

**The Sés Blessing,
Something Old, Something New.**

by

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Many years ago, our oldest son, Richard Jehangir McIntyre, got married to a lovely girl, Suzanne Irwin. For months before the wedding I wracked my brains, trying to figure out a way to integrate Rich's Zoroastrian heritage into the wedding festivities, in a way that would make Rich feel both happy and proud, and make Suzanne, and my husband Dick's side of the family, feel a part of it too. I wanted to bring to the wedding some of the neat things about Zarathushtra's teachings, without being preachy. I wanted to bless them without sounding dumb. But above all, I wanted them to enjoy the Zarathushtrian part of the festivities.

I concluded that there was one happy ceremony, that I had loved from childhood, into which I could blend the old and the new, and which would accomplish most of my objectives – the sés. But not just an ordinary sés. A sés that would give spiritual meaning to each material act. A sés that would link to each material act, a spiritual teaching of Zarathushtra from the Gathas.

I thought this blending of the material and the spiritual would be a neat way to demonstrate to them that in Zarathushtra's view, the material and the spiritual are both good, both part of one design. I also wanted them to understand that it is not enough for us to ask God's blessings for ourselves, that that we, in turn, have to bless each other, and bless our world, with our thoughts, words and actions.

At once, I mobilized The Family. My cousin Jenny from California brought the garlands. My cousin Aashish from Connecticut brought her sés implements and red paste for the tili. My sister in law, Silla, brought chalk tins from India to make the chalk designs. And I worked on crafting a spiritual blessing for each act of the sés, which would bless my beloved children, and at the same time give them the precious gift of some aspects of Zarathushtra's teachings.

On the morning of the wedding, we assembled the sés on two silver trays – garlands, 2 coconuts and silver coins marked with red paste, nuts, dates, rice, we had no pan leaves, so we substituted fresh green oak and maple leaves (for strength, long life and sweetness), a dish of sweet yoghurt, some rock candy, the sés implements, and a lighted diva.

We held the sés on our patio, with summer flowers all about us, and sunlight filtering down through the leaves of the shade trees. We washed our patio floor, made a circle of chalk designs into which Rich and Suzanne stepped, and this is how it went. As I performed each material act, I recited the corresponding spiritual blessing. And the structure of the blessings corresponded to an ancient Iranian poetic technique of starting and ending with the same idea – a technique that appears in the Gathas as well.

The Sés Blessing

<i>The Material</i>	<i>The Spiritual</i>
A garland of flowers was placed around each of their necks;	May God Bless You, May you bless each other, May you bless the world in which you live;
In each of their hands was placed a coconut, nuts, green leaves, silver coins, some rice, and rock candy;	May He be generous with you, May you be generous with each other, May you be generous to all living things;
They each received a spoonful of sweet yoghurt with a piece of rock candy in it;	May He sweeten your lives, May you sweeten each other's lives, May you sweeten the lives of all whom you touch;
A red mark (tili) was placed on the forehead of each one;	May He instruct through good thinking the course of your direction (Gathas Y50.6), May He give you understanding and enduring strength to lead a good life (from Gathas Y43.1 and 2)
Rice was pressed on to each of their tili marks, and, with a cracking of knuckles on my temples, rice was showered over them both;	Let each of you try to win the other with truth and goodness, and you will both be winners (from Gathas Y53.5);
Hugs and kisses;	God Bless You and Keep You, We love you.

After I was done, all our relatives blessed them in turn, with good wishes, rice showers, hugs, kisses, and presents. We next decided by unanimous vote, that our younger son, John Dinshaw (who was not then married), looked in dire need of blessings as well, so into the chalk circle he went (right foot first, naturally), and got teeled, blessed, hugged and kissed, by parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. My family next decided that Dick and I looked as though we could use a blessing or two, so we were ordered into the chalk circle, and got blessed, hugged, kissed and showered with presents in turn.

My beloved sister-in-law then put tili on everyone's forehead, for good luck – Bajajs, Devitres, Ghandys, McIntyres and Sheridans, all got teeleed, with much laughter and good fellowship. That last act turned the sés blessing from a spectator event into something that bound us all together into one family, as participants. It was like magic, the change that it made in the mood of the gathering.

After the wedding was over, and the photographs of the sés were developed, I made a little book for Rich and Suzanne, so that they would have a permanent remembrance of their Zoroastrian wedding blessing. In this book, I described what went into the sés trays, the blessing itself, and pasted in photos of the sés and the family. I added a little introduction and conclusion as follows:

"A sés is a blessing that is given on all good occasions – birthdays, weddings, et cetera. It combines the giving of material things, with spiritual gifts (blessings) because in Zarathushtra's teachings, the material and the spiritual are both good, both part of one Design, each with its part to play in bringing about a better world.

"A central feature of Zarathushtra's teaching is a happy blending of rugged individualism, with a sense of community. To illustrate: On the one hand he teaches that each individual must choose for himself or herself (after reflecting with a clear mind) how he/she will think, speak and act (Individualism). On the other hand, he teaches that God lives in each one of us. So in a very real sense, we are all part of the same whole (the Community). The individual and the community also are both part of one Design, each important in its own way. This complementing of the individual and the community is reflected in the sés blessing. Each person who performs a sés is free to give whatever verbal blessings he or she chooses (individualism). And everyone gets in on the act (the community spirit).

"The blessings I chose were selected to illustrate the meanings of the material symbols of the sés. And the last few blessings are paraphrases of Zarathushtra's own words as they appear in the Gathas.

"You may have noticed, when you were being blessed, that you stood in a circle of chalk designs. Chalk designs were also placed on either side of the doorways, stairways, and any other place that seemed good. I never knew what these chalk designs stood for until my brother Sarosh explained that in ancient days, before pesticides were invented, people used to sprinkle lime around the house to keep the crawling bugs out, because crawling insects (it was believed) would not cross a barrier of lime. The chalk decorations are a remnant of that ancient custom.

"One final thought. On the path of spiritual progress, or growth, one of the first steps is justice. Being fair. But an even higher step is generosity. So be fair. But go a step further. Be generous to overflowing. God Bless You Both Always."

Did the sés ceremony exist in Zarathushtra's day? We don't know. Certainly, some of its material components (like the tili) have a distinctively Indian character. Our creative ancestors probably took certain symbols from ancient Iran (flowers, candy, yoghurt, green leaves, coins, lighted diva) and added to them certain symbols which they picked up from their Indian neighbors, to come up with the sés as we know it today. It is a law of nature that all material

things change. But the core of spiritual values has remained unchanged through the millennia – as valid today as it was in Zarathushtra’s day. And our many times great grandchildren will find these values equally valid a thousand years from now, if we transmit these beautiful ideals to them by word as well as by example.

Zarathushtra’ advice to brides and grooms is as valuable today as it was when he gave it on the occasion of his daughter’s marriage, more than 3,000 years ago in the Vahishtoisti Gatha.

"Let each of you try to win the other with truth [asha], and you will both be winners." Y53.5 McIntyre paraphrase of the Insler translation).

Asha means truth, which includes the truths of mind and spirit -- all that is true and right. In the Gathas, this includes truth, goodness, generosity, friendship, lovingkindness, compassion, justice, et cetera. This great advice tells us that in Zarathushtra's view, the marriage relationship is not one of domination / subservience, but of partnership, with each spouse making the same effort to win the love and respect of the other with the truths of mind and spirit.

I have studied the Gathas for many years now, and I still continue to find new ideas in them. But for all those years of study, I did not have the answer to my cousin Aashish’s question: "Why do we crack our knuckles when we do the rice showers?" Does anyone know?

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