



**24th Annual Lecture Series presented by
ZAH Library & FIRES - Nov 10 & 11, 2023**

The much-awaited Annual event of the ZAH Library was held on Friday, November 10, and Saturday, November 11.

Friday evening, November 10

Jenny Rose was the featured speaker who came to us from London. Friday evening was a Meet-and-Greet session attended by about 50 people. The evening began with Aban Rustomji, chair of the ZAH Library Committee, welcoming all the attendees. She remarked that this was the 24th consecutive year that this annual event has been held – a remarkable achievement that has featured some of the most recognized and famous speakers drawn from all over the world. Aban introduced all the members of the Library Committee with a special recognition of the two new members, Sharmeen Mehri, who had flown down from Buffalo especially for this event and Nazanin Sarkari, ZAH. We appreciated the presence of Arzan Wadia, FEZANA President from New York and Aderbad Tamboli, ZAH Chair – two tireless supporters of ZAH activities and events.



Aban Welcoming the Attendees



Sharmeen Mehri
New Committee Member



Nazanin Sarkari
New Committee Member

In introducing the “remarkable” Jenny Rose, Aban gave us a glimpse of Dr. Rose’s extensive research and lecturing all over the world to academic and professional audiences.

A note on our featured speaker Jenny:



Jenny Rose currently teaches Zoroastrian Studies through the Department of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, California. She also lectures extensively at other academic institutions, museums, and Zoroastrian Association events across North America, Europe, and India, and presents educational workshops for grade-school teachers in southern California. In recent years, Jenny has led study tours of some of the most important archaeological, cultural, and devotional sites in Iran and Central Asia. Jenny holds a doctorate in Ancient Iranian Studies from Columbia University, New York. Her dissertation was published in book form as "The Image of Zoroaster: The Persian Mage Through



European Eyes". In 2011 she wrote two textbooks: "Zoroastrianism: An Introduction", and "Zoroastrianism: A Guide for the Perplexed". Her latest book is "Between Boston and Bombay: Cultural and Commercial Encounters of Yankees and Parsis, 1771-1865".

Earlier, Arzan Wadia had remarked in his speech that he had learned a lot from Jenny’s book: Zoroastrianism: An Introduction. This authoritative text has pretty much replaced Mary Boyce’s book on the same topic.



Dr. Rose gave an informal talk on her background. Her grandmother was a Parsi, born on the Indian subcontinent. Growing up in London, Jenny had failed to imbibe or learn about her Zoroastrian heritage. Attending a university course taught by the famous Mary Boyce sparked an interest that led to her eventual doctorate in Ancient Iranian Studies from Columbia University. Particularly interested in the role of women in religion, she also has studied how the Western world has received Zoroastrianism and other Eastern religions. Jenny has also led study tours of some of the most important archaeological, cultural, and devotional sites in Iran and Central Asia, including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. She remarked that she was interested in visiting the historical lands “where Zoroastrians roamed”! Her latest book, "Between Boston and Bombay: Cultural and Commercial Encounters of Yankees and Parsis" maps the relationships between Bombay Parsis and their contemporaries in the northeastern United States.



Aban Ending the Friday Session

Friday evening had another attraction. The prior weekend, November 4, was the performance of a Play by the Zarathushti Dinner Theater Group – *Gordafrid: The Fearless Warrior*. This Play was authored and directed by our playwright Shahnaz Sidhwa, the pictures of which have been provided in *MANASHNI* and a pictorial synopsis in a *SUPPLEMENT TO MANASHNI*. Together with this play, there was an exhibit of pictures from the Shahnameh showing the lineage of Rustom and Sohrab and introducing the role of Gordafrid that led to the inevitable tragedy between the father and the son. Additionally there was a map showing the boundaries of Iran and Turan. The exhibit was organized by Vehishta Kaikobad and Edul Chikhliwala. Mahtab Dastur, with great oratory flair, gave the synopsis of the Play without giving away the drama around the character Gordafrid. This was such a unique display that it was kept open for the Library event on November 10, 2023.



Mahtab, in keeping with the mood of the Play is dressed up as a young Iranian lady
November 4, 2023



Mahtab explaining the Pictures
November 10, 2023



Natasha continuing with the narration
November 10, 2023

The evening ended with a scrumptious potluck dinner - a word of appreciation for that. Every potluck dinner the ZAH Library has sponsored has always been amply supported, with displays of all kinds of sweet and savory food, both homemade and store purchased. This food is donated and appreciated by the attendees without any recognition of who brought what. We are truly grateful to our community for their generous support and efforts.

Saturday, November 11

On Saturday morning, Dr. Rose was introduced by Sharmeen Mehri who recalled all her academic and professional achievements mentioned earlier. Jenny Rose's featured talk: "*Sheer-e-Shireen: Zoroastrians adding Sugar in the Milk*" began with the "good thoughts, good words, good deeds" mantra that every Zoroastrian is familiar with since childhood.



