

JOURNAL

Dae-Behman-Spendarmad 1387 AY (Fasli) • Amordad-Shehrever-Meher 1388 AY (Shenshai) • Shehrever-Meher-Avan 1388 AY (Kadimi)

**THE PROMISE OF INCLUSION, THE POWER OF LOVE:
PURSUING GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING,
RECONCILIATION AND CHANGE
November 1-7 2018**





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SPRING 2019

A Proposed New Model for Mobedi in N. AMERICA

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Boi (Sacred Fire Ceremony performed by Ervad Tehemton
Mirza at 7 a.m. Nov 4, 2018, at PoWR, Toronto.



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Dolly Dastoor with President elect Audrey Kitagawa, and Exec Director, Dr Larry Greenfield.

In the 125 year old history of the Parliament of World's Religions (PoWR) it is the first time that this event was convened in Canada and in Toronto which has the largest concentration of Zoroastrians in North America. This allowed us to showcase our community and our religion. And the community rose to the occasion!!

This issue of the Journal is a special issue guest edited by Farishta Dinshaw with a detailed account of the events and the extent of participation of the Zoroastrians as, religious leaders, key note speakers, individual presenters, panelists and volunteers. I hope you will enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed participating in the event.

And staying on the theme of showcasing our community we have included an article of the opening of the Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry Institute of Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS and three religious education events of member associations.

I wish to clarify the concept of the parliament, as many have written that how come the PWR did not discuss and resolve issues like religious strife, wars etc etc. We did, each of the morning assemblies were devoted to different themes with powerful speakers, videos etc. the themes were: Indigenous People's program, Women's Dignity, Climate Action, Countering War, Hate and Violence, and the Next Generation. A Universal Declaration against Sexual Violence was read in unison and signed by faith leaders and those attending. The major assemblies and plenaries were most uplifting and people of faith and conscience are now working together to understand, reconcile and change some of the world's most difficult realities

But the parliament is NOT a legislative body. Starting from 1893 it is an attempt to create a global dialogue between faiths, It is an opportunity to examine how we can live together in difference while also creating a just, peaceful and sustainable world for all. It is a rare opportunity to listen and exchange ideas with everyone from grassroots leaders to Nobel laureates.

From the Toronto Parliament new programs of action have been launched: a Network of Climate Commitments, the 5th Directive on Care for the Earth for the Global Ethic, specially created on its 25th anniversary year, World Interfaith Harmony Week engagement and promotion, a partnership with Religica to address the plague of violence in everyday life. These podcasts on Religious Response to Violence will be beginning from January 2019. Expanding advocacy through our United Nations Task Force, producing resources to expand work for women's dignity, advancing Justice, Indigenous Peoples', countering war, hate & violence.

Each Parliament offers us the chance to enhance our lives by addressing critical agendas. And where do we go from here? How can we build on the connections made, how do we pursue understanding and change in intra faith dialogue? It is up to each one of us to make history together by participating in interfaith movements.

I would like to end with a quote from Richard Watts

"It seems to me that the world's religions are like siblings separated at birth. We've grown up in different neighborhoods, different households, with different songs, stories, traditions and customs. But now, we've been reunited, and, having found each other after so many years apart, we look into each other's faces and we can see the family resemblance. We're back together again, and it's very good."

Personally this has been a joyous experience and I thank the community for giving me the opportunity to create space for Zoroastrians to be showcased at the Parliament of World Religions

Wishing each and every one of you the best in 2019

Dolly Dastoor



Indigenous people from around the world at the opening ceremony.



Members of diverse faiths stand united at the closing ceremony.



INTRODUCTION



THE 7TH PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS

NOVEMBER 1-7, 2018, TORONTO

FEZANA, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, organized a contingent of North American Zarathushti religious and community leaders to represent the faith at the 7th Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR), Nov. 1-7, at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Zarathushtis have been represented at all Parliament events in the past, including the inaugural Parliament in Chicago in 1893, where a paper by Sir Jinanji Jamshedji Modi was read aloud in absentia.

