

NORTH AMERICAN MOBEDS COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Location: Kamaran Dar-e-Meher, 15316 Barnesville road, Boyds, Maryland, USA

Date: June 2nd and 3rd, 2018

NAMC EXEC 2017-2018 Present:

Arda-E-Viraf Minocherhomjee	California (President)
Tehemton Mirza	Ontario (Vice President)
Gev Karkaria	Quebec (Secretary)
Xerxes Madan	Ontario (Treasurer)

Members Present:

Jimmy Antia	Washington, DC
Ron Dadina	New York
Cyrus Dadina	New York
Kurush Dastur	Texas
Mehbad Dastur	Ontario
Soli Dastur	Florida
Cawas Desai	Pennsylvania
Hormuzd Katki	Washington DC
Adil Masani	Pennsylvania
Rohan Masani	Pennsylvania
Khushroo Mirza	Ontario

Adil Minocherhomjee	New York
Behram Panthaki	Washington DC
Jehan Panthaki	Washington DC (1/2 a Day June3rd)
Pervez Patel	New York
Adi Unwalla	New Jersey
Kobad Zarolia	Ontario

Two Proxies were registered.

Members were welcomed by ZAMWI President Anne Khademian.

Meeting was called to order by NAMC President Ervad Arda-e-viraf Minocherhomjee after a short prayer.

- 1) Read and adopt the minutes of the last Annual General Meeting.
 - a. Minutes were read, Cawas Desai proposed, Soli Dastoor seconded and the minutes were adopted.
- 2) Discuss any matters arising from the minutes.
 - a. None
- 3) Read and adopt Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 2017.
 - a. Treasurer Xerxes Madon presented the Financial Statements.
 - b. Question: Can we spend NAMC funds outside of USA?
 - c. Answer: Primary goal is to use funds in NA for mobeds; however, we need to decide as a group if we can send funds to ONA organizations --under extenuating circumstances.
 - d. Accumulated Equity on the Balance sheet is increasing; we should continue to spend the funds for education/charitable purposes.

- e. Balance sheet – Member’s equity was \$49,000 in 2017; estimated to be approx. \$63,000 in 2018.
 - f. Major donor looking to put in funds for mobed training; need to have programs available
 - g. Need to invest additional US\$25,000 donation received in 2018; looking to invest in US brokerage account. Xerxes and Tehemton in consultation with Adil will recommend the best vehicle(s) for investments. (The executive committee will approve the investments.)
 - h. Kobad proposed, seconded by Cawas and the Financial Statements were adopted
- 4) Read and adopt President’s report.
- a. Arda presented his report.
 - b. He thanked the executive board members as well as Soli Dastur & Kobad Zarolia for their continued assistance.
 - c. Soli and Joanne have been very involved in community
 - d. Young mobed seminar in La Jolla, CA was very productive
 - e. Arda thanked Tehmton and Soli for steering the seminar and for its success. There was more demand for the seminar than we could accommodate.
 - f. Read thank you notes of the young Mobeds-- they were grateful to NAMC for hosting the meeting.
 - g. NAMC needs to provide the right environment/structure for the young mobeds to attend these meetings.
 - h. Toronto was suggested as the venue for the next seminar for young mobeds. Xerxes and Mehbad were requested to coordinate.
 - i. Need one more volunteer for the NAMC young mobeds seminar- Er. Behram Panthaky volunteered.
 - j. Arda mentioned that our recently departed, respected member, Ervad Noshir Mirza was always willing to help mobeds; last year in Toronto, he volunteered to help young mobeds even without asking

how much time or effort was required. We should all try to emulate his greatness.

