



## NAVROZE GREETINGS!

*Ya Bari Khodal Khodavande Alamra, Hama Anjumanra, Ba Farzandan Hazar Sal Der Bedar. Shadbedar, Tandarost Bedar... Hazaran Hazar Afrin Bad! Sal Khojasteh Bad, Roz Farrokh Bad, Mah Mubarak Bad!*

*O God the Creator! May all righteous rulers of the world, and all members of the community Live on for thousands of years! May they live happily and healthily! May a thousand blessings be showered on them! May their years be spent in happiness! May their days be passed in blessedness! May their months be spent in joy!*

*(From Doa Tandarosti)*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

NAVROZE GREETINGS! May Ahura Mazda shower his choicest blessings on the Zoroastrian community in North America.

### *The Mission*

As a community, our ultimate mission is to bring about a flowering of Zoroastrianism in North America. I see a vision for Zoroastrians in North America. I see a vision of a noble community, with a reputation for truth and integrity. I see a vision of a prosperous community, noted for its enterprise and industry. I see a vision of an erudite community, noted for its learning and scholarship. I see a vision of a caring community that has a deep and abiding respect for others.

It is our bounden duty as first generation North Americans, to lay a strong foundation upon which future generations of Zoroastrians can build. Achievement of this mission as individuals or even as Associations is unthinkable. We have therefore **united** as FEZANA to bring these goals to fruition, and together in unity we gain strength. We have made a superb start. We have established ourselves. There are now 18 formally organized Associations and many more smaller groups. We have consolidated our resources as FEZANA, and now we are progressing forward.

### *The Tasks Ahead*

There are many tasks that lie ahead. Some that come to mind are: religious education for our children, our youth, and our adults; developing informational materials on Zoroastrianism; developing a cadre of spiritual leaders and Mobeds versed in the doctrinal, ritual and ministerial aspects; establishment of a seminary and North American Center; social welfare for the needy and aged both within the Zoroastrian community and outside; facilitating marriages within the faith; keeping our flock together; projecting a better understanding of our faith to others through participation in inter-faith activities; and encouraging Zoroastrian entrepreneurship.

### *Grave Issues*

Also, there are many grave issues that need to be addressed. We cannot sit back and wait for their miraculous disappearance. Some of these are: marriages between Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians; acceptance/non-acceptance of spouses and children of such marriages;

conversion/acceptance; declining world population and North American demographics; promoting Parsee-Irani understanding; and adoption of a unified calendar.

There is much work to be done. How can each one of us do our part? The answer is simple. Through involvement and commitment. Volunteer your services to your Associations and to the FEZANA committees. Use the forum of this Journal to express your views and thoughts. Reach out into your communities and seek out those who have chosen to stay away. Get them involved, so that one by one, drop by drop, we can bring all our scattered Zoroastrians into the fold, working together to achieve our goals.

*Rohinton Rivetna*  
*President, FEZANA*

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## IN APPRECIATION

FEZANA deeply appreciates the contribution of Dr. Jehan Bagli, in starting up and nurturing the FEZANA Journal during its first three years. We also thank Sabar Bulsara for devoting her time and talents towards the production of the Journal during that time. Dr. Bagli has now stepped down as Editor of the Journal but will continue to publish "Gavashni", the publication of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec. We encourage you to support both publications because they are complimentary in their primary focus. While the Journal focuses mainly on news and issues pertaining to the North American scene, the Gavashni is slanted more towards scholarly articles.

To Jehan and Sabar we wish, not Goodbye but Welcome -- as contributors and consultants for coming issues of the Journal.

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## NEWS FROM THE SECRETARY

### *North Texas Association Joins FEZANA*

We welcome the newest addition to the FEZANA family -- the Zoroastrian Association of Northern Texas now becomes the 17th Association to join FEZANA. ZANT currently serves about 120

members from the areas around Dallas, Fort Worth, Arlington, and from the neighboring state of Oklahoma. Zoroastrians from the area are invited to become members of ZANT. Please contact the President, Behram Irani, 3633 Wandering Trail, Plano, Texas 75075

#### ***Vacancy In Funds and Finance Committee***

Due to personal reasons, Jehangir Mobed will not be serving as chairperson of the Funds and Finance Committee. We are deeply grateful to Jehangir for his invaluable services over the last year in guiding the committee through its early stages and setting the foundation for the formation of FEZANA Funds. Associations are requested to submit names of people interested in chairing this committee which is so very vital to the growth of the North American Zoroastrian community.

#### ***Request for Updates from Associations***

Member Associations are requested to send an updated list of their present Executive Committee (or Board Members) to the Secretary, Dolly Dastoor at the address shown below. A form for this purpose is included for Member Associations. This information is of vital importance for the smooth and effective exchange of information between FEZANA and the Member Associations.

#### ***Notice of FEZANA Annual General Meeting***

Notice is hereby given for the fourth Annual General Meeting of FEZANA to be held on July 5 and 6, 1991 in New Jersey, USA. This meeting will be hosted by the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey (ZAPANJ). Member Associations are invited to send one or more representatives. Any proposed amendments to the Constitution should be received in writing by the Secretary at least 45 days prior to the AGM, viz. by May 15, 1991. Proposed agenda items may also be submitted to the Secretary. Please also verify that your annual dues for 1990 - 1991 have been paid to the FEZANA Treasurer.

#### ***Call for Nominations for FEZANA Officers***

The term of office of the Vice-President and Secretary will end at this 1991 Annual General

Meeting. Nominations are invited from Member Associations for these two positions, on the enclosed form to be returned to the Secretary by May 15, 1991. If you are interested in serving, please have your name submitted by a Member Association.

#### ***Prayer for Servicemen In the Gulf***

To all the young Zoroastrian service men and women involved in the Gulf crisis and to their families, FEZANA sends prayers for their safe return. May Ahura Mazda be with you every step of the way, to protect you and guide you and bring you back safely to your loved ones. MAY THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH!

*Dolly Dastoor*

*Secretary, FEZANA*

*3765 Malo Street, Brossard*

*Quebec J4Y 1B4, Canada*

### ***READERS' COMMENTS INVITED***

Readers' comments on the content and format of this Journal will be very welcome. As this publication evolves, we will try our best to reflect the wishes of our readers.

### ***ON THE NORTH AMERICAN SCENE***

#### ***Helping Hands***

The Helping Hands Zoroastrian Youth Communication Network of North America (HHZYCN) serves as a channel to strengthen the spirit of unity and cooperation, especially among the youth, and provides an invaluable service to the needy of the community. Its goals are to develop an effective communication network among Zoroastrian youth in North America, and to provide assistance to Zoroastrians in need. It is primarily involved in projects related to youth leadership development, youth congresses, and publication of the ZYNA (Zoroastrian Youth of North America) newsletter. In the past it has been very effective in raising funds for

**THE ROLE OF THE ZOROASTRIAN YOUTH**

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**Canada**

**ZOROASTRIAN YOUTH**

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**Killington**  
VERMONT

**Youth**

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**NEW FRIENDS**

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**Laughter, the Best Medicine**

peace

**Imagine**

those special memories

**ZOROASTRIANS**

**FEZANA**

**GIVE PEACE A CHANCE**

**ski school**

**ZOROASTRIAN**

**ON THE SKI SLOPES**

Canada and U.S.

**VERMONT**

**SENTIMENTAL JOURNEYS**

**IMAGINE**

**DOWNHILL**

**KILLINGTON**

**VERMONT**

**PARADISE**

**Thumbs up! Ski the Best!**

**AGAZD**

**VERMONT**

**PARADISE**

**Thumbs up! Ski the Best!**

**AGAZD**

Zoroastrian refugees, for medical assistance, and for other worthwhile projects. It plans to formulate a WHO'S WHO among Zoroastrian youth and compile information on reputable educational institutions to facilitate Zoroastrians planning to attend those schools.

Join hands with us and let's work together for the survival of Zoroastrianism in the new world.  
UNITED WE FLOURISH, DIVIDED WE PERISH!

