



**SOME THOUGHTS FOR SURVIVAL OF THE  
PARSI ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY IN  
THE CHANGING WORLD  
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*‘ Ava Padho, Ava Zashte, Ava Ushi, Daryadravem  
Mazdayasne Zarathushtrayo  
Daityanam rathwyanam Haurarshatam  
Shyaothnanam varezai  
Pari Adhaityanam arathwyanam  
Duzvarshtanam Verezai  
Verezyatamacha idha vohu Vastrya, Uyamna  
Anuyamnaish datste’ (Visparad- Karda 15.1)*

Hold ready, O Mazdayasnian Zarathushtrians!  
Your hands, your feet and your intellect,  
In order to perform good deeds  
according to the law and at the right time and  
for the avoidance of evil, and unlawful deeds  
which are contrary to the custom.

Let the good deeds for the furtherance of husbandry be done here.  
Here give help to the poor and needy. *(Visparad-Karda 15.1)*

## **WHAT IS RELIGION OF ZARATHUSHTRA?**

The religion of Prophet Zarathushtra is based on the foundation of Asha i.e. righteousness, purity, piety, harmony, discipline, law and order. It is not a mere ethical code. It is the most divine knowledge. It is the science of all sciences.

It is a way of life, a prescribed path for upliftment of the soul. During the dark days of black magic, animal sacrifice and worship of several Gods, Prophet Zarathushtra emerged as saviour of the ancient Mazdayazanian faith in the kingdom of King Vishtasap and preached his teachings to the King and his subjects, against all possible odds and difficulties. Then the Zoroastrian religion flourished and prospered during the periods of Hakhmanean and Sassanian Dynasties and after the defeat of King Yazdegerd in 641 A.D., when it became extremely difficult for the Zoroastrians to follow their religion in Iran, because of persecution by Muslims about 1,200 years ago, some of our forefathers migrated to India from the Strait of Hormuz to preserve our religion, culture and race.

## **WE ARE THE PROUD LEGATEES:**

As the followers of Prophet Zarathushtra, today we are the proud and privileged legatees of his rich, lofty and meaningful message and therefore, it is our solemn duty to keep the torch lit by Prophet Zarathushtra burning for ever at any cost in this fast changing world.

## **LET US REMEMBER:**

Before we talk about the survival of Zoroastrianism, let us remember with reverence the holy spirit of Lord Zarathushtra and pray for his benediction to guide us forever. Let us also remember with reverence the early pioneers of our religion, who, through vicissitudes and calamities, preserved intact the tenets of our glorious faith and handed it over to posterity to reap its benefits.

## **PARSIS ARE AT CROSS-ROADS:**

Today the Zoroastrians stand at the cross-roads of history. They have talents unlimited, resources both individual and institutional, affluence and the most important, and an enduring reputation to reckon with. In spite of these overriding advantages, if we

perceive the seeds of degeneration, the malady is deeper, more subtle and more endemic.

### **WE ARE A HOUSE DIVIDED AMONGST OURSELVES:**

Today, we are like a house divided amongst ourselves as a result of which in spite of our affluent position, we are going down in the religious, economic, cultural and social fields. It is unbelievable but true that a community which has produced Tatas, Wadias and Godrejs, who have provided employment and accommodation to millions of people, cannot provide employment and accommodation for a few thousands of its own members, and that too with huge funds at our disposal e.g in Greater Bombay alone, here are about 1,000 Parsi Charitable Trusts registered with the Charity Commissioner with a corpus of hundreds of crores and in the State of Gujarat and other places of India, our Trust Funds are running into several crore of rupees. It is also unbelievable but true that for more remunerative and profitable purposes or for the upliftment of the members of our community.

### **LACK OF LEADERSHIP – A TRAGEDY OF OUR COMMUNITY:**

From the aforesaid facts you will observe that the main tragedy of our community is a conspicuous absence of dynamic leadership – Ecclesiastical and secular. Everyone wants to act like Field Marshall but no one is prepared to obey like a disciplined soldier. Late Sir Homi Mody used to remark that if 50 Parsis had collected for a meeting, at least 49 would like to act as the Chairman of the meeting. To solve the problems of 100 Parsis, there are 101 Parsi advisors. Some of the Parsis of today are highly individualistic by nature having strong prejudices, as a result of which they do not bother to adhere to the religious tradition or to act in the larger interest of the community. The great historian Arnold Toynbee, after doing 20 years of research for the history of the world, came to the conclusion that the two most vital factors necessary for the upliftment of a nation are unity and leadership. What is true of a nation is equally true of a race or an ethnic group. With unity in our thought and action and with leadership, our community can confront and surmount any obstacle and remain forever at the zenith of prosperity - both material and spiritual. Therefore, according to my humble view, the most important requirements for Zoroastrians to

survive in this changing world are unity, co-operation and co-ordination, so that we may adopt a unified, integrated and cohesive approach to solve our outstanding problems.

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF A WORLD CENTRAL ORGANISATION:**

With a view to having a consolidated approach to solve our problems, it is absolutely necessary to have a worldwide central organisation:

- (i) to promote the welfare of Parsi Zoroastrians throughout the world from womb to tomb ;
- (ii) to strengthen the sense of racial solidarity i.e. to live in a joint undivided Parsi family;
- (iii) to preserve and spread the social, economic, cultural and religious heritage of the Zoroastrians settled throughout the world;
- (iv) to secure the optimum mobilisation of our economic resources with a view to solving the outstanding problems of our community;
- (v) to facilitate the free exchange of ideas and contacts between Zoroastrians settled in different parts of the world;
- (vi) to promote research in the history and theology of the Zoroastrian religion by the Zoroastrians, in order to avoid possible distortions that can creep in by the western scholars.

### **FOUR DEPARTMENTS OF CENTRAL ORGANISATION**

Such a Central body may have four Departments, such as;

- (i) Ecclesiastical Department;
- (ii) Economic Department;
- (iii) Social Department, and
- (iv) Cultural Department

The first and the foremost task of the Central Body will be:

- (i) to undertake research studies on all problems affecting the Zoroastrian community throughout the world. Such research will indicate the nature and the

magnitude of our problems which will form the basis for any future corrective improvement programmes. Such research work is to be entrusted to professional and result-oriented persons.

