



manashni

Volume 40 Issue 2 – February 2026

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Calendar of Events for 2026:

21st March, Saturday - Navroze Humbandagi and Function  
Register [here](#). See flyer at end of Manashni for details  
28<sup>th</sup> March, Saturday (10.30 am to 1.30 pm) – Asia Society – [Super Saturday: Spring Celebrations](#) along the Silk Road. ZAH is organizing numerous activities including a ZAH performance at 1 pm.  
12th April, Sunday - ZAH Carnival  
31st May, Sunday - Gahambar  
15th August, Saturday - Navroze Humbandagi and Function  
4th October, Sunday - Gahambar

### REPORTS

#### LIBRARY REPORT

By: Jango Mistry

#### It's Time Again for *The Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize*

Yes, it's that time again! You will recall that four years ago, the Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize was established by the Library Committee of ZAH, home of FIRES. It was established to recognize Zoroastrian authors every two years for excellence and was awarded for the first time in 2022. In 2024, the award was awarded for the second time, and in 2026, it will be given for the third time.

This prestigious award honors Houston's Bapsi Sidhwa, a renowned Pakistani-American novelist, recognized worldwide for her contributions to fictional literature. This unique award meets the need to showcase and recognize the diverse range of Zoroastrian talent all over the world.

*We are now thrilled to announce the call for submissions for the 3rd Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize. This biennial award is open to any Zoroastrian writer over the age of 18. Books must be published between January 2024 and April 2026.*

### SUNDAY SCHOOL

PLACE: ZHCC  
8787 W. Airport Blvd.  
Houston, TX 77071  
Tel: 713-270-9339

TIME: Different timings for each group

DATE: March 8, 2026

Children's Session: The Sunday School session starts at **10:30 a.m. in-person and by Zoom**

Middle Group: The Sunday School session at **11:00 a.m. – in-person & by Zoom**



Youth Group: The Sunday School session at 11:00 a.m. **In person**



## BAPSI SIDHWA LITERARY PRIZE



### 3<sup>RD</sup> Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize 2026

Applications now open!

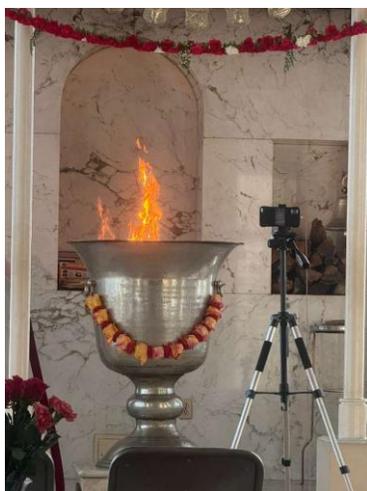
Click on this link for eligibility and  
submission requirements:

<https://fires-fezana.org/bapsi-sidhwa-literary-prize-2026/>

Winner will receive  
US\$ 2000 cash prize  
and the Medallion.



## 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY BEHRAM ROJ JASHAN SPONSORED BY FRIENDS OF ZAH



Writers work in a very competitive environment, and even though there are numerous writing awards, they mostly cover a much more diverse range of writers all over North America. This award is aimed exclusively at Zoroastrian writers all over the world. The response to our announcements has been very heartening. We have received entries from India, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the US. The entries are judged by an independent panel of three recognized judges.

The winner will receive \$2000, a trophy, and the opportunity to showcase his or her work at the 13th World Zoroastrian Congress in Singapore in December this year.

### Calling all book lovers!

By focusing on Zoroastrian authors and recent fiction (2024–2026), we are searching for the most compelling Zoroastrian voices in fiction from the last two years, and we need your help to spread the word. The struggles faced by aspiring authors are well known. Starting with blank pages, they weave a story that will be able to grab a publisher's attention and ultimately be well-received by readers. You can help us shine a light on promising talents and find an author who deserves to be "discovered". Behind every enjoyable book is a reader who told a friend. You may not be an author yourself, but do you know any Zoroastrian writers, academics, thinkers, and storytellers? Or just share this post with your favorite bookworm, and your family and friends here and in your home country. If you've read a standout novel or short story collection by a Zoroastrian author published since 2024, we want to hear about it. You can help us find the best of the best.