*Meher Dadabhoy Amalsad*  
*Chairperson, HHZYCN*

### **Z-SKI In Vermont**

About 25 young Zoroastrians met at Killington Mountain, Vermont, for the third annual Z-SKI ski trip from January 1 - 6, 1991. In the words of Natasha Karanjia of Pittsburg: "... I can only say that these trips get better every time. I cannot believe that after all these trips and congresses, that we could even become closer friends and have a better time than the last. The skiing was fun, the condos were great, and the friendships are forever." As Natasha Dastoor of Montreal put it: "Even more than the skiing and "apres ski" fun, we enjoyed the discussions we had till late into the night on topics such as conversion, death, rituals and the supernatural". Aban Gazdar writes: "After being with everyone and having such an enjoyable trip, I got utterly depressed when we got back home to Toronto. I was in a creative mood so I made this collage". (See illustration next page). Many thanks to Ferzeen Jungalwalla of Boston for an excellent job of coordinating the trip.

### **Network of Zarthusti Women**

Following the session on Zarthusti Women, Past, Present and Future, at the Congress in Houston, there was considerable interest in the formation of a network of Zarthusti women. Through this network the group plans to liaise with Zarthusti women globally on such issues as: socio-economic status of Zoroastrian women; furthering their professional growth; creating public awareness about discrimination against women in religious and social matters; provide a forum where Zoroastrian women can express concerns regarding culture shock, adjustment to the American way of life, care for the elderly, "americanization" of children, coping with the demands of living in a Zoroastrian American society, growing sense of loss of ties, etc. This network is in its formative years -- input is invited from interested women.

*Dolly Dastoor, Chairperson*  
*Brossard, Quebec*

*Shehernaz Joshi, Assistant Chairperson*  
*Chevy Chase, Maryland*

### **Photographs on Exhibit at the Smithsonian**

The Arthus Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution 1050 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C., is exhibiting **Photographs of Iran**, by Anton Sevrugin through May 1991. The exhibit includes several photographs of Zoroastrians in traditional garments taken in the latter part of the 19th century. The photographs are of exceptional quality, and have received favorable reviews in newspapers. For further information call the gallery at (202) 357-2700.





# ZOROASTRIANISM



Light in all its manifestations symbolizes the illumined mind — the highest of all attributes of the one God, Ahura Mazda, that man can possess. The eternal flame burns in all Zoroastrian temples as a constant reminder.

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## AVESTAN PRAYERS FOR THE ZARATHUSHTRIAN CHILDREN

(IN ROMAN SCRIPT)



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AVESTA, the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, comprises in part the 72 chapters of the YASNA ("worship" or "praise"). Seventeen of these hymns are called the Gathas, attributed to Zarathushtra himself.

Prophet Zarathushtra, or Zoroaster, preached the religion on the steppes of Asia, the ancient Persia, around 1500 B.C. The faith flourished through the rise and fall of many civilizations. During the Achaemenian period, Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the Great Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great in 558 B.C. It suffered a setback during the reign of Darius III when Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. Persepolis, the seat of Zoroastrianism, along with all the Zoroastrian scriptures written on cow hides, was destroyed during Alexander's conquest of Persia. Five hundred years of nomadic rule followed.

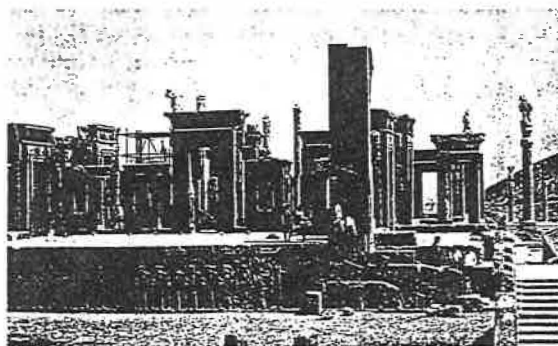
Zoroastrianism revived under the Sassanians (226 A.D. - 641 A.D.). Zoroastrian scriptures were retrieved and once again transcribed in the Pahlavi script during the Sassanian period. Zoroastrianism reeled once more in Persia with the advent of Islam and the conquest of Persia by the Arabs. At that time a large number were forced to accept Islam, but a few shiploads of devout followers left Persia and landed on the western shores of India where they were given refuge by the native Hindu ruler. Their descendants the Parsees, concentrated in and around Bombay, have kept the faith alive in India.

In an age of idol worship and polytheism, Zarathushtra preached the first monotheistic religion of the one supreme God, Ahura Mazda ("Wise Lord"). The message of Zarathushtra is contained in the ancient texts written in Avesta, of which the five Gathas are believed to be the word of Zarathushtra himself. The quintessence of Zoroaster's teachings is embodied in the triad: HUMATA (good thoughts), HUKTA (good words), and HUVERASHTA (good deeds).

The loftiest ideal for man upon earth is to be like Ahura Mazda. With the blessings of the good mind (Vohu Maan), and by following the righteous path (Asha) with devotion (Armaity), man is bestowed with the power to eradicate all evil and can hope to attain the twin rewards of perfection (Hurvatat) and immortality (Ameretat) and thereby attain the ultimate communion with Ahura Mazda.

The total number of Zoroastrians in the world today number only about 130,000 to 200,000, major concentrations being in India and Iran. There are about 10,000 Zoroastrians in North America.

The ruins of Persepolis which was the seat of the Persian Empire. Persepolis was destroyed during the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.



Zoroastrians believe that in every single human being there dwells the divine spirit. FRAVASHI, the divinity in humanity, is represented by this symbol.



A likeness of Zarathushtra the prophet adorned with a Sudreh. The faith was revealed to Zarathushtra when he was in solitude. The Sudreh worn by Zarathushtra in the picture, is an inner garment made of white muslin which is worn by Zoroastrians symbolizing goodness and clarity. The word sudreh means "beneficial path to righteousness." The Kushti, a woolen cord, is worn around the waist three times as a reminder for good thoughts, words, and deeds (humata, hukta, and huverashta).

**Zoroastrians at Inter-Faith Ceremony**

The National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) is an inter-faith body for promoting greater understanding among the various faiths in North America. It is affiliated with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions of which FEZANA is a co-sponsor. Rohinton Rivetna, President of FEZANA, serves as a Board Member on this Council. For the first time this year, Zoroastrians were represented at the NCCJ Thanksgiving ceremony. Ervad Dr. Kersey Antla, Head Priest of Chicago stood alongside other religious leaders such as Archbishop Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of the Chicago Catholic Archdiocese, and presented a verse from the Gathas. With such small beginnings, we are gradually arriving at the center stage of religious activities in North America.

**Seminar on Teaching Methods**

The FEZANA Education Committee will assist and liaise with Member Associations to set up a one or two day seminar on development of teaching methods on teaching Zoroastrianism to school-age children. The seminar will be conducted under the guidance of Dr. Furrokh Mistree of Houston, Texas. It will focus on the process of teaching rather than on the content and will be of interest to individuals involved in running religion classes. The program will provide a good opportunity for learning and sharing ideas and concepts on proper education tools and methods. Associations interested in organizing such a seminar in their area, please contact the undersigned at 10444 18th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6J 4Z8, Canada.

*Firdosh Mehta*  
*Education Committee*

**Zubin In Tel Aviv**

Zubin Mehta was interviewed on CNN several times during the first week of the Gulf war. He was shown along with other guests assembled in the 6th floor corridor of the hotel with gas masks ready, during the early missile attacks.

Our hearts and prayers go out to Zubin, and to the brave Zoroastrian men in the armed forces, (we have heard of several young men having been called to war) as well as those families that are still in the troubled areas of the Middle East.

We pray to Ahura Mazda for their safety and well being.

**Keeping In Touch**

The FEZANA Small Groups Committee serves isolated groups of Zoroastrians scattered across North America who are not served by any Zoroastrian Association. If you or someone you know would like to keep in touch with North American affairs, or if you would like to form a "Small Group" of Zoroastrians in your State or Province, please contact the undersigned at 4703 Orange Grove Way, Palm Harbor, Florida 34684, telephone (813)785-6409.

*Maharoukh Motafram*  
*Small Groups Committee*

**PASS IT ON ...**

To help reach a wider readership to this Journal, after you read it PLEASE PASS IT ON TO A FRIEND

**Zoroastrianism In Inter-Faith Calendar**

(See illustration on next page).