(ii) to develop and implement such programmes within the stipulated time.

### **COMMUNITY FOUNDED ON RELIGION:**

Unless a community has founded itself primarily on the solid bedrock of its spiritual existence, it cannot command any recognition from the world around nor can it endure for long. The civilisations of Greece and Rome flourished and prospered for a few years and thereafter, they disappeared from the surface of this planet in less than a century. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church has survived for twenty centuries and flourished without conquering territories, without carrying out any trade or commerce and without levying any tax or too. It has survived only through the zeal and devotion of its followers.

H.G. Wells in his celebrated work, *Outline of History of the World* emphasised that the most powerful motivating force behind the activity of nations is the force of religion.

### **WORLD ORGANISATION TO SPREAD RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE:**

Religion is the force that binds men to their Maker and the most outstanding works of art and architecture are the products of religious zeal and dedication. Consequently our leads must take upon themselves the task of dissemination of religious knowledge as their primary aim and fundamental object.

### **FOLLOW THE RELIGION SCRUPULOUSLY:-**

If we will therefore follow our religion and its tenets scrupulously, I can assure, my co-religionists, that Ahura Mazda will shower His blessings upon us, with which we will be able to steer successfully the course of our life on this planet. As a matter of fact, because of the strict adherence to the principles of our religion and its traditions by our forefathers, Ahura Mazda has already rewarded them by making them pioneers in almost every field of human activities.

### **FOLLOW THE RELIGION IN PRISTINE PURITY:**

So my second suggestion to the Zoroastrians for their survival is to follow their religion in its pristine purity. Just because man has reached the moon and can swim in space in the twentieth century, the principles of our religion have not become outmoded or obsolete. On the contrary, modern scientific discoveries only bring us closer to our religion and strengthen our belief that our Prophet Zarathustra was a visionary with a powerful extra-sensory perception and inspired to enunciate doctrines which science has just begun to discover. Our elders believed that the simple Kusti prayer had a powerful vibrating effect and that it had a regulated magnetic aura around our bodies to protect us from physical and mental evil forces. It took men thousands of years to discover that even in a vacuum there are magnetic waves, there are sound waves and television waves that are around us, and we petty men gloating blissfully, were ignorant of their presence.

Our Kusti prayer, which is prehistoric, mentions the four salient features of the Mazdayasni religion:

Fraspayaokhedhram (Remover of strife and struggle i.e. Unity), Nidhasnaithishem (i.e. putting down the weapons, disarmament, peace-giving, non-violence) Khvaetvadatham (self-devoted self-realisation) and Ashaonim (Righteousness).

Those principles from the prehistoric age have stood the test of time. You know that a gentleman by the name of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi adopted the two principles – ‘Non-violence’ and ‘Truth’ to fight against the British Empire in India and brought freedom for our country, and therefore the country named him as the Father of the Nation. With the piling of the nuclear weapons, which can destroy the entire world within a few minutes, the Big Powers are now talking about disarmament, the principle which was embedded in our Mazdayasnian religion thousands of years ago.

Principles laid down in our religion are so rational, so hygienic and so scientific that in the last century, an Englishman by the name Samuel Laing wrote:

“The Parsis have no reason to tremble for their faith, if a Galileo invents the telescope or a Newton discovers the law of gravity, they may even remain undisturbed by the latest and the most fatal discoveries that man has made.”

(A Modern Zoroastrian by S.Laing)

### **TOLERATING OUR CUSTOMS:**

As far as our religious ceremonies, rituals, customs and traditions are concerned, let every one of us remember that they have significance which is too powerful and subtle for our limited intelligence to comprehend; let us resolve that the religion and customs must be accepted and tolerated as everyone should be entitled to go to heaven in his own way. If you like to follow certain religious ceremonies and customs like Dokhmenashini or Nirangdin or Muktaḍ ceremonies, so far so good. If you do not want to follow them, nobody can compel you to do so, but for God’s sake do not run down the persons who follow them. Do not start a vilification campaign against our ancient religious ceremonies and customs just because you have no faith in them. Please do not degenerate our religion and its traditions to the level of a debating society.

However, in matters of religion, our community suffers from the chronic problem of what is now called instant knowledge and instant wisdom like instant coffee. If our body ails, we rush to a physician. If our motor car breaks down, we go to a mechanic, if we receive a summons from the Court, we consult a lawyer. But in questions of religion, questions which are so deep so subtle and so complicated, some Parsis venture to make sweeping observations without hesitation and without five minutes of labour or five pages of study. I think that the proper persons to give opinions or express any view on religious matters are our Dasturjis and religious scholars, and the community should follow their opinions only as they are based on the detailed studies of our religion. Religion, it has been said, is a matter of faith and not of rational justification. It is essentially a question of divine inspiration; who are we naïve, petty, uninitiated individuals to pass judgment on the ceremonies and customs which have stood the test of time, which have been preserved for centuries and

which are the subject of voluminous research , e.g., the nirang of our Nirangdin ceremony, after several years from the date of the performance of the Nirangdin ceremony is found free from bacteria on investigation by laboratories in India and abroad and also proves effective on skin diseases, on peptic ulcers and urinary calculi. Our Gehsarna prayer is so powerful that it completely destroys the physical connection of the deceased with this world and therefore, we have never heard about a ghost or evil spirit among Parsis or at our Doongerwadi.

### **DO NOT GET DIVIDED ON THE GROUND OF RELIGION:**

We should not get divided on the issues of our religious ceremonies or practices, customs and usages. Let us channelize our energy and time for living beings and for the upliftment of living beings and let the issue of getting the ceremonies performed be left to each individual according to his own conscience.

### **WE HAVE EXPLOITED OUR PRIESTS;**

But where are the priests in our community who can motivate or arouse faith in our religion and ceremonies? Though the prices of day –to-day items like food and clothing have increased more than 300 times during the last 50 years, we have exploited our priests by not increasing their remuneration.