Application information and other details on eligibility and requirements are on the FIRES Website: <https://fires-fezana.org/bapsi-sidhwa-literary-prize2026/>

### ATASH KADEH NEWS

By: Atash Kadeh Committee

The first day of January began with a Khushali Ni Machi during the first Boye of 2026 at the Atash Kadeh, to bring positive changes, hope and light to our entire community. The celebration continued with a Jashan in the afternoon, sponsored by the Friends of ZAH group. What a wonderful way to begin the New Year with so much festivity. Thank you to each member of this group for your continued support. We value your enthusiasm.

The Houston Zoroastrian Study Group met on Sunday January 11, 2026 at 12:30 p.m. to learn about the **History Behind Ancient Persian "History"**

*This presentation discussed the legend of Kai Vishtaspa ascending to the throne. Soon after, Zarathustra arrived at Vishtaspa's court seeking to advance his revelation of Ahura Mazda's edicts to humankind. The discourse offered an explanation behind the myth of Zarathustra reviving Vishtaspa's incapacitated steed, based on the Zarathusht-Nameh by Bahram-bin-Pazdu. Highlights from the Yatkar-i-Zariran and Shah Nameh illustrate Vishtaspa's attempts and struggles to spread Zarathustra's religion.*

Due to the gravity of the recent events in Iran, we gathered at the Atash Kadeh on January 18, 2026 for a short prayer dedication for the well-

**31<sup>st</sup> JANUARY  
BEHRAM ROJ JASHAN  
SPONSORED BY HAVELIWALA FAMILY**



**YOUTH GROUP ATASH KADEH  
CLEANING**



being and security of all those impacted. The turnout was good but the mood was sombre, yet hopeful. We prayed together and hoped for a positive resolution soon.

The last day of January closed with yet another Behram Roj Jashan sponsored by Yasmin & Sheroy Haveliwala and family. Thank you very much for your generosity and your willingness to support the continuing tradition of our monthly Jashans.

Machis and Tandarostis continue each month as always. We also continue to zoom the prayers for the benefit of those who wish to attend remotely.

A special note of thanks once again to our Mobed, Ervad Pervez Gonda, who has kept our Atash Kadeh going with the help of Ervad Khushrav Nariman.

Our committee has been busy cleaning, and de-cluttering the Atash Kadeh. We want to thank our ZAH Youth who will be helping us with Spring Cleaning as well, in February.

Please note that though we value everyone's kind-heartedness in wanting to donate items, our Atash Kadeh is fully set up with everything needed. Please check with one of the committee members before dropping off anything at the Atash Kadeh. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

You can reach us at [AtashKadeh.ZAH@Gmail.com](mailto:AtashKadeh.ZAH@Gmail.com) or call any of our committee members if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Committee Members: Khushrav Nariman, Feroze Bhandara, Shernaz Bhandara, Mitra Khumbatta, Persis Behramsha

**YOUTH GROUP REPORT**

By: Shireen Anklesaria

The Youth would like to wish everyone a happy New Year. We had a volunteer event at the Atash Kadeh on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb, where the Youth helped clean the Atash Kadeh in preparation for upcoming Nowruz. We hope you have a great year.

**MNE SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA AND APPLICATION**

By: MNE Scholarship Committee

The MNE Scholarship is awarded to students enrolled at any accredited University, College, Community College, or accredited vocational or IT or advanced technology related institute with credible certifications. Two scholarship will be awarded in March 2026 - one scholarship of \$3,000 and one of \$2,000. The scholarship criteria and application form are on the ZAH website at below links:

[Click here for Application Form](#)

[Click here for Criteria for Eligibility](#)

Please note that applications are due by February 28, 2026.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "THE BOOK OF ARDA VIRAF" (ARDA-VIRAF NAMEH)**



**THE BOOK OF ARDA VIRAF**

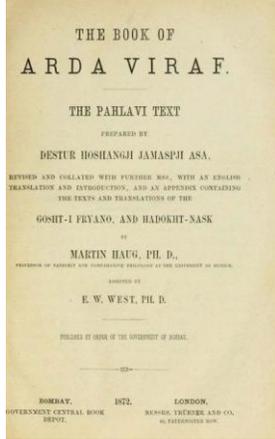


Image from Chapter 37 of the book. Illustrating bodies of those who did not wear the sudreh-kusti on earth being devoured by demonic animals in hell. The writers attempting to make a point not to deviate from the Zoroastrian religion.