For the first time, Zoroastrianism is included in the 1991 inter-faith calendar published by the National Council of Christians and Jews (NCCJ). Other religions represented are: Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity (Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Native American and Sikhism. The NCCJ is an inter-faith body for promoting greater understanding among the various faiths in North America. It is affiliated with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions of which FEZANA is a co-sponsor. A few copies of the calendar were distributed by FEZANA to each Member Association and Small Group; as a token of appreciation to NCCJ, a donation to cover the cost of these calendars will be most appreciated. Additional copies may be purchased by sending \$10.00 to NCCJ, 360 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 1009, Chicago 60601-3808.

## CHOOSING A UNIFIED CALENDAR -- A TIMELY CONCERN

*For centuries, Zoroastrians in India have followed and continue to follow three separate calendars (Shenshai, Quadimi and Fasali) for liturgical services. Dr. Jehan Bagli sheds some light on why the three calendars perpetuated for so long in India and offers some practical solutions to resolve this concern for Zoroastrians in North America. Readers letters are invited on this subject.*

### Reasons for Three Calendars

The saga of the three calendars was started by Zoroastrians in India. Sometime between 1125-1131 A.D. the community in India corrected their calendar by adding an extra month. This was done to bring back the receding Roz Hormazd of Month (Mah) Fravardin to coincide with the day of the vernal equinox (March 21st). Historical evidence clearly indicates that the major Zoroastrian community of Iran was completely unaware of this intercalation. The result was that the calendar of the Indian community fell behind that of the Iranians by one month.

History records that this difference of one month revealed itself some six centuries later when Mobed Jamaspa Vilayati visited Surat from Kerman in 1720. After the Mobed's return to Iran, some Parsi Zoroastrians arbitrarily decided to follow the computation followed by the Iranians. They called themselves Quadimis, and others called themselves Shenshals. Thus, the two calendars came into existence. It is for this reason that the Quadimi calendar is one month ahead of the Shenshai. Later in 1906, *Zaratoshti Fasali Sal Mandal* initiated by Khurshedji Cama brought the Fasali calendar into existence.

For generations the three calendars were blindly followed in India without proper explanation of their origin or history. Even today, the priesthood at the helm is content with the status quo, arguing against change because of traditional rituals. These rituals were incorporated at a much later date and have little to do with the religion of Zarathosht.

### Unified Calendar for North America

On this continent, the relevance of any Zoroastrian calendar has deteriorated considerably. There is a distinct danger, if order is not brought into this confusion, that youth in time will completely eliminate the use of the Zoroastrian calendar, and an important part of the tradition will be

wiped out. It is incumbent on the community in North America to take steps to preserve this tradition and to explain the history and mistakes of the past to the next generation. We owe it to them to rationally point out why the unifying change to a single, unified Fasali calendar is the most plausible, sensible, and meaningful way to create order out of the confusion that was generated over the past eight hundred years.

### Fasali Calendar -- the Right Choice

Right from the beginning, early Zoroastrians followed the year by performing their highest devotional feasts of Gahambars around the change of seasons. The lunar calendar followed by the Achaemenians, was intercalated and prevented from drifting away from the day of the vernal equinox. This was done by adding an extra month (Spendarmad) every six years. In the 12th century A.D., history records that Parsis in India added an extra month to bring Roz Hormazd of Mah Fravardin back to the day of the vernal equinox. Thus the efforts to retain the first day of the Zoroastrian calendar at the day of the vernal equinox are well documented in our history. The manner of execution of this intercalation was, however, quite impractical viz., addition of an extra month every 120 years. It is important to point out that the issue of intercalation is that of tradition and not of religion. It was unilaterally decided by a Sassanian monarch, Kavad I, in early 6th century A.D. to add one month every 120 years. A Fasali calendar provides the single most practical way to revive the early Zoroastrian tradition.

Fasali is the only Zoroastrian calendar that:

- Maintains the traditional concept of computation -- starting the year with the beginning of spring -- since the initiation of the Zoroastrian calendar. It consistently begins with the day of the vernal equinox.



- In the northern hemisphere, the calendar retains all the high devotional festivals of Gahambars in their proper location as defined by the religion of Zarathushtra.
- Starts the observance of Gah Rapithwan at the proper time of the year. Gah Rapithwan is not observed during the winter months (Aban to Spendarmad) due to shorter daylight hours. Its observance is resumed in the spring with the month of Fravardin. These timings are consistent only with the Fasall calendar, and are completely inconsistent with the Shenshai and Quadimi calendars. Also, the Jashan of Rapithwan performed on Roz Ardibehesht and Mah Fravardin is correctly preserved in annual computation.
- Has a practical manner of intercalation built into it to retain Roz Hormazd and Mah Fravardin from receding. This is done by adding a day called Avar-Dad-Sal-Gah every four years at the end of the year.
- Permits essentially permanent overlap with the dates of the Gregorian calendar. Thus, March 21st always falls on Roz Hormazd of Mah Fravardin. GREGORIAN DATES ALWAYS FALL ON THE SAME FASALI DAY AND MONTH YEAR AFTER YEAR.

### ***Sacrifices and Compromises***

Any Zoroastrian who wishes to switch from Shenshai or Quadimi to Fasali is free to do so. Zoroastrian priests on this continent have an obligation to perform family rituals following the calendar as requested by the family.

There are however, some barriers introduced by the traditional dogmas of certain ritual practices. These may bar the performances of certain higher liturgical rituals of Yasna and Vandidad in North America. At present, facilities for such rituals are nonexistent in this country. In time, when we reach that point, there is no reason why such rituals cannot be performed following a Fasali calendar subject to the availability of appropriately trained personnel. It is therefore important that Zoroastrians on this continent deal with this problem now and establish a tradition that will facilitate and permit, in time, the performances of higher liturgies using the Fasali calendar.

### ***Best Time for Changeover***

This year the Roz of the Shenshai and Quadimi calendars are one day behind those of the Fasall computation. The months are however separated

by about six or seven months. In the year 1992, the Shenshai and Quadimi computation will drift one more day. This change will overlap the Roz of all three calendars. This phenomena occurs once every 120 years. For those families who have followed and understood the "errors" of our history and are awaiting a suitable time for change, March 21, 1992 WILL PRESENT AN IDEAL OPPORTUNITY. The Roz for all three calendars on March 1992 will be Hormazd with the months for Fasall--Fravardin, for Shenshai--Aban and for Quadimi--Adar. As the number of Zoroastrians following the corrected calendar of Fasall increases, it will then facilitate Zoroastrian organizations to adopt the calendar as a standard and announce their activities using Fasall Roz and Mah.

The discussion of these questions is crucially important for the perpetuation of our religious tradition on this continent. It is abundantly clear that anything not fully understood by the youth of the community is an endangered issue to be gradually discarded. It is ludicrous to assume that because three calendars survived so long in India, they will do so in ignorance on this land. On the other hand, it is equally absurd to believe that the problem can be solved without making some sacrifices. Those who maintain "it is not worth the effort" are selfishly motivated. Their arguments do not encompass the broader vision of the perpetuation of the religion of Zarathosht and the unit of the Zoroastrian community on this continent.

North American Zoroastrians who value their faith and heritage; who follow the devotional days of Gahambar as outlined in the religion; who wish to rationally understand and explain the calendar to their children; and who value the goal of perpetuation of the Zarathoshty faith on this continent, have an obligation to fulfill. They must realize that the Fasali calendar is the only one that can restore order and bring back all the traditional rituals to their rightful place. Only then will tradition be resumed on this "New Zoroastrian Homeland". The Fasali calendar offers us the only logical choice in North America. We are rapidly approaching the crossroads of history. March 1992 will present an ideal "time window" for adopting the Fasali calendar in North America.