### **NO PRIESTS, NO PARSIS:**

Consequently, the priests of today are involved in the struggle for their survival. Let us therefore revive our priestly class. With this object in my mind, I suggest that there should be a Central Organisation for maintenance, uplift and amelioration of our priestly class. Let our maxim be, “No Priests, No Parsis: and therefore No Zoroastrian religion – we must make our priests free from worldly needs. We should provide them and their children free residential accommodation, free education, free medical aid, insurance, provident fund, pension and other benefits as available in a commercial establishment. Let us maintain a record of priests, their names, addresses qualifications, categories, financial position, etc., so that the community may know the problems of the priestly class and take remedial steps.



### **LET US REVIVE OUR MADRESSAS:**

Let us revive our Madressas so that they may fulfil the needs of the Zoroastrians by providing:

- (a) Yozdathregar mobeds
- (b) Teachers and preachers who can effectively conduct classes to impart religious knowledge not only for our children but also for grown –ups
- (c) And last but not the least, scholars who can do research work on the Zoroastrian work on the Zoroastrian Religion and Philosophy and can stand in competition with the priests of other communities.

In short, what we want are qualified, learned and enlightened priests with missionary zeal to keep the torch of the message of Lord Zarathushtra ever burning. In this context, I strongly feel that it is high time for the community to utilise the vast estate of the M.F.Cama Athornan Institute at Andheri as a Centre for Religious Studies, wherein the present training of our boys for priesthood and other religious activities, like research, seminars and refresher courses for our present –day priests can be pursued.

### **RELIGION CAUGHT AND NOT TAUGHT:**

Religion is caught and not taught, and therefore, if in our Parsi homes, if religion is followed by parents in a proper way, it would create an everlasting impression on our children and they would never forsake our religion under any circumstances. Let there be religious classes conducted by the Central Organisation to enlighten our children as well as grown-ups about our religion, culture and history. Let our children be given religious education by modern methods like audio-visual tools or illustrative literature, which is both educational and entertaining. Please do not forget our children are willing, intelligent, and enthusiastic and show concern about our religion, and therefore our parents and the priestly class should always be alert to satisfy their needs. We lack publicity within our own community about our rich heritage and the greatness of our religion which has resulted in total ignorance among our younger generation of the significance and importance of our religion and race. Let there be more opportunities for our teenagers to have regular meetings for religious instruction, along with social and cultural activities to make it more attractive for them.

### **LET US LEAD A ZOROASTRIAN WAY OF LIFE:**

Let the home of a Parsi family pervade with the Zoroastrian way of life. Let the house of a Zoroastrian be a castle of our tarikats. By Zoroastrian way of life, I mean that every Parsi should put on Sudreh and Kusti on his or her body without fail. The Sudreh Kusti is the emblem of our faith, the symbol of our strength and the shield against forces of evil. Let every Zoroastrian pray before Fire at least twice a day in the morning and before dinner at night. Let there be joint prayers too, because a family that prays together stays together. Let there be fire worship in our homes in whatever little way we can have. As long as the family fire remains burning and is kept alive in every Parsi home, it keeps the religious fervour alive in the hearts of every member of the community. With the extinction of the family fire in our homes, the devotion, dedication and zeal for the religion and the religious way of life are slowly diminishing.

### **ADVANTAGE OF FIRE TEMPLE:**

I firmly believe that through the worship of fire, which is described in our holy scriptures, as the 'son of God' ( Atarsh Puthra Ahurahe Mazdao), we get the spiritual inspiration and guidance to lead an honest and upright life and, like fire, we will always remain shining and dazzling. It should be our constant prayer as per our Atash Nyaesh:

Saoche buye ahmi namane,

Mat saoche buye ahmi namane,

Raochahe buye ahmi namane

i.e. May the holy Fire shine in this house;

May the holy Fire ever glow in this house;

May the holy Fire blaze in this house!

Let our children be taken to fire temples regularly on Sundays, on Humkaras and on other auspicious days of our Parsi calendar and during Muktdad or Fravardian days. We should always remember that the fire of our Atash Behrams and Agiaries is a

spiritual storehouse from where we can draw our sustenance and strength. In a way, they are power houses from which we can constantly recharge our spiritual, mental and even the physical batteries on which we live and thrive. Let there be a spurt of congregational activities such as congregational prayers, hymns, excursions and cultural activities which will sustain the religious aspirations of the community.

The Parsis of yesterday were known to be a vibrant, valiant and versatile race, as the teachings of Prophet Zarathushtra were embedded in the marrow of their bones; but while some of the Parsis of today do not wear Sudreh and Kusti and pollute fire by an outward show of smoking you will find some Parsis involved in cases of moral turpitude such as fraud, cheating and other criminal acts. Oh Zoroastrians! Therefore, come back to the Zoroastrian way of life.

In this context my humble suggestion is that as far as possible, we should wear white clothing on all our religious occasions, sad or auspicious as white colour generates positive vibration.

### **LET THERE BE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY:**

Let the economic department of our Central Organisation first take up the economic and statistical survey of the members of our community and based on this survey draw up an action-oriented programme. Such an institution should be run on a full-time basis with a completely professional outlook, manned by exceptionally competent persons and technical experts. The economic department of our Central Organisation should also have a vocational institution, which will test the intelligence as well as the aptitude of each Zoroastrian child so as to help and guide him in his future career planning. Let every Parsi child be indoctrinated with the example of immense hard work, thrift and innovativeness, and be made conversant with the history of our forefathers in Iran and India, so that he gets inspiration to come up and shine like his forefathers in his life. The slogan before Parsis must be the slogan that the Swiss, Swedes and the Jews have long held before themselves “there must be an investment in excellence” as there is no other way for the Zoroastrian community to survive in this fact changing world. Right from childhood when a Swiss boy or girl begins

school education, he or she is told two things- the world does not owe Switzerland a living and Switzerland was in fact a poor country made rich only by the thrift, hard work and innovativeness of its people. Tiny Singapore has more recently followed the same path. A Parsi child must be indoctrinated with these types of examples. Without the psychological input of the immense hard work, thrift and innovativeness, it will not bring the desired result of survival with progress for the Zoroastrians in the world. But who shall do this? The Parsi parents- both by theory and by example. To be born a Zoroastrian, amidst the vast multitudes of other communities is a great challenge which can be overcome not by an exercise in breast beating or by demanding special privileges, but by fighting it out with excellence in the fields, to be selected by testing one's own aptitude and talent. Under the circumstances, my advice to our youth is:

“Pray not for easy life; pray not for easy task; but pray for strength equal to your task

#### **LET US SHIFT TO RURAL AREAS:**

Let our community turn from its highly urbanised outlook and plan for a conscientious shift to share the prosperity of rural development. It is easier and better to live, earn and progress in a rural area rather than in a big city, where one not only feels that he is lost, but gets a raw deal, because of prevailing situations like congestion, pollution, sanitation and transport.