Featuring the theme: *The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love: Pursuing Global Understanding, Reconciliation, and Change*, the 7th Parliament of the World's Religions is the oldest, largest, most diverse and inclusive global interfaith event. In 2018, it featured 1000 sessions and 1,600 speakers across six major tracks.

- The Women's Track: The Dignity of Women Across the World's Wisdom Traditions
- Countering War, Hate & Violence Track: Peace and Love: Not War, Hate & Violence
- Climate Action Track: Care for Our Earth, Responsibility for Our Future
- The Indigenous Peoples' Track: The Spiritual Evolution of Humanity & Healing Our Mother Earth
- The Next Generations Track: Interfaith Has No Age, Youth Voices for Change
- Justice: Advancing Concrete Change Toward a Just, Peaceful, and Sustainable World

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By Dr. Dolly Dastoor and Dr. Ardeshtir Irani

As co-chairs of the FEZANA PoWR committee, we most sincerely thank all the presenters, volunteers, and participants, too numerous to name, for making us all proud to be Zarathushtis. We could not have done it without the willing co-operation of you all. Your hard work and dedication paid off as we were even mentioned at the 125th anniversary banquet!

Some special thanks are due to the following individuals for their commitment and contribution.

- Afreed Mistry needs a special vote of thanks for being our anchor in Toronto prior to the Parliament.
- We would also like to thank Marzi Byramji for printing our pamphlets and posters as a gift to the community for the PoWR.
- A special thanks to Arzan Wadia and Aban Rustomji, Nawaz Merchant and Armaity Anandsagar for well decorated booths that attracted a lot of traffic. And to Zara Nadeer Contractor and Tanya Hoshi for contributing their design expertise.
- A big thank you to Ervads Tehemton Mirza and Kobad Zarolia for the religious ceremonies of the purification of the Fire (Boi) and water which was attended by over 50 people at 7 a.m.! And also to Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli and Mobedyar Guloo Austin for the Jashan demonstration where there was standing room only.
- Thank you to Meherji & Jamshed Madan for presenting the movie "On Wings of Fire".
- Thanks to Mitra Jam, the President of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario, and her team for organizing the visit of the 30 plus visitors to the Rustom Arbab Guiv Dare Mehr on November 1. Those who came for the visit were very impressed.
- Thank you to Mani Rao for her patience and perseverance in making a lay choir sing the *monajats* to some level of proficiency! Thank you to all the singers who participated.
- All our presenters and moderators either on a panel or as individuals. You made a mark, and for that we thank you.

- Thanks to Cyrus Rivetna for the model of Dar- e Mehr in Houston which was on display together with models of places of worship of other faith communities throughout the Parliament week.
- A resounding vote of thanks to our star performers, Parisa Khosravi, the Zarathushti speaker at the opening plenary who was considered the most effective speaker of the evening, and Armene Modi, the major speaker of the Women's Assembly on November 3, 2018, who spoke passionately about her work with under privileged girls and the efforts of her NGO to empower them with education.
- Thanks too, to all the attendees who shared photos of the events printed in this issue - we cannot credit you on each individual photograph, but you have our collective thanks. The ones who shared albums include Arzan Wadia, Guloo Austin, Katayun Kapadia, Mitra Jam, Nawaz Merchant, Roshan Rivetna.

Dr Dolly Dastoor is a widely published research clinical psychologist and specializes in the assessment of dementia, most recently was clinical Administrative Chief at the Program in Dementia and Psychiatric Comorbidity at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute in Montreal and is Asst Prof in Psychiatry, McGill University. She is past President of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec and of FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America). She is currently the editor in Chief, of the FEZANA Journal since 2005.