Illustration from Chapter 14 of the book. Writers attempting to illustrate happiness in heaven for having lived by the Zoroastrian principles on earth.

By: Meheryar N. Rivetna

When the founding principles of a religion get drowned in a sea of misinformation, brought about by waves of declining knowledge, the followers of the religion either renounce their faith in favor of another or create their own version of their religion. The prelates of the religion, in their panic, seek ways to reverse the trend, compounding the problem in the process.

In the Pahlavi text of *The Book of Arda Viraf* prepared by the Zoroastrian scholar-priest Dastur Hoshang Jamaspji Asa, in association with the scholar of Zoroastrian studies, Martin Haug, we learn that for the first few centuries after Zarathustra the Zoroastrian religion was practiced with some, but not much, deviation from his edicts. After Alexander’s invasion of the Achaemenid Empire, the book tells us, “...the whole political order of Iran was reversed; many wars ensued, and the Zoroastrian religion decayed”. (1).

During the Seleucid and Parthian dynasties that followed the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, the Zoroastrian religion was still practiced, but as *Arda-Viraf Nameh* states: “there was confusion and contention among...the people of Iran...they had no lord, nor ruler, nor chieftain, nor dastur who was acquainted with the religion...religions of many kinds, and different fashions of belief, and skepticism, and various codes of law were promulgated in the world...” (1). It was not until the Sasanian era that the stimulus to revive the religion intensified. In their anxiety to preserve the religion, the book informs, “... the spiritual guides of the Zoroastrian community, the Dasturs, assembled to devise a new means for testing the truth of the religion and re-establishing it on a firm base”. (1).

The priests identified a fellow cleric named Viraf who, putatively, would go to the celestial worlds—heaven and hell—under the influence of an intoxicant (believed to be *haoma* or cannabis, i.e., *bharg*) and bring back to earth the workings in the afterlife. [The prefix “Arda”, meaning “truthful”, was appended to his name; thus, Arda Viraf meant “Truthful Viraf”. Recruiting Viraf, a priest, was a concocted belief that only priests were capable of saving the Zoroastrian religion from the upheaval it suffered].

The ruse engineered by the Sasanian priests claimed Viraf to have traveled to heaven, hell and *hamestagan* (purgatory) with *Sroasha* and *Atar* as his guides in the celestial world. His journey into the great beyond lasted for seven days and on awakening from his trance, Viraf narrated the punishments the souls suffered in hell for their evil ways in earthly life; he described the rewards souls enjoyed in heaven resulting from their virtuous life during their sojourn on earth.

When during the Sasanian era the book was written and who wrote it is unknown. It has had multiple authors over the decades.

The book is an imaginary journey of a pious priest through heaven and hell. Dastur Hoshangji is categorical that the book is “a mythological work”.

But, if it is “imaginary” and “mythological”, what purpose does it serve?

**AVA HOMA STEVENS**



With religious beliefs fading away, the priests fabricated a way to create solidarity among Zoroastrians and revitalize faith in the Zoroastrian religion. The ramifications in an unknown, unknowable, after-life, contingent on deeds in earthly life, can wreak psychological havoc on the average human mind. The priests tapped into this fear in an effort to prevent apostasy and urge their faithful to live by the Zoroastrian principles the priests advocated.

The book did and does serve a purpose: "It is the idea of the strictest justice which pervades the whole description of hell. No crime or offense, let it be moral, or ceremonial, or a mere misdemeanor, according to Zoroastrian notions, is left unpunished; but at the same time, no good work, however trifling it might have been left unrewarded..." (1).

Justice is fundamental to the Zoroastrian religion and the book aims to establish that key religious principle.