#### **LET US REVIVE OUR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES:**

Until the beginning of the last century, the community was vibrating with cultural activities such as (i) study of Avesta-Pehalvi and Persian languages and their literature; (ii) recitations of Shahnameh, Khayals and Garbas; (iii) gymnastic and sports activities. But by Anglicisation, our activities in cultural fields have become negligible day by day. Today's Elvis Presley culture or disco dance has unfortunately overtaken our youth, who willingly barter the rich treasure of our faith for the cheap gloss of western culture. In our mania of imitating the west, we have uprooted ourselves from the enduring foundation on which the edifice of our race was built by our forefathers and which withstood the onslaught of time. Let the cultural and social

departments of the Central Organisation take upon itself the task of reviving and resuscitating these values and rebuild the edifice on our old foundation.

### **TEACHING SHAHNAMEH:**

Let our children read or listen regularly to epic stories from our Shahnameh so as to get inspiration to lead noble and illustrious lives like our forefathers.

### **POPULATION PROBLEM:**

As per the 2012 study featured in the FEZANA Journal, country wise population of Parsi Zoroastrian is as follows:-

<b>Country</b>	<b>Population</b>
India	61,000
Iran	25,271
United States	14,405
Canada	6,442
United Kingdom	5,500
Australia	2,577
Arab states of the Persian Gulf	1,900
Pakistan	1,675
New Zealand	1,231
Other European countries & Central Asia	1,000
Singapore	372
Hong Kong	204
Afghanistan	100-200

<b>Country</b>	<b>Population of Zoroastrians</b>
Canada	5,000
Australia	2,700
Persian Gulf Countries	2,200
Germany	300

From the aforesaid figures, the Parsi population in India was at its peak during the years 1931-1941, which was a period without high prices. During those periods,

Parsis generally lived in joint families and each person would have normally 3-5 children as he could afford to bring them up. Now the time has totally changed. Parsis have become individualistic. Everyone wants an independent house before starting his married life. As a result of which, hundreds of our young boys and girls engaged to be married, have to wait at the doors of our Panchayat for about 5-7 years to get a flat, as they cannot afford to buy an ownership flat of the value of Rs.2-5 crores. On account of continuous rising prices of daily necessities, an ordinary Parsi cannot afford to have more than two children and our hospital records shows that after the birth of the second child, our Parsi mother undergoes operation so as to prevent any further delivery. I am mentioning these facts to show that the prevailing economic circumstances restrict the increase in our population or results in decrease of our population.

### **ILL EFFECTS OF CONVERSION**

One suggestion made every now and then for increasing the number of the Parsi Zoroastrians is adopting the method of conversion. Just because our numbers are less in comparison with other communities, we should not become diffident or adopt desperate methods to increase the numbers, by which we may lose our identity and our genetic traits, not to mention our innate ability to project our image before the world, this is far more vital than mere horizontal expansion, size or weight of numbers. Once the floodgates of conversion are open quality will replace quantity. The yearning for more numbers and the lure of our opulent funds and resources would submerge our closely-knit community into the morass of an amorphous tribe. In the process, our extinction will be certain.

### **SMALL COUNTRIES MEMBERS OF U.N.O.:**

We are aware that there are at least 40 countries existing on this planet with a population of less than one lakh persons, but they still maintain their status as sovereign independent states. They demanded seats in the U.N.O. and they have not rested till they were made members of the U.N.O. e.g. .a State like Monaco in Europe with an area of one square kilometre has population of 23,000 persons. Similarly,

there is San Morino in Europe, which has got a population of 18,000 persons. There is also a state called Nauru located just south of the equator, halfway between Honolulu and Melbourne, having a population of 18,000 persons and lastly, Seychelles near Madagascar has a population of 78,000 persons.

You know that during the last two world wars, tiny Switzerland chose to remain neutral and away from power politics, which enabled it to render yeoman services to humanity by way of the Red Cross. Today, tiny Switzerland occupies a unique position in the community of nations, because it did not join hands with any political power but decided to maintain its independent and neutral stand.

### **WHAT SHOULD BE OUR APPROACH?**

So, just because we are about 1.20 lakh in number we should not get diffident and try to adopt desperate methods to increase our number. Instead, we should find our ways and means of increasing or at least maintaining our numbers. Because Parsis are highly individualistic by nature and have high standard of living, more than 50% of our members remain single and about 25% of our members marry late in life, so there are less chances of their progeny. In order to rectify this situation, we should advocate marriages, for as many members of our community as they can and as early as they can, with no family planning programme and with substantial incentives for housing and education to those who can't afford to have children. It is being said that since the last 50 years we are going down in every field, i.e. religious, educational, economic etc. Then I ask, what is the purpose of bringing more people in our fold, when we are not in a position of taking care of our existing lot? If a father has two children who are not good in health or study, the father will not think of adopting more children but will think of improving the lot of his two existing children. So my co-religionists, I sincerely plead and appeal that instead of talking about conversion, it is our solemn duty to first improve the lot of our existing Zoroastrians. Let us live like a joint undivided Parsi family.