*Dr. Jehan Bagli  
Princeton, New Jersey*

## CONVERSION -- AN ISSUE THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

*In a circular letter Ervad Jal Birdy and the "Group of Concerned Zoroastrians", express fears that conversions into the Zoroastrian faith pose a direct threat to the survival of the Zoroastrian community in North America, and suggest that FEZANA "stop encouraging conversion". In response, FEZANA President Rohinton Rivetna has sent a letter to Member Associations, repudiating the allegation that FEZANA encourages conversion. The letter stresses the need to address the issue and proposes an Action Plan for the North American community. Both letters, are reproduced below, followed by a response to Ervad Birdy from Vice President Homi Homji. Readers letters are invited on this subject.*

### THE CONCERN

Some of us attended the Zoroastrian Congress in Houston in September 1990 and came away with serious concerns regarding the survival of the Zoroastrian community in this country. We learned that there are full-time salaried individuals, supported by well-to-do, Influential but misguided Zoroastrians, who have been devoting all their time and energy propagating conversion, mixed-marriages and discrediting our time-honored beliefs and traditions openly. One such individual, Ali A. Jafarey -- a Moslem who now considers himself a Zoroastrian has started an organization called the *Zarathushtrian Assembly* which is actively engaged in converting anyone to our faith. Its aim is to enroll 20,000 converts of all races within the next few years. This is not going to boost our supposedly declining numbers, but will destroy our identity and completely transform our religion. Some Zoroastrians seem to be falling for Jafarey's preaching. Most disturbing is the fact that some hold prominent positions in FEZANA. They are influencing FEZANA to actively support and encourage Jafarey and others like him to travel to Zoroastrian Associations around the country and spread their damaging message.

### Contrary to Zarathushtra's Teachings

Our High Priests in India have jointly put forward convincing reasons to show why there is no concept of conversion in our religion, and why we have never accepted conversion. Zarathushtra preached a simple, sensible, complete and excellent religion. He taught that in everything we undertake we are faced with a choice between Good and Evil. While we cannot stop others from following Zarathushtra's teachings, we maintain that those among us who want to accept converts are making the ultimate Evil choice because they will be helping to annihilate our faith and identity. Our forefathers have preserved our community through tremendous hardships over the centuries.

It is outrageous, and also saddening, to see some of our own people advocating policies which will send us down the road to self destruction.

### A Clever Scheme To Wipe Us Out

What kind of converts are likely to come into the faith? There will be those of weak disposition; such people will change again tomorrow. Then there are those who have no faith at all and want to come along just for the ride, or there may be those who are absolute fanatics. Converts are essentially people who are unfaithful to their own religion; how then can they be faithful to ours? Also, where is the burning need for drastically increasing our numbers overnight? One wonders if there is not an ulterior motive in all this. Is this a ploy to collect funds from unsuspecting people or is it a deliberate scheme to wipe us out?

### Stop Encouraging Conversion

We recognize the need for a central body like FEZANA. We also recognize the good work it has done. Nevertheless, if FEZANA continues to assist in propagating a destructive conversion policy then all its good work will have been in vain. When our future generations search for their roots and find none, we do not want them to point to us as the generation that betrayed them. Our task is to instill a sense of pride in our youngsters regarding our faith and heritage. We must seek out role models and heroes who will serve as torch bearers. We must create an environment for them to mingle with their own kind and multiply. We must encourage them to be good citizens and to participate fully in the North American way of life while still preserving their distinct faith and identity, just as our forefathers managed to do in India.

FEZANA should be expending its energy and resources pursuing the above goals, rather than helping to mislead the community into accepting conversion. It should realize that our faith and identity are equally important and that both must be preserved.

### **What Should We Do?**

- Urge friends and your local Association to convince FEZANA and others to cease encouraging those who preach conversion immediately.
- Urge FEZANA to define the term Zoroastrian and amend sections of its constitution such that the identity of Parsee and Irani Zoroastrians is safeguarded.
- If your Association is a member of FEZANA, elect representatives who will take a stand against conversion and who will use the ballot box to keep people favoring conversion out of the FEZANA committees.

The fate of the Zoroastrians and their future in this country lies in our hands today. May Ahura Mazda guide and help us in our efforts to preserve our faith and identity.

*For the Group of Concerned Zoroastrians,  
Ervad Jal N. Birdy  
Corona, California*

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### **FEZANA'S RESPONSE**

At the outset, I would like to categorically state that **FEZANA IS NOT IN ANY WAY CONNECTED WITH THE CONVERSION ACTIVITIES MENTIONED IN THE LETTER AND HAS NEVER ENDORSED, SPONSORED NOR ENCOURAGED THOSE ACTIVITIES DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY.**

### **FEZANA'S Role**

When we speak of FEZANA we are speaking of each Member Association and its Individual Members. Each one of us collectively make up FEZANA, and have a voice, through our Associations, in setting direction. The power of decision lies with the Member Associations and not with the FEZANA Officers. Each Member Association has its own advocacies and each is comprised of individuals with differing views. Associations being perfectly autonomous, may do as they choose. Under the present structure, it is not within the scope of FEZANA to regulate the activities of Member Associations or its Individual Members. However we, as Member Associations or Individuals are entitled to voice our concerns as Ervad Birdy has done, and it IS within the scope of FEZANA to collectively respond to such concerns, and take action as necessary.

### **Need to Address the Issue**

Ervad Birdy and his group have raised a very valid issue of Conversion/Acceptance that we as a community have not addressed adequately in the past. We cannot hope for the miraculous disappearance of these issues. We, as the North American community must set a direction on this and other such major issues after rational discourse and due consideration. Our salvation shall be through rational, objective, deliberate course of action, not cast in stone but alterable from time to time as exigencies demand. In past instances of conversion / acceptance, reams of materials full of accusations and innuendos have been published in Zoroastrian publications. This kind of dialog has no place in our society. Emotional outbursts, finger pointing and mud slinging are but futile exercises. They get us nowhere, but only leave a trail of ugly footprints leading to polarization and acrimony. We should conduct our discussions at a mature and rational level, focusing on the issue rather than on individuals.

In an age of religious freedom and pluralism, conversion sounds rather archaic. People do not really get converted any more; they embrace a particular tradition of their choice, and there are many to choose from. In our case however, it is not so simple; our ethnicity, our history and our religion are interwoven, intertwined and inextricable one from the other. Acceptance of others into our fold raises the specter of eventual loss of our identity and our heritage.

The reality is that whether we like it or not, there will be others, more so now than in the past, who do not have our heritage, who will call themselves "Zoroastrians". This is something we as Individuals or as a community living in a secular free country cannot control. At best we must learn to seek solutions to these issues as they surface by focusing the efforts of the best minds in our community. What IS within our control is the level of acceptance (or non-acceptance) that we offer to these individuals who embrace Zoroastrianism out of choice. The challenge is how we as a community are prepared to deal with the situation, and develop consensual guidelines and solutions.

### **Understanding and Respecting Differing Views**

Ervad Birdy's letter demonstrates his love and devotion to his faith with the underlying fear of loss of our identity and heritage. Equally devoted, of course are others who see our religion as a religion for the world without concern for preservation

of our ethnicity and our institutions. Both are equally devout and equally vehement in their beliefs. Between the two however, there is a common ground on which both can stand side by side. Polarization is disastrous and must be avoided at any cost. **DIVERSITY SHOULD MAKE OUR COMMUNITY RICHER NOT WEAKER.** We talk of Iranis and Parsees, we loosely talk of Orthodox and Liberals and there now seems to be emerging Ultra Liberals and Moderate Liberals, and there are only 10,000 of us to go around. In all the melee the individual striving for his own spirituality is all but forgotten. The primary purpose for our existence is to provide an environment where spirituality grows and blossoms and we need to get on with that task, once we have put the divisive issues behind us.

***Plan of Action for an Objective Evaluation of the Conversion/Acceptance Issue***

Today we are equipped to deal with issues quite adequately. At least we have our systems in place if we choose to use them. We need to take a proactive approach and make an OBJECTIVE EVALUATION of the situation, so that we are prepared to handle such situations when they arise. I propose the plan of action as outlined below. Member Associations are invited to review the plan of action and return their comments to FEZANA.

***Step 1. DIRECT A RATIONAL OBJECTIVE DISCUSSION. (Now through 1992 Vancouver Congress)***

Conduct free and open discussion on:

- a. The subject of conversion/acceptance. Address questions such as: "Who is a Zoroastrian?", "What level of acceptance or otherwise will be accorded by our North American Institutions to non-Zoroastrian spouses, children of mixed marriages and other converts?", etc; and
- b. The process to be followed in the North American context.