- k. NAMC needs to institutionalize the process for training young mobeds. Manuals/courses/time etc.
 - Goal is to train at least 20 young mobeds – – may be half of them will show greater interest in religious education and preaching.
- l. Need sponsors for tickets/hotels for young mobeds to come to training sessions
- m. ZAC meeting in Chicago went quite well. One observation-- NAMC spends time and effort to have mobeds drive from various locations but there were only two young people attending. We need greater participation from younger generation.
- n. Anjumans/behdins sometimes have high expectations of mobeds but not of themselves. We all need to work together to ensure success in the community.
- o. Chicago ZAC has begun to contribute to the NAMC (US\$354)
- p. Want all associations to contribute \$1 – 2 per member per year to NAMC for educating the next generation of mobeds, but overall response is mediocre. May be associations are not interested in financing religious activities or looking for free services.
- q. Each anjuman should be willing to finance their mobeds travel expenses to NAMC events/training
- r. NAMC sponsored Dasturji Kurshed Dastur's trip to Southern California—he presented in San Diego and Orange(ZAC) and performed a Jashan at ZAC (Orange)
- s. Arda made a presentation on behalf of NAMC at the last FEZANA AGM in LA The two main points in his presentation were i) Associations should begin contributing directly to NAMC (similar to FEZANA) for financing religious activities and ii) to let the mobeds (vs boards) be in charge of religious activities /Atash Kadeh—"separation

of Atash Kadeh and the state” He noted that we have brought the same failed “model” from India where the boards/trustees are in charge of both cultural and religious activities. He mentioned that boards may not be ready or willing to give up their power/authority.

- t. Iranshah Utsav – Soli and Tehemton presented at the event
- u. Tehemton thanked Arda for his initiative in organizing young mobeds’ seminar. Kobad proposed, Tehemton seconded and the President’s report was adopted.

5) Current structure – interaction of NAMC with FEZANA and other member Associations and how we foresee this relationship in the future

- a. Arda pointed out that major portion of NA Associations and FEZANA resources are allocated towards cultural activities and less towards religious activities and education. NAMC’s role should therefore be to focus on religious education of both the mobed/mobedyars and the laity. Importantly, unlike other major religious denominations like the Christian or Muslims, our Atash Kadehs/priests are governed by the boards (and are at the bottom of the organization chart.)
- b. Discussion also centered on the current status of mobeds in India where, unlike other communities, they get very little respect from the laity. Since their livelihood depends on the services they render to the laity, they are in many cases compelled to succumb to their boards’ demands. Though situation in NA is different, we should be careful not to fall into the same trap. It is imperative; therefore, that NAMC remains totally autonomous at all times.
- c. Two key things were discussed:
 - i. The officiating mobed(s), not boards, should have the authority to lay down rules that are to be observed during the performance of religious ceremonies and rituals.

- ii. As the President mentioned in his report, FEZANA should recommend that each NA Association contribute at least \$1 per member annually to NAMC.

6) Future of NA Mobeds future and Religion in NA-- with lots of interactions with the attending mobeds.

- a. Mobeds in NA get little/no respect from some Behdins. (Most are very respectful, kind and generous.) Whenever there is a disagreement between a behdin/board and a mobed, the mobed ends up defending himself as the majority are behdins and they try to impose their views on the mobed(s) who are in minority.
- b. Unlike India, the situation in NA is different. Majority of mobeds in NA provide their services, be it ceremonial or educational, on voluntary basis. However, NAMC has recently circulated to all NA associations a list of recommended charges for various ceremonies. The Associations should encourage their membership to offer payments to mobeds/mobedyars. It is up to the individual mobed to accept or donate any payment offered to him for the services rendered. Though there have been few instances otherwise, it was generally agreed that mobeds command better respect from laity in NA than their counterparts in India.

To follow Chicago's example, Arda recommended that local mobeds should form their own group and speak with one voice. The group should appoint a mobed to represent them at the Association's board.

NAMC strongly recommends that a short explanation by mobeds/mobedyars should follow after completion of each ceremony. Laity participation at jashans under the guidance of officiating mobed is also recommended.

Sadly today the young generation seems to be distancing themselves away from religion. Mobeds at every opportunity should emphasize the power of the prayers and the importance of wearing sudreh/kusti. To achieve this, the prayers have to be meaningful and

this could be done through conducting religious classes. NAMC could play a role here by providing educational material to mobeds.

Arda recommended that 4 young mobeds (and a mobedyar) undertake a survey to find out how NAMC and anjumans could help to fulfil the spiritual/religious needs of the community.