Moreover, conversion is contrary to the Will of God. The history of the prophets of the world reveals that whenever there is chaos and disorder in the world,

Almighty God sends his messenger to deliver his message to humanity to relieve it from the disorder prevailing at the time, i.e. when there was wickedness prevailing in the world, Ahura Mazda sent Zarathushtra to preach righteousness among the people of that time. Similarly, when there was cruelty prevailing in the world, Bhagwan sent Krishna to spread the message of kindness to the people of that time. Similarly, when there was lack of faith in the world, Allah sent Mohammed to spread message of faith amongst the people. Similarly, God sent Jesus to spread love when there was hatred prevailing in the world. Every religion in sum and substance teaches its followers to be good and do good. Each religion leads its followers to God; in other words, Teachings of all religions are universal and have stood the test of time. To play one religion over the other or to select one religion over the other is nothing but destroying all religions.

It is the law of destiny that each man is born at a particular time in a particular family and in a particular religion according to his physical, mental and spiritual composition. In other words, man has no control over birth and death, the family to be borne in and the religion to be followed during his life. Once this basic fact is accepted, it will be futile for any rational human being to say that he does not like the religion on his birth or the family of his birth.

To renounce one's religion of birth is an act of defiance against the Will of God and is tantamount to abrogation of His Will. Conversion involves two acts. One, renunciation of one's religion of birth and the other, embracing of another religion.

History is full of religious wars, but we must note that those religious wars were not because of multiplicity of religions that were prevailing in the world but it was the spirit of intolerance that led people to believe that one particular religion is superior to another.

Swami Vivekananda advised humanity, "Do not try to disturb the faith of any man. If you can get hold of a man, where he stands, give him a push upwards, but do not destroy what he has."



Thomas Jefferson in his letter to John Adam, (Works Vol. 15) advised: “I never spoke of my own religion, nor scrutinised that of another. I never attempted to make a convert, nor wished to change another’s creed. I have never judged others’ religions by their lives, for it is from our lives and not from our words that our religion must be read.”

Mahatma Gandhi expressed the same view in the following words:

“After a long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (i) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one’s own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore, no thought of conversion is possible.”

Let us learn from the sayings of those great sages and resolve that we should never propagate our religion among members of other religions. We should never try to scrutinise another religion. We should never attempt to make a convert nor forsake the religion of our birth and convert anyone to another religion because we will be judged not by our religion but the deeds which we perform on this earth.

We hold the Christian religion in high esteem as it has produced people with missionary zeal to serve humanity like St. Xavier and Mother Theresa, but that does not mean that we should convert ourselves to Christianity.

Several persons of other religions hold Zoroastrians in high esteem because the Zoroastrians have brought happiness unto others by following the principles enunciated in Gathas by Zarathushtra, ‘Ushta ahmai Yahmai ushta Kahmaichit’ which means that ‘Happy is he who has made other happy, but that does not mean that they desire to convert themselves into Zoroastrian religion or that they should be accepted in our religion.’

What I want to emphasise is that, it is our way of life which will evaluate the faith we follow and not the fact that we allow conversion or we have accepted in our religion person of other religion.

As far as the history of the Parsis and their forefathers are concerned, after the decline and fall of our last Emperor, Yazdegard Sheriar in 641 A.D., the Muslims tried to persecute our forefathers in Iran and compelled them to forsake their religion and accept the religion of the State viz. Muslim religion.

Our forefathers had only one aim in their life, viz. to preserve their religion, race and traditions and its usage at any cost and therefore, they left their dear mother land from the port of Hormuz and migrated to India about 1,300 years ago only to save their religion and race.

On reaching Sanjan, a place in western India, they promised Jadhav Rana, the King of the land, who was kind enough to give them shelter that they would not indulge in conversion. They promised the king that they would remain with other subjects like brothers and not like brothers-in-law, and they also promised that they would spread sweetness around them, by adding sugar in the milk pot sent by the king. From their advent in this country till today, Parsis have kept the word given to the then king of the land and remained as a separate race and never indulged in conversion.

Historians say that during this period of turmoil, some group of Zoroastrians went towards Europe, Punjab and China and settled there. But these groups adopted conversion and mixed marriage, as a result of which today they are totally wiped out as a distinct race.

However, in the beginning of last century, a French lady claimed that she had become a Zoroastrian by putting Sudreh and Kusti on her body and wanted to enter our Fire temple. This move was vehemently opposed by the then members of our community and the then Trustees of Bombay Parsi Panchayet. As a result of which the then elite members of the community headed by Sir Dinshaw Petit filed a suit in the High Court of Bombay against Sir Jamsetji Jejeebhoy and others, being the then Trustees of Bombay Parsi Panchayet. The plaintiff in that case sought a declaration from the Court that the Zoroastrian religion permits conversion of aliens and such converted people have got the rights to the funds and properties of the community.

After hearing the case for several months and taking evidence of several witnesses which included Dasturjis and scholars of our community, the Division Bench of the Bombay High Court consisting of Justice Davar and Justice Beaman, held that the Zoroastrian religion contemplates conversion but the Parsis, since their arrival in India, never sought conversion. The court further held that the Parsis formed a caste like all other Indian castes and kept aloof from other communities as far as conversion is concerned.

It will be interesting to note that when the suit was going on, the Court suggested an amicable settlement of the dispute as the elite of the society were involved in the case, that the lady in question be considered, as an exception and be allowed to the limited benefit of the funds and institutions of the community. The then trustees of the Parsi Panchayet through their Counsel replied to the Court that if they would agree to the suggestion of the Court, they would be committing breach of Trust, unless they obtain sanction of the community at large. So during the pendency of the suit, a meeting of the Anjuman was called on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1908 at Allbless Baug. The then Anjuman overwhelmingly rejected the suggestion of the Court and replied "NO" and went to the length of suggesting that the case could be taken to Privy Council, if the decision went against the Trustees. The law laid down by our High Court about 100 years ago still holds good, even today, and applies to all the Parsis in India who represent about 80% of our present strength in the world.

The opinion of Samast Anjuman expressed in 1905 and also in 1908 was echoed during the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress held in Bombay in 1978, when the consensus amongst delegates was against conversion and mixed marriages. I am confident that even today if an opinion of the members of the community is taken by way of a referendum on the subject of conversion and mixed marriages, their answer will be emphatically 'no'. The majority of our co-religionists are residing in India and for them the matter was settled not only by the aforesaid Judgment of our Bombay High Court but by the terms and conditions of all our Trusts - which are for the benefit of Parsi Zoroastrians only.

