

# IN MEMORY OF PEER E SABZ

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Triumphs and tragedy bind people together. The memory of sacrifices made by people to preserve their identity is a binding force that strengthens unity, gives purpose and meaning, and acts as a stimulant to preserve and continue on an ancestral path.

Peer e Sabz in Yazd is one such memorial. In the middle of the desert high up on the mountain there oozes droplets of pure spring water from the face of a stone. Otherwise for hundreds of miles in all four directions there is not a drop of water to be found. The rare desert rain is only enough for thorns and shrubs to survive; so such a spring is cherished and earns for itself the greatest of respect that the people can bestow, and what can be greater than to dedicate it to all those lives lost in preserving their heritage.

For centuries Peer e Sabz has kept alive the memories of the innocent Zarathushti mothers, daughters and sisters, who were raped, tortured and killed, or taken as slaves by the invading Arab hordes in the name of religion.

The story of Peer e Sabz is about one such daughter who was fleeing the Arab hordes, thirsty and tired, dragging herself up the mountain to save her chastity. With no more strength in her limbs to pull her to safety, she prays to Ahura Mazda for help. All of a sudden the mountain opens up and swallows her to safety. Many years later a shepherd, lost in the desert, faints due to thirst in the heat of summer, and he has a dream. A beautiful damsel wearing a green robe riding a white horse appears to him in his dream and tells him her story and says to him; "If you promise to build a shrine in memory of all your sisters who lost their lives to preserve their honour, I shall give you water". He promises, and the droplets of water falling on his face from the face of the stone bring him back to life.

He collects as many stones that he could find in the desert sand and builds a pond to enshrine the water in memory of the dear women who had suffered at the hands of the invading Arabs. He finds his way back to town and informs all his people of the episode; and since then every summer people go on a five day pilgrimage to this shrine, where they

pray, sing and dance in memory of the millions of women who suffered at the hands of the invading horde.

I have heard of two more sites in Iran with the exact same story - one in Lorestan and one in Kurdistan. In the desert of Yazd there are a total of five such places of pilgrimage - each with its own unique story. Peer e Hiresht has a shrine built around a black stone which is in the shape of a mother and a child. The story goes that a princess with her child was being pursued by the Arabs, and she prayed to Ahura Mazda for help. Lightning strikes and she and her child are turned into that black stone, thus being saved from torture and rape.

So many shrines with the similar themes tell us of the wide spread atrocities and genocide committed against our ancestors. The kind of atrocities that reduced the Zarathushti Empire to a mere 7711 heads in the 1860's, when Maneckji Limji Hataria counted them and paid ransom to the then king and saved them.

Wherever we settle in the world, it is but appropriate to come together in memory of Peer e Sabz, the green clad princess who represents the sacrifice of our ancestors. History repeats itself for those who avoid these stories and try to be politically correct.

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**Note:** The five days of the pilgrimage are from 24 to 28 of Khordad that is June 14 to 18.

For more information on atrocities and genocide visit  
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