Discussion may be conducted at the local level within the Associations, through letters and articles in the FEZANA Journal, and eventually at the Vancouver Congress. Comments will be received and processed by the FEZANA Information Receiving and Dissemination (Journal) Committee.

***Step 2. FORMULATE A PROCESS (By early 1993)***

Seek community consensus and formulate a

process. There are many alternative ways or processes available; the following are only some examples:

- Accept the recommendations of the Dastours of India and Iran.
- Accept the recommendations of the Mobeds of North America.
- Accept the recommendations of a group of North American scholars and Mobeds selected by the Member Associations.
- Conduct a referendum and be governed by the majority decision.
- Make a decision not to address the issue at this time.
- Allow each Association to address the issue at the Association level.

***Step 3. IMPLEMENT THE PROCESS (by mid 1993)***

Implement the process selected in Step 2, eg. obtain guidance from the Dastours of India and Iran; or convene a group of North American scholars and Mobeds; or conduct a referendum; or some other plan.

***Step 4. PROMULGATE A STATEMENT (by 1993 AGM)***

Summarize the findings and results of Steps 1 - 3, and promulgate a statement.

***Prayer for Guidance***

We have many issues to resolve and actions to take for our continued growth on this continent. We will be effective as a group only if we assume the responsibility, get involved and make our voices heard. We must bear in mind that we are living through our formative years on this continent, and what we do, or fail to do today, will form the basis of our society for centuries to come. Do we want history to remember us as "The quarrelsome first settlers who drifted without direction and lost a long and glorious tradition" or "The dedicated first settlers who sowed the seeds for the flowering of Zoroastrianism in North America"? The responsibility sits squarely on the shoulders of each and every one of us. We pray to Ahura Mazda for guidance.

Rohinton Rivetna  
President, FEZANA  
Hinsdale, Illinois

**HOMJI'S RESPONSE TO ERVAD BIRDY**

Let me state very clearly that I am writing this as my personal views, in my personal capacity and NOT as a FEZANA official. Notwithstanding an amount of freedom of expression that one may concede, the expression of one's concern should be truthful in the true Zoroastrian spirit, should not be wilfully derogatory to individuals, nor destructive to our institutions built with much thought and care by the more forward looking and constructive sector of the North American society. Nor should they malign individual scholars, to whom the community in fact owes a debt of gratitude for their devoted and single minded scholarship, simply because their views do not conform to one's own.

**Jafarey - Researcher and Scholar**

I know Ali Jafarey from his early days in Karachi where he studied our religion under Dasturji Dhalla and have immense respect for his scholarship and integrity. Ali is not a muslim. He was initiated as a Zoroastrian in Iran. Although the rules of Navjotes are different in Iran, they are no less sacred. The Iranis are to be lauded for having carried through this ritual for centuries despite a persecutive milieu. If we deny this privilege to Jafarey, then we deny it to all Zoroastrians whose Navjote took place in Iran and also to those who reverted back to their ancient faith. Ali Jafarey is not a "salaried individual" despite the fact that he serves the Zoroastrian community "full time". Only during the first 3 or 4 years after his migration to the USA, was he helped financially by some benevolent "influential Zoroastrians"; ever since then his family supports his activities.

Jafarey is an original researcher and scholar whose writings and articles are published in both USA and abroad. His views are based on the knowledge of over a dozen ancient languages and on translations made directly from the Avesta (not Pahlavi). A careful, unbiased study of his works will open the eyes of Athornans and Behdins to the essence of our religion especially of those trained in rituals and later traditions at the cost of the spirit and philosophy of Zoroastrianism. In my opinion Jafarey is shining a new light into long-closed minds and showing the path to Zarathustra's Universalism in the Gathas. The North American Zoroastrian Youth it seems have a better appreciation of Jafarey and invited him to speak at their Congress. They feel he can separate the chaff from the kernel and social customs from religious rituals and traditions.

**Universal Faith**

Now if some intellectuals, in their honest belief in Zoroastrianism are prepared to relegate their own faith and by *CHOICE* become Zoroastrian, do they become renegades? Finding our doors closed to them, if they start their own Zarathushti Assembly, should we become afraid of being tainted? Did Zarathushtra ever close his doors to different ethnics or races? Does our religion permit us to deny others their voluntary choice? In every 'Niaesh' we pray "May the knowledge extent and fame of the commandments of the Mazda-worshipping religion increase all over the world, over all seven regions". The figure of "20,000 converts" is a speculation. In fact why not 200,000 if all seven regions are to be covered? Our identity in North America and the world will decline NOT through increasing our numbers (globally we are already in negative demographic growth so by 2050 we may have near zero survivors), but due to our hard core theocratic, traditional attitudes.

Jafarey quotes chapter and verse to prove that Zoroastrianism is a Universal faith that is not limited to those born Zoroastrian. Priestly and intellectual individuals (conservatives, radicals and Athornan and Behdin scholars) were recruited by the Parsi Punchayat of Bombay in 1903 to review the issue of conversion. The eminent 11 members (ULEMA Committee) included Dorab Dasturji, Peshotan Sanjana, Edulji Antia, Jiwaji Jamshedji Modi and were Unanimous in deciding that "Zoroastrianism does NOT prohibit proselytization but enjoins it". Who today can rival these eminent learned men? By thrashing the waters of ignorance, we are not creating proper understanding or communal harmony. By ignoring our global demographic slide into oblivion, we are only displaying our ignorance of the science of demography and of the world of tomorrow.

Ali Jafarey is a scholar of courage, conviction and integrity and manifests Independent thinking. Let us honor him for that.

Homi B. Minocher Homji  
Weston, Ontario



## READERS' FORUM

*Letters for the Readers' Forum should be sent to Adel Engineer, Editor -- Articles and Letters, FEZANA Journal, 1959 Bristol Court, Naperville, Illinois 60565. They must include the writer's full name, address and telephone number. Letters should be less than 600 words. The Journal reserves the right to edit letters for clarity and space.*

**The Purpose of a Congress**

The "Congresses" convened so far have seemed to me like seminars where scholars have given papers about our religion, its history and its relation to other religions. Indeed, there is a great need for such seminars; and periodic seminars in each community, where scholars can impart religious knowledge to community members should be continued.

In my opinion, however, the main purpose of a Congress should be to bring together fellow Zoroastrians, including all family members, for an exchange of ideas. The sharing of ideas, problems, beliefs, etc. will facilitate the formulation of community goals and objectives so that a plan may be developed to achieve the goals.

Some Zoroastrian Associations In North America are operating by following the ways of their counterparts in India and Iran; viz. a few individuals have taken upon themselves the role of sole protectors of the religion and the community. They seldom share and discuss issues of interest with community members. Congresses should therefore offer an opportunity for all Zoroastrians to participate in the setting of goals and in developing the means to achieve them. I suggest the following agenda items for the next Congress:

- Bringing together the separate Associations (one for Parsees and another for Iranians) that have formed in some cities.
- Bringing together the youth and children as Zoroastrians rather than Iranians or Parsees.
- Guidance for our youth when they are ready to get married and raise families.
- Promoting greater cooperation between individuals and their Associations and between the Associations and FEZANA.

Keikhosrow Mobed  
Westmont, Illinois

مراد از کنگره نوشته کسرو موبد (ZAC) ترجمه گو آریا

بنظر می‌رسد کنگره‌هایی که تا کنون تشکیل شده‌اند مانند سمینارهایی بوده‌اند که دانشپژوهان نوشته‌های خود را درباره دین ما و تاریخ آن، پیگیری دین ما و رابطه آن با دیگر دینها ارائه داده‌اند.

براستی به اینگونه سمینارهای گله‌بگله که دانشپژوهان بتوانند دیدانش و درک دینی را به آگاهی اعضا جامعه برسانند باید ادامه یابد.

با این وجود بنظر من، هدف نخستین کنگره باید گردهم آوردن زرتشتیان که شامل همه اعضا خانواده می‌شود، برای تبادل انکار و درمیان گذاردن طرحها و اشکالات و عقاید باشد. این کار روشن نمودن هدفهای جامعه و همچنین روشهای رسیدن به آنها را ممکن می‌سازد.