If we adopt the principle of conversion and try to convert members of the other community to our religion, we will be exposed to the grave risk of being wiped out

overnight, more particularly when there are political conversions going on in this country and overnight lakhs of people become Christians from Hindus or Hindus from Muslim religion. If we accept the principle of conversion, our co-religionists who are residing in the theocratic states would be compelled to leave the country or would be compelled to convert themselves to the Muslim religion on the ground that their religion has now accepted the principle of conversion and only Muslims can reside in their country.

As mentioned above, we came to India, to preserve our religion, race, culture and tradition, but after Independence some of our co-religionists from India went abroad for their economic upliftment. They are finding it difficult to survive in the countries where they have settled now. They fear that their second generation will be wiped out and for that reason they want to convert members of the other religions to the Zoroastrian religion. It is difficult to appreciate such reasoning in support of conversion. If a person is not sure of his progeny continuing Zoroastrian religion, the answer would be to return to India immediately rather than convert members of other religions to keep our religion alive. The better course for such persons who left India for their economic upliftment is to return to India after achieving economic gains abroad so as to preserve their religion, but they should not create confusion and complication in the community by introducing members of other religions into our religion. When the books of any religion are open for anyone to study and follow, I fail to see any purpose behind conversion in the following words “If he converts from conviction, he is a fool. If he does it for convenience, he is a scoundrel.”

I also fail to understand the reason given for conversion, that it is required to ensure that the second generation follows the Zoroastrian religion. Then I ask these questions. What are the parents of the first generation doing? What is their role to protect their second generation? Have we to keep the teaching of Zarathushtra alive by the acts of our own people or by hired ones? So, to the protagonists of conversion, I will say, “Physician, heal thyself first.”

## **PROBLEMS OF MIXED MARRIAGES:**

The problem of mixed marriage and their progeny which is haunting our community since the beginning of last century is a delicate, sensitive and emotional problem. We know that according to Justice Davar's Judgement, issues of a Parsi father and non-Parsi mother can be admitted in our religion on performance of Navjote ceremony. However, today there are two diametrically opposite views prevailing in our community. One view is that the children of mixed marriages, i.e. whether the father is Parsis or not, should not be admitted in our religion, while the other view is that the benefit of Justice Davar's judgement should be given to the issue of a Parsi mother marrying a non-Parsi. Instead of expressing my views, one way or the other, I would like to place before you certain undisputed facts and pose before you some questions for your careful consideration and mature judgement:

(a) You know that one of our scriptures is Vendidad, which means the law against the demons. Fargard 18 of this scripture contains a question and answer series between Dadar Ahura Mazda and the holy prophet Zarathushtra. Because of the question-answer series, our religion is called a revealed religion. In para 62 of the said 18 Faragard, Ahura Mazda replies to the holy prophet that those Mazdayasnians who mix their seed with non-Mazdayasnians are committing sins.

“Aat Mraot Ahuro Mazdao, Zahi ba, Ashaum Zarathushtra Yo Khshudrao ham raethwayeili, dahmanam adahmanamcha daevayasnanam Adevyasnanam tanuparethnam, atanuparethanam.”

(b) In our Chithrem Buyat prayer we pray Chithrem Buyat ahmya Nmane, Pithavem Buyat ahmya Nmane. Taokhma Pithavem Buyat ahmya nmane.

“May there (be increase) of lineage of Mazdayasnian in this house.

May there (be increase) of prosperity in this house.

May there (be increase) of prosperity of lineage in this house.”

(c) The law of genetics is no respecter of personalities. Across the corridors of history, men have discovered that certain ethnic traits regulate the characteristics of every individual tribe and race. Man is a creature of heredity and environment. So

long as man retains the bonds of association with his tribe or race, those ethnic traits run like a golden thread across centuries of time and make their mark in the history of the age. We, the Parsis, are no exception to this rule. During thirteen centuries, we denizens on a foreign soil have scrupulously retained our racial identity and in the process have produced the greatest industrialists, scientists, lawyers and freedom fighters, who have not only enriched the heritage of our race but benefited the society at large. We, the Parsis have always taken great care for the preservation of our race, as a result of which we have today developed certain racial characteristics, such as uprightness, enterprising, charitable and humorous nature and adaptability. Would you prefer to retain our racial characteristics or lose them at the altar of conversion and mixed marriages?

(d) Anthropologists, entomologists and other scientists have come to the conclusion that cross- breeding not only results in degeneration but also in the extinction of species, may it be plants, insects, birds, animals or even human beings. Thus, cross-breeding is against the law of nature.

(e) From time to time till the year 1978, the community has expressed its views against mixed marriages and giving any rights to the children of mixed marriages. In the Anjuman meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1919, Parsi girls marrying outside were publicly condemned as being detrimental to the preservation of our race. At another Anjuman meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1933, the community again expressed displeasure at such marriages of Parsi girls. In the Third World Zoroastrian Congress held in Bombay in 1978, the consensus of opinion was that mixed marriages should not be encouraged and all possible steps should be taken to prevent them in future and the progeny of non-Parsi father and Parsi mother should not be accepted in our faith. As you well know, our Dasturji and the orthodox group have boycotted the Third World Zoroastrian Congress. I do not know whether the Reformists had attended the Congress or not, but from the manner in which the proceedings took place, one thing was clear to me, that the intelligent, educated and mature members of our community from all corners of the World had participated in the Congress. Do we believe in a democratic way of life? Should we accept the view of the majority expressed from time to time or not?

(f) We know that our first leader in India, Dasturji Nairyosang Dhaval, had given a word of honour to King Jadhav Rana of Sanjan that Parsis will not indulge in conversation or inter-caste marriage. In other words, our forefathers had assured the King that we would remain as brothers with members of the other communities and not as brothers-in-law. However, presuming for the sake of argument that our sagacious leader had not given such a promise or had decided to adopt the method of conversion and inter-caste marriage, after the passage of 1,300 years, would we be existing today as a separate and distinct race?