(1) The Pahlavi Text of *The Book of Arda Viraf* Prepared by Dastur Hoshangji Jamaspji Asa; Bombay. (1872).

Note: Attached illustrations from the British Library Manuscripts.

**ZEEAN BEHRAMSHA**



#### **BIRTH**

**Ava Homa Stevens** was born on December 23, 2025, at 8:28 p.m. in Houston, Texas. Her proud and lucky parents are Gohar Firozgary and Adam Stevens. She's already being welcomed by her furry big sister, Penny Stevens (woof!!) They are beyond grateful for their baby girl!!

***Heartiest Congratulations to the proud parents Gohar and Adam.***

**Zeean Behramsha**, a son, to Avan and Khubyar Behramsha, grandson to Roshan and Percy Behramsha - Persis and Feroze Sethna, nephew to Tanaya Behramsha, Ferzin Sethna and Sohrab Sethna on February 7, 2026.

***Heartiest Congratulations to the proud parents Avan and Khubyar.***

**SHAYAN AND NAT**



#### **WEDDING**

Avan and Noshir Bhatena are delighted to announce the wedding of their daughter **Shayan to Nat Srisakulpinyo**, son of Nipon and Daranee Srisakulpinyo in Bangkok, Thailand on December 19, 2025. Shayan and Nat currently reside in Houston, and we wish them a lifetime of love and happiness together.

***Heartiest Congratulations to the newlyweds Shayan and Nat.***

**ZAL AND HELEN**



Avan and Noshir Bhatena are delighted to announce the wedding of their son **Zal to Helen Li**, daughter of Jimmy Li and Sandy Lau in New York City on October 10, 2025. Zal and Helen live in New York, and we wish them a lifetime of love and happiness together.

***Heartiest Congratulations to the newlyweds Zal and Helen.***

**NAMC INSTITUTE OF ZOROASTRIAN STUDIES IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE FOLLOWING SESSIONS:**

ZAH Member **Meheryar Rivetna** is a panelist for the session on 8<sup>th</sup> March – Concept of Cause and Effect in Zoroastrianism

**Online Discussion: 'Concept of Cause and Effect in Zoroastrianism' - Sunday, March 8, 2026 - 11 AM Eastern**

**Panelists:**

**Dr. Karishma Koka - Neuroscientist, University of Cambridge**

**Mr. Meheryar Rivetna - Zoroastrian scholar and author**

**Moderator: Ervad Dr. Arda Minocherhomjee**

This special discussion explores the powerful Zoroastrian concept of cause and effect.

Registration is not required to join.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82432181448?pwd=Mjh5dDJHOFJ2SmNBMXJqeXZqdRTQT09>

**Lecture: 'The Shepherd of Stubborn Camels: Zarathushtra in the Gathas' - Sunday, April 12, 2026 - 11 AM Eastern**

**Presenter: Ervad Adil Minocherhomjee**

This lecture delves into Zarathushtra's struggles and triumphs as revealed in the Gathas.

**Please see the attachment for more information and the Zoom link.** Please click the Zoom link at the appropriate time.

Registration is not required to join.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82432181448?pwd=Mjh5dDJHOFJ2SmNBMXJqeXZqdRTQT09>

**Lecture: 'Representation of Zoroastrianism in Pop Culture' - Sunday, May 10, 2026 - 11 AM Eastern**

**Presenter: Pablo Vazquez**

Drawing on rigorous research and professional experience as a media consultant, Pablo Vazquez will show how this ancient faith continues to shape contemporary literature, television, cinema, gaming, music, and beyond.

Please click the Zoom link at the appropriate time.

Registration is not required to join.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82432181448?pwd=Mjh5dDJHOFJ2SmNBMXJqeXZqdRTQT09>

**Course: 'Zoroastrian Purification Rituals'**

**Saturdays @ 11:00 am Eastern time (USA & Canada) - April 11, 2026 to April 25, 2026**

**Instructor: Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia**

This course explores the spiritual science behind the core Zoroastrian purification rituals and blends theology, ritual procedure, symbolism, and practical application.

