, of not being able to be judged and having to wait: this happens in the case of unsolved sins involving someone else, in the case of a person who has no offspring and no adoptive children and to a person who has never undergone the *barašnūm*. There are several other factors which may compromise a person's chance of going to heaven. A famous example is weeping over the dead: every tear that is shed is collected in a river, and the soul of the deceased will not be able to cross that river (SDN 96). Connected with this idea, of course, is the idea that certain rituals performed for the sake of a deceased relative help his crossing. This is one of the main reasons for the popularity of the vicarious *barašnūm* and the recitation of the confession of sins. These are rituals intended to remove certain obstacles, such as unrepented sins and bodily impurity. Other rituals help the soul cross the bridge by providing him with a guardian, the god Srōš, who will accompany the soul for three days if three Vendīdāds in his honour are performed (a ceremony called *tars-astūdān*; SDB 40).[57]

Two rituals probably unknown to Sasanian Zoroastrianism enjoy a great popularity among the writers and audience of the *Ṣad dar*: the *gētī-xarīd* ("buying the (other) world") and the *zende-rawān* ("the

[57] For the *Vendīdād* of Srōš, cf. G. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition* (Orientalia Rheno-Traiectina 28), Leiden 1985, 154–156.

living soul"). Both are rituals designed to ensure a person a place in heaven. The *gētī-xarīd* ceremony was intended for a Zoroastrian who had died without having performed the *nowzūd*, the initiation into the Zoroastrian community. Because of his virtues, he might go to heaven, but he could never reach the highest heaven; therefore, the *gētī-xarīd* was to be performed. An additional benefit of this ceremony was that it encouraged all those who dwell in heaven to let the deceased person's soul share in their merit: that way, he would always reach the highest heaven (SDB 42; SDN 5). The *gētī-xarīd* came to be performed for living persons too, to secure their place in heaven.

The *zende-rawān* is a ritual for the living soul, destined to secure him a place in heaven. The *zende-rawān* could be performed as often as one liked, and its celebration removed 210,000 deadly sins (70,000 for every day of celebration) (SDB 43; SDN 58).

From these examples, which can be multiplied *ad libitum*, it becomes clear that the idea of the individual who is responsible for his or her own actions only is not at the centre of the Zoroastrianism evident from the *Ṣad dar* texts. This responsibility certainly exists, and it is of great importance, but the system is much more diverse. It shows how a person can benefit from actions performed by others, how sins can be annulled or multiplied, how virtue can increase without any virtuous deeds being performed and above all how one's actions influence, and are influenced by, those of others. In other words, the individual in these texts is part of an extensive network of links that embed him in the various groups of which he/she is a member: the family, the Zoroastrian community of the living and the community of the dead.

Many of the ideas listed above are not new. Evidence for the transfer of sins and virtues, for instance, can be found in the Avesta (cf. *Vd.* 8.97–103, discussed above) and in Pahlavi texts.[58] The rituals performed for the souls of the deceased are generally thought to have been part of Zoroastrian observance from its earliest days.[59] What seems to be new in the *Ṣad dar* texts, however, is the frequency with which these links are stressed and the more systematic

[58] A good example is *Nērangestān* 7.5 (Kotwal-Kreyenbroek): "If a priest is very able, he may sell vermin (*xrafstar*; killing these increases merit, A.J.) which he has caught for a price; both parties thus acquire twofold merit: both for catching it and for killing it."

[59] Boyce, *HZ* I, 319.

way in which they illustrate the responsibilities of every man and every woman for those with whom he/she has established some sort of connection.

6. *The vicarious* barašnūm *as ritual of integration*

We have argued above that the *barašnūm*, in its earliest interpretations, was a ritual of re-integration. A person who had become polluted had to undergo this purification in order to be able to have contact with his fellow Zoroastrians once again. In this early system, the *barašnūm* was an *ad hoc* ritual, performed whenever the need arose. In the course of the development of Zoroastrianism, several changes occurred in the nature of the purification: it became compulsory for every Zoroastrian, it became meritorious to undergo it every year, whether one had been polluted or not, and it came to be considered as a ritual that purifies the soul and increases the spiritual merit of anyone who performed it. A parallel development could be observed in the confession of sins: from a ritual performed after the actual sin it developed into a compulsory ritual, to be performed regularly (even daily) and eventually into a ritual that annuls sins and increases spiritual merit. Both rituals also came to be applied to the souls of deceased relatives and came to be performed for living Zoroastrians who were unable to perform them themselves.

These developments show some changes that took place in the development of Zoroastrian ritual practice. It is easier to document changes in performance than changes in interpretation, but the two cannot properly be separated. It seems that the rituals which involve lay participation (such as the *barašnūm* and the confession of sins) were spiritualised and lost some of their original *ad hoc* nature. This spiritualised interpretation of the rituals opened the way to their vicarious performance; this variety of the rituals was perceived to work just as other ritual and non-ritual actions could be said to "work" in the lives of others: through the many links which bind the community together. For the vicarious *barašnūm* this implied a concretisation of its earliest function: it continued to serve as a ritual of integration, in this case a ritual that could integrate the souls of the deceased into the community of the blessed.