(g) Some argue that the progeny of mixed marriages are healthier more intelligent and more outstanding than the progeny of marriages between two Parsis. Since the beginning of last century, some mixed marriages have taken place in our community. Have the mixed marriages produced persons of the stature and calibre of Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshaw Mehta, Jamshedji Tata and others? What is the contribution to the religious field by the progeny of the mixed marriages? Have they written any book or even an article or given a talk on Zoroastrianism? Have they cared for or made any type of contribution for the protection of our religion institutions?

(h) Our modern scientists, anthropologists and entomologists are of one opinion – that marriages within the community do not lead to degeneration of race, but on the contrary, the only way to ensure the continuance of a species of bird, animal or human being is to avoid cross breeding. It is our common knowledge that the only way to have a superior pedigree of animal, be it a dog or a horse, is to breed the animals of a particular species having regard to the pedigree and traits of heredity. Nobody would suggest mating a champion Dobermann Pinscher with a champion Alsatian, though both are dogs, both are German and both are champions. If anybody would venture to cross-breed, the offspring would neither turn out to be Dobermann Pinscher nor Alsatian, but a degenerated specimen.

(i) In the beginning of the last century, Japan was trying to modernise and westernise itself and it toyed with the idea of achieving this by encouraging the marriages of Japanese with westerners. The late Dr. Herbert Spencer issued a stern warning to the Japanese of the possible dire consequences of such a move and strongly advised them to take possible steps to prevent such mixed marriages. Japan is

ever thankful to Dr.Spencer for his valuable advice and we are witness to the fact that Japan is today one of the most advanced countries of the world, as mixed marriages have not taken place to destroy their character and race.

(j) Let us not forget that even man, for his own selfish purpose, unnaturally cross-breeds animals as in the case of a jackass and a mare to produce a mule. Nature, which disapproves and abhors such cross-breeding assures that such progeny is not continued. The mule is always sterile. Let us therefore be in consonance with nature, science and religion. In fact, our religion aims at achieving Hamazor – harmony with nature.

(k) Protagonists of mixed marriages have no answer to the question that if all human beings belong to one family, why did God not create all human beings of one pattern, one colour, and one trait? It would be better to die nobly of one stock on account of decreasing numbers rather than as a half-caste or lose the qualities of uprightness, charity, enterprise, tolerance and adaptability that the Parsis are endowed with, without casting any disrespect to members of other communities in the world. In the history of the world, the names of Napoleon, Rani of Jhansi or Joan of Arc are written in gold not because they joined hands with others so as to become victorious in their wars, but because of the heroic manner in which they lost their battles. The main objection to mixed marriages is that they will ultimately lead to the extinction of the good qualities for which Parsis are ever famous and which have kept the community and the religion alive inspite of various vicissitudes.

Please ponder over these questions very carefully, coolly and calmly. To get a proper perspective of the matter, please do not forget that our forefathers left their homes, their land, their wealth and their every worldly belonging and migrated to India for only one purpose i.e. to preserve our religion, race and culture. Each generation has tried to fulfil this aim of our coming to India by following our religion scrupulously and each generation, and today each one of us, rich or poor, young or old, are the Trustees of this Trust to preserve our religion and its culture in its pristine purity and to pass it on to the future generation as a noble priceless heritage. Keeping in mind our aforesaid purpose of coming to India, what are our problems today? As pointed out above, our main problems are that some members of our community are



totally devoid of religious knowledge and have therefore gone astray. As there are no enlightened missionary priests existing in our community, consequently they are not following the Zoroastrian religion in the way our forefathers did. So what is required to put them back on the rails? Some members of our community are not able to achieve economic progress as our forefathers did, as they are not industrious or hardworking like their forefathers. As a result of acute shortage of housing accommodation, our members cannot start family life early, as a result of which our number is decreasing. Before we consider giving rights to mixed marriages between a Parsi girl and a non-Parsi boy, we need to look at other issues plaguing us: Does your heart not weep when you see a Parsi begging on the road, or when you read about a Parsi girl going astray or get to know of a Parsi couple not living together, not because of the divorce decree but because of lack of accommodation, as a result of which hundreds of our boys and girls who want to get married, cannot do so for a considerable period. Please ponder over this vital question: Whom would you take care of first? Let us have some sense of proportion and not lose sight of our main problems. The problem of mixed marriage is a by-product of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because of the advent of industrialisation, emancipation of women, co-education and ignorance of the precepts of our religion and heritage by our progeny. Before talking about giving rights to the issue of a Parsi mother and a non-Parsi father, should we not take all possible steps to prevent it? We should find out the reasons for it and rectify it. If we train our children in the Zoroastrian way of life and acquaint them with our religion, heritage and culture, I venture to say that there will be no mixed marriages in our community at all.

That reminds me of a true story which occurred during the partition days, at the time of our Independence. In one of the partition camps, a Muslim girl fell in love with a Hindu boy and wanted to marry him. At that time, as you know, the relations between the two aforesaid communities were at dagger's end. So the parents of the boy and the girl and other persons in the camp entreated their respective children to forget the matter, otherwise there would be a riot in the camp, and no one would survive. The girl refused to follow the advice of any one. The situation became so tense that there was fear of a riot in the camp at any moment. Then one Maulvi was

informed by someone about the firm decision of the girl to marry the Hindu boy at any cost. The Maulvi immediately rushed to the tent where the girl was put up and the crowd gathered outside the tent. He uttered some religious words in the ear of the girl. Within a minute, the girl came out of the tent and proclaimed that she had changed her mind and she was not going to marry the Hindu boy. From this story I ask, where are such priests in our community who can perform such miracles and save our boys and girls from mixed marriages.

### **LET RELIGION BE THE PIVOT OF OUR LIFE.**

The life of our forefathers rotated round the pivot of our religion, and for the sake of religion they were prepared to sacrifice anything, nay even their lives.