**Registration is required.**

For registration, please click here: <https://www.namcmobeds.org/namc-izs-course-registration-page/>

**Course: 'Zoroastrian Concepts in Pahlavi Texts'**

**Saturdays @ 11:00 am Eastern time (USA & Canada) - May 9, 2026 to June 13, 2026 ( no class on May 23rd)**

**Instructor: Dr. Rastin Mehri**

This course introduces Middle Persian (Pahlavi) texts. The course highlights the continuing relevance of these texts for modern diaspora communities.

**Registration is required.**

For registration, please click here: <https://www.namcmobeds.org/namc-izs-course-registration-page/>

**Four-day Retreat: 'Sacred Purification (Bareshnum) Inner Renewal Retreat'** (open to all Zoroastrians)

**July 23, 2026, to July 26, 2026**

**Location: Bhandara Atashkadeh, Houston, Texas**

This will be an Immersive Experience in Advanced Spiritual Purification for the participants.  
This four-day retreat offers a rare opportunity to experience Bareshnum, the highest Zoroastrian purification ritual.

Registration is required.

For registration, please click here: <https://www.namcmobeds.org/namc-izs-course-registration-page/>

You may also complete the registration form using the QR code or by clicking the link provided in the attachment.

Weekly Online Communal Prayer:

Every Sunday @ 2:30 pm Eastern time (USA & Canada), 11:30 am Pacific time.

We are inviting you to join our Weekly Online Communal Prayers, led by Ervad Zarrir Bhandara and other learned Mobeds. We invite you to join us in prayer online via Zoom.

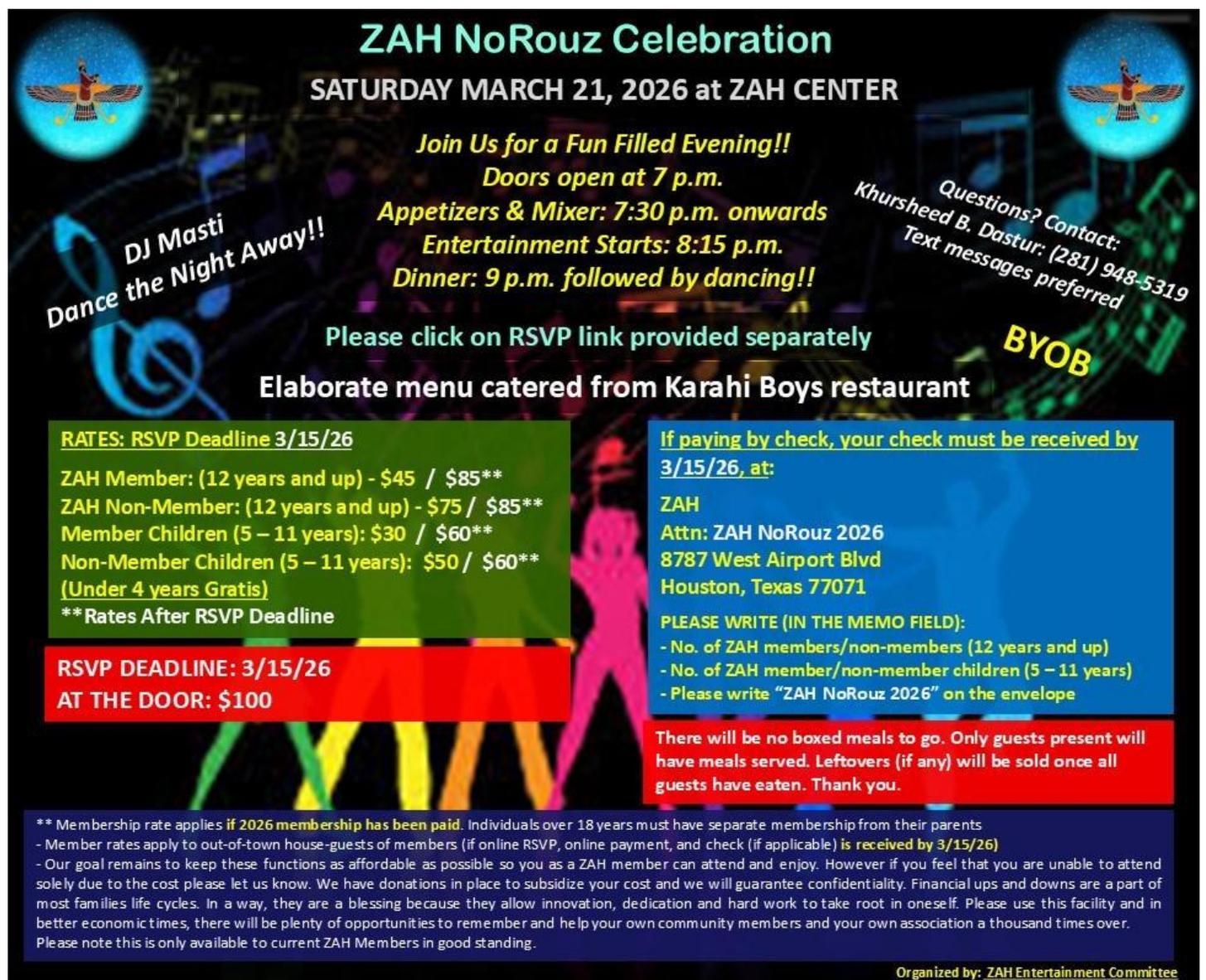
Please click the Zoom link at appropriate time.