پس از روشن شدن هدفها و روشهای رسیدن به آنها، زرتشتیان میتوانند راه و روشهایی را که با عمدیگر روشن نموده‌اند به پایه اجرا درآورند. بنظر می‌رسد که پاره‌ای از انجمنهای زرتشتیان در آمریکای شمالی راهی را که همپایه‌هایشان در هندوستان و ایران دنبال میکنند میپیمایند.

منظور من این است که در این انجمنها ناچیز افرادی خود را تنها پاسدار دین و جامعه میدانند. این افراد بندرت موضوعات مورد علاقه جامعه را با افراد جامعه در میان مگزینند.

بنابراین کنگره باید امکان شرکت و روشن نمودن هدفها و روشهای رسیدن به آنها را به همه زرتشتیان بدهد.

پیشنهاد میکنم کنگره آینده در ونکوور، کانادا موادی مانند مواد زیر در دستور جلسه داشته باشد

- ۱- راه و روشهایی برای گردهم آوردن انجمنهای زرتشتی (پارسی و ایرانی) که در پاره‌ای از شهرها تشکیل شده‌اند
- ۲- روشهایی برای گردهم آوردن بچه‌ها و جوانان بعنوان زرتشتی به ایرانی یا پارسی
- ۳- هنگامی که جوانان ما آماده ازدواج و تشکیل خانواده هستند، چه راهنماییهایی به آنها بکنیم؟
- ۴- روشهایی برای همکاری بیشتر افراد و انجمنهایشان و انجمنها و فزانا

و غیره

## COMING EVENTS

### **Midwest Education Seminar**

A seminar sponsored by FEZANA and the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago (ZAC), will be held on Sunday March 24, 1991, at the Arbab Rustom Guiv Darbe Mehr, 8615 Meadowbrook Drive, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521, telephone (708) 789-1983. This will be an educational seminar on Zoroastrian Doctrine, History, Ethics and Traditions. Speakers will be Keki Bhote, Kay-omارش Mehta, Prof. Kaikhosrov Irani, Ervad Dr. Kersey Antia and Dr. Mehraban Khodavandi. Zoroastrians from the Midwest (and others too, of course) are invited for the seminar as well as the Navroze function on Saturday 23, 1991. Seminar registration fee of \$15.00 including lunch and teas, should be sent to The Zoroastrian Association of Chicago, at the above address.

### **1991 Youth Congress**

The Fifth North American Zoroastrian Youth Congress will be held in Vancouver, Canada in the summer of 1991. Watch for further details.

### **1992 North American Zoroastrian Congress**

The Eighth North American Zoroastrian Congress to be held in Vancouver in 1992, is in the planning stages. FEZANA has solicited input from the various Member Associations for a list of items to be submitted for discussion. It is felt that Congresses are best suited for discussion of issues affecting the North American community, while presentation of scholarly papers should be done at Conferences and religious education should be done at local Seminars. Members of the Zoroastrian community who wish to have an input in this matter are requested to submit suggestions to their respective Member Associations. The Congress Planning Committee is headed by Ms. Soona Engineer, 270 East 40th Avenue, Vancouver BC. V5W 1L8. Canada.

## BOOKS, TAPES AND OTHER MATERIALS

### **Gatha Tapes Available**

The recitation of the Gathas of Zarathushtra is now available on two audio cassette tapes

recorded by Ervad Dr. Kersey Antia, Head Priest of Chicago. The Gathas are the exact words spoken by Zarathushtra and preserved through the centuries. These tapes will be a valuable addition to the library of those who have often yearned to recite or follow these beautiful verses but have trouble with the pronunciations and rhythm. \$950 of the recording and editing costs have so far been borne by Dina McIntyre of Pittsburgh from the funds of her "Gatha Studies Trust". Dr. Antia, with the support of Dina, has fulfilled a long-standing need; to both of them we are deeply grateful. The two-tape set is available from FEZANA, 626 West 56th Street, Hinsdale, IL 60521, (708) 325-5383. A donation of \$10 or more will be deeply appreciated to cover costs.

### **Compilation of Educational Materials**

The Education Committee often receives requests from individuals regarding educational materials for children and young adults on various aspects of Zoroastrianism. Member Associations and Anjumans are requested to send a list of all books, tapes and other audio-visual materials used for classes for children and young adults, that the Association presently has. The lists will be compiled and the master list redistributed to each Association. Please send the information to the undersigned at 10444 18th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6J 4Z8, Canada, by March 31, 1991.

*Firdosh Mehta*

*Education Committee*

### **Parsiana Magazine**

Parsiana, the only news magazine devoted to the world Zoroastrian community, is in need of revenue to survive. This high quality magazine is known for its impartial coverage of world events of current and historical interest. Veera Patel, Marketing Director writes: "Though 18% of subscribers are from overseas [outside India], the advertising revenue from abroad is less than one percent of our advertising revenue ... if Parsiana is to continue serving the interests of overseas Zoroastrians, increased support will have to come from them." A full page ad in Parsiana costs only U.S. \$90. Annual subscription is U.S. \$12 by sea mail and \$20 by airmail for 12 issues. FEZANA urges Zoroastrian businesses in North America to support Parsiana by placing ads in

this monthly international link for our community. Please contact Veera Patel, Parslana, GPO Box 892, Bombay 400 001, India.

### **PLEASE GIVE FROM THE HEART...**

#### ***Jamshed K. Pavri Memorial Fund***

The late Jamshed Pavri of Vancouver, B.C. devoted a lifetime to helping people and supporting noble causes. His approach to humanitarian projects was always full of optimism, deeply embedded in a belief in the innate goodness of man. As a memorial to Jamshed, his family has established the Jamshed K. Pavri Memorial Fund, a special open endowment under the administrative control of the Vancouver Foundation, a registered public charitable foundation under the Income Tax Act of Canada. The interest and investment income generated by the Fund will be made available to charitable organizations as follows:

- One-fourth to the Canadian Red Cross.
- One-fourth to Operation Eyesight Universal, Calgary, to be directed to their work in India.
- One-fourth to the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia library and to promote the study of Zoroastrianism among children, youth and adults.
- One-fourth to the Canadian Chapter of FEZANA to provide assistance to a worthy student studying Zoroastrianism at the university level. (Until the establishment of the Chapter, this amount will be added to the principal of the endowment).

Jamshed Pavri was considered by many as the father of the Zoroastrian community of British Columbia. He played the leading role in founding and nurturing the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia, and was an indefatigable worker for the cause of increasing the awareness of our religion among his adopted countrymen and women.

FEZANA salutes the pioneering efforts of Jamshed Pavri, and urges all to contribute generously to the Fund. Please send contributions to: Jamshed K. Pavri Memorial Fund, c/o Vancouver Foundation, One Bentall Center, 505 Burrard Street, Suite 230, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1M3.

#### ***Anoushiravan Dadgar Girls High School***

Last year, the Anoushiravan Dadgar Girls High School in Tehran was heavily damaged due to a fire caused by a faulty electric connection. The school building with a beautiful Farohar facade was financed by two philanthropic Parsee sisters of the Tata family, and had stood for over 50 years as a beacon of the highest standard of education. Largely due to fund raising efforts of Mrs. Farangis Shahrokh, the California Zoroastrian Center has raised \$28,000, and an additional \$575 were raised spontaneously at the Houston Congress. Many thanks to all who contributed. Renovation work has now started to restore and perpetuate this landmark.

#### ***Sponsor a Needy Zoroastrian***

Helping Hands, a charitable organization headquartered in Poona, India, is seeking sponsors to help deserving students through school in India. This organization does very laudable work distributing food, clothing and financial aid to needy families in India. A sponsor is currently needed for a hardworking student from a poor family, studying for a B.Com (Bachelor of Commerce) degree at the St. Vincents College of Commerce, Poona. Since the cost of schooling in India is very reasonable, a donation of Rs. 600 (about \$35) is all that is needed to sponsor one student for one year. If interested, please write to Mrs. Yezdee Jal Patel, No. 3, Parade Ground Road, Poona Cantt. 411 001, India. Donations are being coordinated in North America by Dinshaw Joshi of the FEZANA Welfare Committee (see address above). Checks may be made to FEZANA marked "Helping Hands - Poona".

