

A NAVJOTE OF THE AGES

ZAREEN HAKIM AUSTIN



Officiating priests Ervad Gev Karkaria and seated Ervad Jal Panthaki

On a crisp, sunny October morning in Montreal, I had the pleasure of attending a close friend's daughter's navjote with my family. What was extra special about this navjote was that my friend's daughter, Kaila, was 18 years old and had made the conscious choice to officially become a Zarathushti of her own free will, exactly as the religion would have prescribed.

Born to a Parsi father (whose father was a mobed) and a French-English Canadian mother, Kaila and her twin brother, Kayvan, have participated in all jashans, religious classes and other gatherings, and have been an integral part of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec.

When Kaila announced that she wanted to learn her prayers and have her navjote performed, the community

fully supported her. Sudrehs, kustis, and lovely navjote outfits were brought from India by friends, a large ses and patlo was borrowed, and our mobeds and their wives met with Kaila on a regular basis to teach her the prayers. These acts, in and of themselves, were generous and true to the Zarathushtrian spirit of helping to guide those who choose to follow the good path.

On the navjote day, we were welcomed to an intimate ceremony with close friends and family around the small stage. From a large window in the background, we could see the sun shining and the colourful leaves gently blowing in the wind. One could feel the blessings of Ahura Mazda in the air. Kaila walked to the stage in a red satin lengha with matching shawl, topi, slippers and a simple top. She looked calm and contemplative as the prayers started, with a slight smile and bright blue eyes gazing at the audience from time to time.

The room was quietly watching and intently listening or praying along. A serene tranquility was instantly felt which added to the joy and uniqueness of the event. Soon, Kaila rose and started to say her prayers with the priests. She prayed loudly and confidently, with conviction and strength. I was deeply moved by this act of courage and faith and felt tears roll down my cheek. Others around me seemed to feel the same way. This navjote was different, somehow, more meaningful, in that it was Kaila who made this choice and initiated the action after studying and learning about Zoroastrianism for over a year. What a beautiful message to send out into the world that this choice is available.

After the ceremony, a loud applause followed, and everyone went to greet the new Zarathushti. Kaila was beaming with joy and excitement and then disappeared momentarily, only to return in a beautiful pink sari, which she was proud to wear for the first time. During the lunch that followed, Kaila gave a heartwarming speech, thanking her family and the Montreal Zarathushti community for their support in guiding her and helping to bring the navjote to fruition.

Kaila's thoughts, words, and deeds on this occasion were inspiring and represented everything that Zoroastrianism stands for, especially the freedom to choose with the Good Mind, Vohu Manah. The community couldn't be prouder of its new Zarathushti. May Kaila be showered with blessings of Ahura Mazda on her life's journey.

Zareen Hakim Austin is the president of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec and lives in Monteval with her husband Pheroze and children Rushad and Shiraz