- 7) Use as guideline for our discussions as 10 years from now. 20 years are too long to think about. Many of us will not be there in 20 years.
 - a. Soli Dastur recommended that we seriously look at and foresee NAMC's role on this continent for the next 10 years.
 - b. It was recommended that NAMC should allocate some of their funds for older generation of mobeds to document their processes and thoughts to assist young mobeds and mobedyars going forward.
- 8) What will be our Mobeds doing in 10 years?
 - a. Currently, jashan / navjote / wedding / funeral
 - b. Should discuss the meaning of the prayers and how to live our lives
 - c. Possible seminars for the community and for the mobeds
 - d. Hold adult prayer class so they can teach their children
 - e. Hold a history class so people understand our glorious past
 - f. Have a flyer for the jashan prayer so attendees can read the translation/ interpretation
 - g. Let's ensure we share the best practices across the community so people from different areas/districts can leverage different ideas when communicating with their groups
- 9) How many of current 191 Mobeds will be there to participate in NAMC?
Many of us will surely be not there!

Concern was raised by Soli dastur as to the future of NAMC and mobeds in general in NA 10 years from now. Based on the presentation at the 2017 AGM by Gev Karkaria, there were a total of 193 mobeds and 17 Mobedyars in NA. We do not have the exact no. of mobeds who are actively participating in the performance of religious ceremonies in NA. At the end

of 2017, NAMC had only 33 life members and 21 regular members. The participation at AGMs averages between 20 and 25. The main concern was the continuity -- not just of NAMC but also of the rituals and ceremonies since many of the first generation of knowledgeable mobeds that came to NA may not be around 10 to 15 years from now.

- 10) What prayers will Mobeds be reciting? In our Avesta/Pazand or in English (translations)?
 - a. We need to continue with the practice of praying in the original language as we did in India and Iran
 - b. However, we also need to know and explain the meaning of the prayers for the ceremonies to be meaningful to the laity.
 - c. Despite complaints from some members of the laity about the length of time of some ceremonies, under no circumstances should the prayers be shortened arbitrarily.
 - d. Mobed youth had indicated interest in discussing the meaning of the prayers and their relevancy with the bedhins
- 11) Will there be any "consecrated" Atash Kadeh and if so what will be the Rituals, Prayers, Teachings, etc. performed by Mobeds?
 - a. OZCF in Mississauga, Ontario and ZAH in Houston, Texas are in the process of establishing Atash Kadehs.
 - b. During the discussion on establishing an Atash Kadeh in NA the question arose about Bareshnum. Since we do not have a mobed who would have undergone Bareshnum purification, it was suggested that *self bareshnum* would be the way to go. Cawas Desai mentioned that this was done for Iranshah when our forefathers came to India.
 - c. There is a paper prepared and circulated by NAMC on establishing an Atash kadeh in NA. This paper could be used as a template with continuous updates as work progresses.

- 12) Will we have ceremonies to ordain a Navar in this Atash Kadeh? And if so, which Mobeds will do it?
- a. Based on current plans the OZCF Atash Kadeh will be geared to perform in future, all inner liturgical ceremonies like Yasna, Vendidad and the Navar ritual. OZCF has two Mobeds who have undergone complete training in India and are capable of performing all inner liturgical ceremonies.
- 13) Today our Mobeds use books to recite their Jashan and other prayers. How about cell phones/iPads for the same in 10 years?
- a. With current technology, it is possible that young mobeds and mobedyars in future will substitute prayers books with cell phones and tablets in reciting jashan and other prayers. Mobeds could use the latest technologies available to them.
- 14) There is a growing thought promoted by some Mobedyars about why we have to be Navar and/or Martab to perform certain ceremonies. How does NAMC handle non- Mobeds/Mobedyars/Behdins performing ceremonies in 10 years? Who is going to stop them? And how would NAMC react to this trend?
- a. NAMC has prepared and circulated the Mobedyar manual to all its members which clearly outlines and differentiates the duties of a mobedyar –which are different from that of a fully ordained mobed. For a mobedyar to be recognized by and obtain certification from NAMC, he/she has to give an undertaking to follow the rules, regulations and guidelines set out in the manual. If a Mobedyar acts outside those rules and regulations on his/her own or under pressure from the laity, the only recourse NAMC has is to withdraw the “Mobedyar Certification” given to him/her and cancel his/her membership to the NAMC.
- 15) In our future “consecrated” Atash Kadeh, are we going to have Yasna and Vendidad performed? By whom? And how often? Even in India, even at

Iranshah, these are performed only when there are Navars/Martabs performed. I(Soli) have not seen a single Yasna/Vendidad performed in Iranshah during my 42 days of stay in Udvada. If this is the norm, then how often we in NA perform these rituals and who will be performing them?