Registration is not required to join the prayers.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86137471713?pwd=OENiSW50a1l5MkoxSWY4TmJhWUQzQT09>

## NOWRUZE CELEBRATION

Click [Here](#) to Register



**ZAH NoRouz Celebration**  
SATURDAY MARCH 21, 2026 at ZAH CENTER

*Join Us for a Fun Filled Evening!!*  
*Doors open at 7 p.m.*  
*Appetizers & Mixer: 7:30 p.m. onwards*  
*Entertainment Starts: 8:15 p.m.*  
*Dinner: 9 p.m. followed by dancing!!*

*DJ Masti*  
*Dance the Night Away!!*

Questions? Contact:  
Khurshed B. Dastur: (281) 948-5319  
Text messages preferred

**BYOB**

Please click on RSVP link provided separately

Elaborate menu catered from Karahi Boys restaurant

**RATES: RSVP Deadline 3/15/26**  
ZAH Member: (12 years and up) - \$45 / \$85\*\*  
ZAH Non-Member: (12 years and up) - \$75 / \$85\*\*  
Member Children (5 – 11 years): \$30 / \$60\*\*  
Non-Member Children (5 – 11 years): \$50 / \$60\*\*  
(Under 4 years Gratis)  
\*\*Rates After RSVP Deadline

**RSVP DEADLINE: 3/15/26**  
**AT THE DOOR: \$100**

**If paying by check, your check must be received by 3/15/26, at:**  
ZAH  
Attn: ZAH NoRouz 2026  
8787 West Airport Blvd  
Houston, Texas 77071

**PLEASE WRITE (IN THE MEMO FIELD):**  
- No. of ZAH members/non-members (12 years and up)  
- No. of ZAH member/non-member children (5 – 11 years)  
- Please write "ZAH NoRouz 2026" on the envelope

**There will be no boxed meals to go. Only guests present will have meals served. Leftovers (if any) will be sold once all guests have eaten. Thank you.**

\*\* Membership rate applies if 2026 membership has been paid. Individuals over 18 years must have separate membership from their parents  
- Member rates apply to out-of-town house-guests of members (if online RSVP, online payment, and check (if applicable) is received by 3/15/26)  
- Our goal remains to keep these functions as affordable as possible so you as a ZAH member can attend and enjoy. However if you feel that you are unable to attend solely due to the cost please let us know. We have donations in place to subsidize your cost and we will guarantee confidentiality. Financial ups and downs are a part of most families life cycles. In a way, they are a blessing because they allow innovation, dedication and hard work to take root in oneself. Please use this facility and in better economic times, there will be plenty of opportunities to remember and help your own community members and your own association a thousand times over. Please note this is only available to current ZAH Members in good standing.

Organized by: ZAH Entertainment Committee