In the twenty first century, people do not give much importance to their religion or religious way of life, but to power, position and pleasure and they want to seek them at any cost. It may be true with the big powers who want to maintain their superiority in space or with some of our politicians who want to form a government Whether their party has got majority or not who want to hold on to their chairs, whether they are useful or not or it may be true in the case of mixed marriages, where for the sake of pleasure and position, our young members marry outside their community. In such a prevailing situation, what could be the guiding principle for the survival of Zoroastrianism? And I think the answer to this question can be given by quoting an incident which took place in the life of our prophet Zarathushtra himself. Before the emergence of Zarathushtra in the Court of King Vishtaspa, a person by the name of Dura Saran was the king's favourite. When Angre Nainyu observed that Zarathushtra was bent upon preaching his religion in the kingdom of Vishtaspa, he realised that he would lose his position and status in the kingdom. Therefore, tried to tempt our holy prophet Zarathushtra by offering him a palace to live in and other boundaries, on the condition that he give up his mission of spreading the Mazdayasnian religion. Thereupon, our holy prophet replied:

“Noit he apastavane Vanguhim Daenam Mazdayasnim,

Noit astacha, noit ushtanemacha, noit baodnacha Vi-urvisyat.”

i.e. “Even if my bones are broken, even if my soul leaves my body and even if my memory is lost, I shall not forsake my good Mazdayasnian religion.”

(Vendidad Fargarat 19)

I think that the aforesaid words of our Holy Prophet should be our guiding principle in day-today life and an example for posterity to follow.

### **LET US BE FAITHFUL TO OUR RELIGION AND COMMUNITY:**

We must always remain faithful to our religion and community and our constant prayer should be “Grant me, O Ahura Mazda in thy rank to stand, a valiant soldier faithful to the end.”

Many people ask me whether the Parsi community will survive after 50 years or not. That reminds me of a story of a sage of Iran. In Iran, there was a well-known sage. One day, a boy decided to prove him wrong by taking a bird in his hand and asking him whether the bird in his fist was alive or dead. The boy thought that if the sage would reply that the bird is alive, he would tighten his fist and kill the bird so as to prove he sage wrong, and if the sage would reply that the bird is dead, he would open His fist so as to release the bird and allow it to fly. So the boy took a bird in his fist and asked the sage whether the bird in his fist was alive or dead. The sage replied to the boy, “Answer is in your hand. If you keep your fist loose, the bird will be alive; if you tighten it, it will die”. The lesson from this story is that whether the Parsi Zoroastrians will survive or not will depend upon the actions and deeds of its followers.

Man always plans his future from his experience of the past. An American statesman remarked, “I have but one lamp by which my feet should be guided and this is the lamp of my experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past. “It is being said that our past was glorious and our present is perilous and our future appears to be dim and dark. Then which way should Zoroastrians go? Should they take their inspiration from the glorious past or from the perilous present? The Zoroastrians in India survived for about 1300 years because they did not follow the

principles of conversion or mixed marriages. The groups of Zoroastrians who settled in Europe and Punjab during the course of their migration from Iran are today totally wiped out as a distinct race, because they indulged in conversion and mixed marriages. The members of our community are educated and enlightened. Let them calmly and coolly ponder over and decide which way to go for the future – the way followed by our forefathers in India for 1200 years by which we have survived and prospered or the way a group of Zoroastrians settled in Europe and Punjab by which they were wiped out as a distinct human race? Our past was glorious because we followed the principles of the Zoroastrian religion scrupulously. Our forefathers never indulged in conversion or mixed marriages. In other words if the Community wants to survive, what is needed is reconversion of certain Zoroastrians to the true Zoroastrian way of life so that our community once again becomes vibrant and versatile. There are certain Paris who have no faith in our religion and there have become worshippers of Baas and peers and visitors of dargahs and churches. What is absolutely required today is to bring them back to the path preached by our renowned Prophet Zarathustra.

Lately, it has become a fashion with some Parsis to run down our community publicly, but they forget that when they point out one finger to someone, three fingers are pointed against them. So when some says our community is degenerating, I would like to know from him what is his contribution to prevent it (i) Has he followed the Zoroastrian way of life and taught the true principles of Zoroastrianism to his children? (ii) If he has got children, has he got them married within the community at an early age so that our number does not decrease? (iii) If he is well placed in life, has he spared his time, energy and money for the welfare and upliftment of the members of our community? I feel that as long as we follow the principles of Zoroastrianism strictly, try to preserve our religion and race and will not forsake them for selfish ends or self-interest. We will survive and even if there is only one person left on this earth following the Zoroastrian religion strictly, it will remain alive. We must therefore have full and implicit faith in God and His plan. With the grace of Ahura Mazda, we have survived for centuries and it is with His grace, we will survive till the earth exists in this universe or till the Renovation of the World.

Let us have immense faith in our religion and our Prophet even though we may not have any knowledge of or have studied the Zoroastrian religion, because it is only the faith that elevates the soul, purifies the emotions, sustains human dignity and lends nobility and divinity to the man's manner of life. As is recited in Ashirwad Ceremony, Zarathushtra rad setayad, Revere Zarathushtra as your leader.

Position of some of the Parsee who forsake our religion and its traditions are like an ass carrying on his back a bag of precious metal like gold but does not know its value. As some persons drive their luxury car under the influence of alcohol and knock down poor people sleeping on the footpath, similarly in our community there are some persons with immense wealth who do not care for our religious principle and traditions and breach them every now and then. Not only that such persons who are in minority try to ridicule or oppress the majority who are scrupulously following our religious principle and traditions. This is nothing but oppression of faithful majority by radical minority.

In my humble view if Parsi Zoroastrians want to survive on this earth, they will have to follow the footsteps of their ancestors and should recite Mathravani on daily basis, pray before the holy fire for enlightenment and follow our religious principles and traditions scrupulously.

Let us pray before our Holy Fire that every member of our community be fired with the fervour of the religion and take the solemn vow to follow our religious principles and traditions and maintain the purity of blood, thereby enabling the community to preserve and perpetuate its rich heritage.

'O Zoroastrians! Be united; stand like a solid rock based on the foundation of Dini Pasbani, Comi Pasbani and Bunyadi Pasbani so that the Zoroastrians survive forever in this world: Saecula Saeculorum.

“Hama Zor, Hama Asho bed”

Atha Jamyat, Yatha Afrinami.”