Jenny remarked that this mantra came to life with the tangible actions she witnessed in several areas across the globe – from sharing food at the Maidyozarem Gahambar in Taft, Iran to cooking sirog during Humbandagi at the California Zoroastrian Center. In Yazd, good occasions (like the birth of a child) are celebrated by the family cooking “charity soup” outside its home and sharing the food with friends and neighbors of all faiths and religions. She talked about the ceremony in Tehran that parallels the “Mushkil Asan” ceremony observed by Parsis in India and Pakistan. She recalled how, on her first visit to India, she was received by the Aga family who selflessly looked after all her needs, even teaching her Parsi cuisine. That hospitality was also a gracious gesture that she herself follows with others who grace her doorstep. She also mentioned how she experienced welcoming actions by total strangers in Taft who welcomed her into their home as she was passing by, and offered her a cup of tea or a meal. At the Senior Center in Navsari, India, and the Parsi Infirmary there, she witnessed several acts of caring for their fellow residents – like reading aloud from the newspaper to others who were unable to do so. At Pouruchista Skills Foundation in Yazd, women volunteer their time and expertise to teach vocational skills, like sewing hair-cutting, and Kushti weaving to other younger women in need.

Jenny Rose recounted the Ava Project in Navsari, the recovery and preservation of forests by Rashneh Pardiwala, recognized at the UN Forum for her work in recovering the land around the Doongerwadi in Mumbai. She ended her talk by summarizing the types of “good deeds” that can be done through “Hamazor”, or getting together as a group to generate strength that makes it happen. Before she took questions from the audience, Jenny invited Mahtab Dastur and Natasha Dungor to talk about FEZANA Ava Project, another act of *good deed*.



Natasha and Mahtab talked about *Ava Project*, which is a FEZANA project in support of United Nations’ initiative to educate people regarding the Water Conservative practices. This project is a 10-year initiative focusing on addressing the 30 Sustainable Goals of the UN. They talked about Goals 6 – clean water and sanitation, Goal 14, life under water, and Goal 17 partnerships. In addition, they mentioned several projects such as the distribution of educational materials for the youth and community at the World Zoroastrian Congress in 2022 in NYC, and the several presentations, including at the Parliament of World’s Religions.

This talk of philanthropy set the stage very nicely for the next part of the program when all the participants were urged to be inspired and work on ways that Jenny’s message could be converted into action – *good deeds*. Groups of people seated at their tables were asked to focus on three questions and come up with simple, sustainable actions that could be implemented by the attendees. Jangoo Mistry, who conducted this part of the program, reminded the attendees that “if it’s something you are already doing, share that with the group. It may spur others to do the same thing. Or, it can be something that may require the help of a group of committed people. We are looking for something that will move the needle, make a difference, and sweeten the milk of human kindness”.



It was very gratifying to see the participants throw themselves into the brainstorming exercise. Numerous practical examples and suggestions were reported at the end of the breakout session. Jangoo concluded by thanking everyone for their enthusiastic participation and reminded them that even if each person went out and carried out one good deed, so much good would spread through the community. President George H W Bush spoke about “a thousand points of light” of a community. I believe that on that day we generated a hundred points of light that would spread sweetness in the community. The suggestions have been gathered by the Library Committee and will be shared in a future edition of Manashni.



Emanating from the talk by Jenny Rose on Philanthropy/Good Deed at the ZAH Library's 24th Lecture Series event, Roshan Engineer advised us of the non-profit organization named *Moving Waters* which she would like ZAH Members to support. This non-profit provides mobile showers to homeless folks restoring their dignity "one shower at a time". This organization wants the donation of undergarments – men & women, large refill bottles of shower gel, shampoo and other toiletry items as well as socks. An appeal was requested to be announced in the ZAH Newsletter *MANASHNI*. If anyone wants to donate, please contact Roshan Engineer at 832-766-8720

After a nice lunch, Meheryar Rivetna was introduced by Nazanin Sarkari who lauded Meheryar as a scholar, an author, and a valued member of the Library Committee.



Meheryar spoke on: “*Politics and Power- the Birth of the Younger Avesta*”. Meheryar started by defining the difference between what the Older and Younger Avesta contained. We have to start by asking the question, “Is the

Zoroastrian religion monotheistic, dualistic, polytheistic, or henotheistic?”. These questions are important because they go “hand-in-hand” with the birth of the Younger Avesta. Tracing the history all the way from the Stone Age and the Bronze Age, (around 4,500 B.C.) Meheryar explained how Zarathustra was taught to accept tradition with blind faith. Doubting that, Zarathustra set out in seclusion to acquire wisdom and determine for himself what the truth was. Zarathustra preached a monotheistic religion and proclaimed Ahura Mazda to be the one and only God and Creator.

Through a fascinating tracing of history from Cyrus the Great establishing the Achaemenid Empire, Darius I (who had two of Cyrus’s daughters among his four wives) Darius II, Cambyses II, and the important religious role that the Magi played during the various Empires, Meheryar related the decline and fall of the Zoroastrian religion as it had been revealed by Zarathustra. Separation of the church and state, as proclaimed by Cyrus the Great, was abandoned and the scheming Magi, through infiltration into the political structure of the times, self-appointed themselves as the true custodians of the Zoroastrian religion. Creating the Young Avesta, they gave us their version of the Niyashes and Yashts that have come down to us today. Citing numerous scholars and priests of our religion, Meheryar reiterated that the Gathas were the only genuine compositions of Zarathustra and that the rest of the Avesta were composed by the Magi, adopting our religion long after the prophet’s death. Meheryar said, “Rejecting historical evidence or re-writing history is not an option. Evidence matters, not opinions”.

During the question-and-answer period, Barjor Dastur had a different view of history and presented to the community the views of other scholars regarding the origins of religious scriptures besides the holy Gathas.

The 80+ people who attended had a rewarding experience and felt that their time spent during the day was well worth it.



Library Committee – Arzan presenting honorarium to Jenny Rose