As indicated in item 12 above, the Atash Kadeh should allow the performance of the inner liturgical ceremonies. The frequency of these ceremonies will depend entirely on the interest, enthusiasm and response from the members of the community. Tehemton indicated that since these ceremonies are unique to NA, the response could possibly be overwhelming.

Also, while on the subject it was recommended that the charge for a Fareshta ceremony should be \$1,501 and for Vendidad \$2,001.

- 16) How is NAMC going to help to get new Mobeds in 10 years from now?

The senior mobeds of the community should instil confidence and guide the newly ordained mobeds in the performance of various religious ceremonies. They should also provide educational material that explains the significance and meaning of the ceremonies that he may perform. The main encouragement must come from the laity. Diluting the “Mobed brand” will hurt this process in the long term. There are no magic bullets

- 17) How are we (NAMC) going to deal with Mobedyars who are claiming their right to perform “all” ceremonies which are now performed by Mobeds including Navjotes, Weddings, etc. What authority NAMC has to prevent this happening?

This has been covered in 14 above.

- 18) FEZANA – fall edition

- a. Our President Arda has been requested to be the guest editor of winter edition of the FEZANA Journal.
 - b. Arda requested our senior mobeds Tehemton, Cawas and Soli – to contribute articles. He similarly requested our younger mobeds Kurush, Jimmy and Adil and Mobedyar Hormuz.
 - c. Ervad Dr. Kersi Antia gave a very informative talk via skype on the value of meditation in Zoroastrianism.
- 19) Training for priesthood in the modern world. A follow up on the article by Dr. Jehan Bagli
- a. Continuing education for someone like a mobed is very important
 - b. There is essentially nothing in the history through the Achaemenian, Parthian, Sasanian, and post-Sasanian eras to indicate that a Zarathushti priest interacted with laity any more than to fulfill their ritual needs and his responsibility to perpetuate the religion. The present age of reason, particularly on this continent, demands a broadening of that role. An ideal Zarthushti priest of the future must assist in leading the religious as well as moral and spiritual consciousness of the Zarthushti community.
 - c. To equip them to deal with contemporary ethical issues, some exposure to psychology and sociology will be helpful as they relate to the prevailing way of life on this continent Do not want to remove, rather expand our services
 - d. Soli has put together this research on the hospital services
- 20) Soli Dastur enlightened us with his talk on The Evolution of our Afargaanyu and Significance of Rahkyaa
- 21) Paid or volunteer Mobeds: Should Mobeds in NA provide voluntary service or should they require compensation- advantages/disadvantages. The following observations were made and commented on:

- a. Some Mobeds feels that asking for money will obligate them to do whatever the board/behdins demand
 - b. Some Mobeds may want the anjumans/behdins to donate money to some Zoroastrian causes
 - c. There is a mobed development fund in some organizations so they can sponsor mobed activities
 - d. Each mobed should have the right to do whatever they want
 - e. Encourage the association to pay the youngsters (15-21 years old) to stay active in the anjuman
- 22) Interfaith marriages: Should the entire Ashirvad ceremony be performed or an abbreviated version like Tandarosti only? Could non-Zarthosti spouse undergo the Nahan ritual?
- a. Varying views were expressed. Some mobeds only pray Tandarosti if the full wedding ceremony has already been performed according to the faith of the non-zoroastrian spouse.
 - b. Some mobeds indicated they would still perform the full Ashirvad ceremony.
 - c. Nahn ceremony is not performed for a non-zoroastrian spouse.
 - d. Finally it was agreed by all that the final decision in these instances should rest with the officiating mobed.
- 23) Performance of Bareshnum in North America, once we have the capability of Navar initiation on this continent.
- a. See point 11 above
- 24) Rationale of reciting certain Fargards during Vendidad ritual, a paper submitted by Ervad Jal Panthaky of Toronto for discussion at the AGM.
- a. This paper was discussed at length and there was a general consensus amongst participants including our senior and scholarly mobeds, that we should keep all our religious scriptures including Venidad intact and recite them in full during the ceremony as per our tradition. Examples were cited of other faiths that have not deemed it appropriate to change their holy scriptures.