#### ***Khushnum Khambatta Surgery***

The family of 10 year old Khushnum Khambatta wishes to thank all the well wishers who have so generously donated for medical expenses. Khushnum needed surgery to save her left leg, which was diagnosed as having bone cancer. The procedure which required the implantation of an artificial femur after removal of the cancerous bone, was successfully performed at the Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital in New York last November. Since then Khushnum has had several setbacks, and has undergone a series of operations involving skin grafts to aid in the healing process. She is still hospitalized and the

parents are staying at the nearby Ronald McDonald house. Her medical expenses continue to mount in excess of the original estimate of \$50,000. Your generous donations to help a little girl in need will be deeply appreciated. Checks to FEZANA, marked "Khushnum Khambatta" may be sent to Dinshaw Joshi at 4515 Willard Avenue, #1609-S, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815-3620. Alternatively, donations and inquiries may be directed to Mrs. Khorshed Khambatta, c/o Mrs. Nileema Noble, 54 Orchard Ridge Road, Chappaque, New York 10514.

*Dinshaw Joshi*  
*Welfare Committee*

### **Hearing-Impaired Student**

An ambitious 24 year old hearing-impaired student from Bombay is pursuing studies in computer programming, data and word processing at Seattle Community College. Due to lack of facilities for the higher education of the deaf in India, he has come to the U.S.A. to prepare himself for his chosen career. He has received financial assistance from most of the Indian charity trusts, but after one and a half years of study, is now in urgent need of funds to complete his education. Your assistance to help this enterprising young man fulfill his dreams will be appreciated. Your checks to FEZANA, marked "Hearing-impaired Student" may be sent to Meher Amalsad at 15842 Villa Nova Circle, Westminster, CA 92683.

*Meher Dadabhoy Amalsad*  
*Helping Hands (HHZYCN)*

### **Money Matters**

For FEZANA to grow it is necessary to develop a strong financial base. FEZANA has currently defined five categories of funds: Welfare, Education, Properties, Religious Education and General. Donations will be deeply appreciated.

The following donations are most gratefully acknowledged and have been forwarded as appropriate:

Anonymous	\$7
Susan Behizadeh for Journal	\$15
Sheroo Daruwalla for ZYNA	\$21
Sheroo Daruwalla for Journal	\$10
Rohinton Dhondy for Journal	\$5
Houston Congress Attendees for Teheran School	\$575
for Gujarat Farmers	\$575
Bejan Irani for ZYNA	\$20
Iraj Jahanian for Journal	\$10
Mehraban Zartoshty for ZYNA	\$250
ZAC (California) for interfaith calendars	\$50
ZAC (Chicago) for ZYNA	\$200
ZAC (Chicago) for interfaith calendars	\$51
ZAMW (Washington) for ZYNA	\$51

### **MILESTONES**

*Please send notices of births, navjotes, weddings and deaths in North America for record-keeping and publication promptly to the Chairman of the FEZANA Information Receiving and Dissemination Committee: Dr. Rustom Kevala, 16525 Comus Road, Dickerson, Maryland 20842.*

### **Births**

### **Navjote (Sudreh-Pushi) Ceremonies**

### **Weddings**

### **Deaths**

### **PRESS CLIPPINGS**

Reproduced in this issue is an interesting article "Thus Spake 460 Houstonians" that appeared in the Houston Press of August 30, 1990 during the week of the Seventh North American Zoroastrian Congress in Houston.

## COMING EVENTS

The day after the FEZANA annual general meeting in New Jersey on July 5, 1991, there will be a one-day conference on Zoroastrianism sponsored by FEZANA and the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey (ZAPANJ) followed by a dinner hosted by ZAPANJ. Watch for future details in the next issue of FEZANA Journal. For further info please contact:

Ms. Freny Ranji  
726 White Horse Pike  
Collingswood, NJ 08107  
(609) 854-2251

## JASHAN SADEH

Zoroastrians across North America celebrated Sadeh around the first week of February. As in previous years, a large gathering of Zoroastrians celebrated this ancient feast in Northern California at the Arbab Rostam Guiv Dar-be-Mehr in San Jose. The ceremony was sponsored by PZO, and was attended by close to one hundred Northern California Zoroastrians from as far away as Sacramento and Los Angeles. The Dar-be-Mehr's 10 acre remote site provided an excellent ground for the lighting of a 20-foot high fire, outdoors. The festivities continued with prayers around the fire by Mobed Khorshidian, followed by dinner and dancing.

## JOBS

*As a service to the North American Zoroastrian community, FEZANA Journal will print jobs / positions in this column free of charge. Names will be withheld upon request. Please send complete information with full address and telephone numbers, to: Dr. Rustom Kevala, Chairperson, FEZANA Information Receiving and Dissemination Committee, 16525 Comus Road, Dickerson, Maryland 20842.*

### Jobs Wanted

Architecture graduate (B. Arch) with a minor in Interior Design from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University looking for a suitable entry level position. Has two summers work related experience. University honor student and Dean's list. Phi Eta Sigma National Academic Honor Society. Designed a Zoroastrian Fire Temple for his B. Arch thesis. Willing to relocate. Zoroastrians who may know of an opening or have contacts in an architectural, interior design or construction firm can help this young man embark on his career. [#J91-1].

## MATRIMONIALS

*The FEZANA Welfare Committee maintains a file of matrimonials and will coordinate the initial contacts between interested parties. All information will be kept in strictest confidence. Submissions and responses to this column may be made to: Roshan Rivetna, FEZANA Welfare Committee, 626 West 56th Street, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521, (708) 325-5383.*

**42 year old divorcee lady**, well placed, management executive secretary with an American company in Bombay. Arts graduate. Height 5'-8" in good health. Hobbies include music, socializing, reading, traveling and movies. Interested in meeting a gentleman about 45 years, over 5'-10" tall, preferably a professional settled in the U.S.A. or Canada. [#M91-1].

**27 year old lady** employed in marketing department of a company in California interested in meeting suitable gentleman. College education in administration and legal services from London and California. All round interests including cultural activities, reading, swimming and jogging. Has also done a parachute jump! [#M91-2].

**24 year old gentleman**, recent graduate in computer sciences from a U.S. university, currently employed in a company creating computer games. Interests include cycling, gymnasium, volley ball, photography, music. Has participated in cycle races. [#M91-3].

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## RELIGION

## Thus Spake 460 Houstonians

*Zoroastrians are not space aliens. Some live in Houston, and their ancient religion has a lot to do with our way of life*

by Tom Curtis

**S**arosh J. Collector, a bearded, somewhat owl-like-looking certified public accountant, swivels in his chair at his southwest Houston office and discusses modern-day attributes of his tiny, ancient, and intellectually appealing religion — one that influenced Christianity and Judaism and underpinned the philosophy justifying the American Revolution.

"People say that anywhere two Zoroastrians are gathered, you have three opinions," Collector says. "The fact that we are educated is our biggest handicap, because everybody wants to analyze the situation for himself."

With just 115 or so families in Houston, Zoroastrians arguably rank as the city's smallest faith. But this weekend there will be hundreds upon hundreds of additional divergent opinions in town as Zoroastrians flock here from as far away as Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles to schmooze and debate in their annual North American Congress.

At sessions in the Hyatt Regency Hotel, delegates including Zubin Mehta, the distinguished departing conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, will wrestle with thorny issues ranging from how North American Zoroastrians should dispose of their dead to whether they should allow religious conversion — currently closed even to spouses of Zoroastrians or children of mixed marriages involving Zoroastrian mothers. All these controversies add up, in their way, to a single, poignant question: Can the world's first religion to worship a single god survive the 21st Century?

Perhaps the most perplexing practical problem they'll take up this week is disposal of their dead. In India and Iran, Zoroastrians adhere to an ancient custom similar to that once used by many American Indian tribes. Averse to burial or cremation (because those practices pollute earth and fire, both sacred to believers), they expose the corpses to be eaten by vultures on so-called "Towers of Silence."

Trimming their traditions in a culture that finds that approach unacceptable, most North American Zoroastrians now acquiesce to burial or cremation. Still, one Houston adherent says the most theologically acceptable solution would be to instantly vaporize cadavers with a single zap from a laser gun.

Perhaps the most complicated issue this week's gathering will address is the "demographic trap" causing their religious membership to dwindle toward extinction.

Here's the crux of the calamity that threatens Zoroastrians' very existence: late marriages, smaller families, intermarriage outside the faith, and a tradition that deters conversions even by spouses of Zoroastrians. (This is partly because Zoroastrians see themselves as a fusion of race — all are basically of ancient Aryan stock — and religion.)

For instance, Sarosh Collector's wife, Pearlina, whom he met while they were students at the University of Oklahoma, is non-Zoroastrian and like other outsiders, is basically unwelcome to join the faith.

"Conversion is a touchy subject, and I don't raise it," she says. Before marrying, the Collectors agreed to raise

steps of central Asia, the prophet Zarathustra founded a religion celebrating a single, benevolent, not-quite-all-powerful God named Ahura Mazda — Lord of Wisdom. (If that moniker sounds familiar, it's because the Japanese auto company Mazda intentionally chose His name.)

In hymns called the Gathas, the first poems in history attributed to a known author, Zarathustra introduced not just monotheism but the notion of free will and a number of other seminal ideas: the concepts of heaven, hell and final judgment; salvation; human stewardship over the other creations in nature; and the perfectibility of life on this earth.

For these contributions alone, asserts



**Houstonians Meherwan Beyce and Farrokh Mistree will confer with other Zoroastrians here this weekend.**

their children as Zoroastrians. Unlike Judaism, which is matrilineal, membership in this religion is defined by being born to a Zoroastrian father. "There definitely is an inconsistency" between Zoroastrianism's general absence of sexism and this patrilineal cultural tradition, Sarosh Collector admits. Like his father, the Collectors' young son Rayomond could also marry outside the religion and raise his kids as Zoroastrians; but their daughter Dina couldn't.

Zoroastrians "are an endangered species," acknowledges Shapur Pavri, a Texaco accountant here who is also a Zoroastrian priest. Zoroastrians worldwide today have dwindled to a mere estimated 125,000 — the vast majority of them in India (where they are called Parsis), perhaps 7,000 to 10,000 on this continent. But it wasn't always so.

Some 3,500 years ago on the vast

Columbia University's Dr. J.R. Russell, Zarathustra probably should rank among history's most important intellectual figures since "all the monotheistic civilizations, and most of the philosophies that have arisen to shape the modern world, depend ultimately on certain of his teachings."

By way of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, Zoroastrian ideas helped inspire the American, French and Russian Revolutions, writes Russell, a non-Zoroastrian who will attend the Congress. Benjamin Franklin's and Thomas Jefferson's notion that men have inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness have been traced to Zoroastrianism, as has the reference in the Declaration of Independence to "Nature's God."

Masons, the ancient secret society formally organized in 18th-century

England, preserved and disseminated much Zoroastrian lore — including the crown of an archangel named Mithra, a crown which has seven long rays. When a French Freemason designed a huge statue as a gift from France to the U.S. to commemorate the two countries' common heritage of freedom, the result was the Statue of Liberty — complete with fiery torch (a central Zoroastrian symbol) held aloft and seven Zoroastrian rays projecting from her crown.

I became aware of Houston's Zoroastrians because one crisp evening last fall, rushing for my return flight on a little 46-passenger turbo-prop heading from Shreveport to Houston, I happened to sit next to a distinguished-looking fellow traveler who'd been on the plane from Houston with me early that morning. He had a full Lincoln-esque beard and a shock of thick, gray-flecked black hair, a striking profile, no tie but a sports jacket over an intricately embroidered vest. He radiated an air of seriousness, nobility, even mystery — like some old-time potentate or prophet.

He introduced himself as Farokh Mistree, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Houston. Some weeks later we met again, this time intentionally for dinner with our wives. I, at over drinks I asked his religion — assuming that, like most Indians, he was either Hindu or Muslim. "I am Zoroastrian," Mistree had said.

According to Zarathustra, Mistree explained, man is the finest creation of this entirely good but not quite all-powerful God. There is, the religion holds, a clear-cut, ongoing war between good and evil, life and death, wisdom and ignorance. All wickedness flows from the invasion of the world by an evil spirit called Ahriman. Man's purpose is to help God remove evil from the world. Using his greatest gift — his mind — to do good works to improve human welfare and the environment, man empowers Ahura Mazda and helps win the final, inevitable victory over Ahriman.

Zarathustra enshrined reason and free will and insisted that to find the good, people should think for themselves and decide what they believe.

So far Houston lacks even the most modest Zoroastrian house of worship, but there is talk of opening one here. Meanwhile, Houston's Zoroastrians meet irregularly for services at Rothko Chapel, the non-denominational sanctuary on the campus of St. Thomas University in Montrose. There men cover their heads with skullcaps called topees and priests light ritual flames and, with cantor-like cadences, chant prayers that were first uttered 1,500 years before Christ.

Several months back, Mistree invited me to a monthly Sunday school class at the pleasant, middle-class home of a Zoroastrian couple in southwest Houston. This session was an adaptation to American religious conventions — in Zoroastrianism there are daily prayers at home but no regular weekly services. Still, certain special days such as the Zoroastrian New Year's Day (March 21) are set aside for services, and festive celebrations called jashans may be scheduled to commemorate the birth of a child, a housewarming, or some other important event.

The Sunday school class began with the priest Shapur Pavri and his son reciting prayers in the archaic languages

of Avestan — the parlance of Zarathustra's holy poems — and Pahlavi, the old Iranian language. Then Mistree sat on the raised hearth in front of the fireplace vividly reciting a classic Zoroastrian story for a dozen or so children fidgeting on the green shag carpet in front of him.

Next the kids and adults present repeated a litany of belief, the closest thing Zoroastrians have to a creed: "I believe in truth. I believe in good. I believe in virtue for its own sake — because it is right. Thank you for this good mind to think about good thoughts, good words and good deeds."

Zoroastrian spirituality isn't at all other-worldly. Spiritual success is to be attained by promoting happiness and prosperity. Greed, though, is anathema. According to Zarathustra, money is to be used for charity — and many Zoroastrians make sure that it is. Nearly all the 15 or so Zoroastrians I spoke with in Houston had been beneficiaries of scholarships from Zoroastrian educational

trusts; most had repaid the scholarships to help recharge the coffers.

Zarathustra prodded his followers saying, "Let us be those who make the world wonderful." In this inherently activist religion, a better world isn't just to be hopefully awaited; it is supposed to be created daily by each person through ideas, words and deeds that improve life and vanquish evil.

In addition to an ethos that encourages optimism, education, personal prosperity and charity, several other Zoroastrian attributes appeal to me: among them are its nonauthoritarian priesthood and its anti-proselytizing stance.

But so far, its rich tradition and historic impact haven't helped keep Zoroastrianism alive in America, where children of immigrants and natives alike frequently reject the faith of their fathers.

Take the case of Meherwan Boyce, a stout, prosperous Parsi who owns a Houston-based international combustion engineering firm. Glancing down at the cameo ring of Zarathustra on his left pinky finger as he chatted with me in his cavernous Houston office, Boyce explained that the ring was once his great-grandfather's, then his grandfather's, next his father's and now his.

Today the religious continuity that succession implies is in peril. Though both Dr. Boyce's daughter and his son went through the traditional coming-of-age rite called a navjote — a kind of Zoroastrian confirmation — these recent UT and Texas A&M graduates have since drifted away from their ancestral religion.

"I would like them to come back to it," Meherwan Boyce admits. "But I don't know whether that will happen." □

Tom Curtis is a Texas Monthly senior editor based in Houston.

• AUGUST 30, 1990 • Houston Press

The Japanese auto company Mazda intentionally chose His name.



## FEZANA JOURNAL

*The FEZANA Journal is the official publication of the Federation of Zoroastrian Association of North America. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FEZANA.*

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