- 25) Rationale of reciting Papet Pashemani or Patet Avesta during Navjote ritual
- a. This matter was also discussed at length by all participants. Papet pashemani is a prayer generally recited for repentance of one's sins that may have been committed. Some of the mobeds do not deem it appropriate to recite this prayer at a child's Navjote-- the rationale being that a child at his/her age is unlikely to have committed any of these sins. Since there was no consensus on this subject, it was left to the individual mobed to pray what he deems appropriate.
- 26) Should NAMC produce a pamphlet about the basic concepts of Zoroastrianism
- a. Youth to provide a list of concepts to set guidance on-- research topics due by July 4
 - b. There was unanimous agreement amongst all participants that NAMC should produce a pamphlet outlining the basic concepts of Zoroastrianism. References were made to a similar pamphlet produced by Rohinton Rivetna of Chicago and also a booklet by Roshan Rivetna titled "The Legacy of Zarthustra". Soli Dastur made reference to a similar booklet by Poly Bhada of Miami. Soli, Adi, Tehemton.
 - c. Cawas agreed to coordinate this effort.
- 27) Audio recordings of Zoroastrian prayers
- a. Gev Karkaria mentioned concerns raised by some of the members of the ZAQ for the performance of Geh Sarna ceremony in the event both their mobeds Gev and Jal Panthaky are unavailable and at the same time if there are none available from Toronto. They wanted to know if there were audio recordings available for such

eventualities. Soli Dastur assured these recordings were available on avesta.org.

- b. Importantly, NAMC/FEZANA has a list of mobeds that are available for these circumstances.

28) Mobedyar : status report if any on training

- a. More people are interested in becoming Mobedyars; however, we need to verify they are Zoroastrians – organization to provide guidance on this
 - i. Need at least 1 parent to be a Zoroastrian
 - ii. Must know basic Zoroastrian prayers

29) Mobedyar program analysis: Analysis held by president

30) NAMC website update

- a. May want to add a filter to verify files before we share them publicly
- b. In the upload segment, write a note that there if you upload something, it will not be automatically approved. VP to email text to Webadmin for what the staging area should say.

31) Facebook page / Twitter page

- a. May want to reblog Soli's one pagers
- b. Xerxes / Adil - to determine what should be on the Facebook page
- c. Turn off comments to setup as one-way information flow

32) Any other business

- a. Volunteering for talks on different topics
- b. Setup additional conference calls to discuss the more practical topics behind the religion
- c. Kobad suggested that NAMC should contribute funds towards the Gatha Hymn project. There is a group of Gathic singers in Toronto who sing the Gathas operatic style. This Gathic Hymn project is also being promoted by WZO Canada. It was agreed by all that NAMC contribute \$1000 towards this project.
- d. Possible changes in bylaws in the future meetings –Mobed members only get voting rights but is everyone included as a part of NAMC?

33) Election was held and the following new executive members were elected:

- a. Kurush Dastur - Secretary
- b. Mehbod Dastur – Member at large

The following executive members were re-elected:

- a) Arda Minocherhomjee – President
- b) Tehemton Mirza – Vice- President
- c) Xerxes Madon - Treasurer

34) Kobad proposed and It was unanimously agreed by all participants present, that NAMC bestow the title “Distinguished Scholar” on our two senior learned and scholarly members:

- a. Ervad Soli Dastur
- b. Ervad Jehan Bagli

The President will write to them officially and will also request their respective Associations to honour them with this title in the presence of their congregation.

This announcement by NAMC should also be circulated in the news media. (FEZANA, Parsiana, Jam-e-Jamshed, Parsi Khabar)

The meeting adjourned with a vote of thanks to the President and other executive members.