Dr Ardeshir Irani is a solo pediatrician practicing in the Metro Detroit area for 20 years. He is a founding member of the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan and is currently its President. He is actively involved in local and regional interfaith activities, is active with the Interfaith Leadership Council (IFLC) of MetroDetroit and currently serves as the Co-chair of the Interfaith Activities Committee of FEZANA with Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala. Ardeshir lives in Farmington Hills, Michigan with his wife Shekufa and children, Sanaya (21) and Sarosh (19)

GUEST EDITORIAL

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw

The 7th Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR), concluded on November 7, 2018 in Toronto after seven days of interfaith dialogue and displays of rites and rituals. Its purpose – to celebrate differences, recognize commonalities, and appreciate the uniqueness of the various belief systems – was resoundingly successful. We need such events, particularly at this time in our global experience of divisiveness and violence, which has escalated 9/11. In a TED Talk titled, “Which country does the most good?” (July 2, 2014), independent policy advisor, Simon Arnholt, said that there is a risk that we will become “cultural psychopaths”, without empathy for people who are not like us, separated by race or religion. Now more than ever, we need to come together through work and worship to build bridges of understanding and non-judgement, establish networks based on respect, and dismantle prejudices and stereotypes.

FEZANA's involvement in interfaith activities is a part of its commitment to promote Universal Fellowship (Gatha Vahisto Ishti, Y53.8). Participation in the Parliament of World's Religions, driven primarily by Dolly Dastoor's tireless effort as Trustee and Vice President of the Board of the Council of the Parliament, promoted the commitment into action. Sixteen Zarathushtis, ranging from young adults to those in their golden years, participated as presenters, panelists, and moderators. And many others showed up to cheer them on. Zarathushti presence was felt from the beginning, with Parisa Khosravi's rousing opening keynote address on November 1, 2018 to Homi Gandhi's random encounter on the train to the airport after the Parliament closed on November 7, 2018. This issue of *FEZANA Journal* gives voice to those stories of successes as well as the jubilation of new friends, new ideas, and renewed enthusiasm. Participants' perspectives also highlight where we fall short, what we need to focus on moving forward – from engaging Zarathushtis across generations in intrafaith dialogue to recognizing that our collective voices on sexual and gender-based violence are muted.

It is easy to forget, while basking in the glory of a job well done, that the work towards a “Promise of Inclusion” is ongoing. It is not only FEZANA's responsibility as an organization that represents us, but also our individual responsibility to step up. According to Zarathushtra, each of us is a potential *saoshyant*, a potential champion, a potential

savior. He said, “Those men shall be the saviors of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth, Wise One” (Gatha Spenta Mainyu Y48.12; translation Stanley Insler, 1975). In the end it will not matter what we say at conferences, but what we do in our day-



Farishta Murzban Dinshaw is an Adjunct Professor with the graduate programs in Immigration and Settlement, and Criminology and Social Justice at Ryerson University, Toronto. She also works with newcomer and ethno-linguistic communities in Ontario to raise awareness about family violence, addictions, and mental health. She has presented on Zarathushti faith, heritage and history at several congresses, including the “World’s Religions after September 11 Congress” in Montreal. She is a regular contributor to Zarathushti community journals and is the author of “Discovering Ashavan”, a young adult novella set in ancient Iran about a young boy befriended by Zarathushtra.

to-day lives to promote love and peace that will refresh our world and bring the promise of Universal Fellowship to fruition. **



PROMOTING LOVE



“IT ALL BEGINS WITH THANKSGIVING”

By Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield

Larry Greenfield is the executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, a regional judicatory of the American Baptist Churches U.S.A, and the theologian-in-residence for the Community Renewal Society, a progressive, faith-based organization in Chicago that works to eliminate race and class barriers and advocates for social and economic justice. Larry is now Executive Director of the Parliament. Excerpts from his speech are given below.



The religions of the world, I contend, have a special role in making that fundamental change happen. The religions of the world, and the adherents of those religions, can and must be the central agents of that change.

But to do that, the religions of the world must change.

Fundamentally, and perhaps radically, I want to suggest that religions must now reverse and change their ways of relating beliefs to action, of relating theologies to ethics, of relating doctrine to practice. Historically, religions have insisted that their beliefs, their theologies, and their doctrines determine and shape the ethics, rituals, practices, and behaviors of themselves and of their followers. But in some cases, that way of doing business contributes and leads to practices and behaviors and actions that are earth-destroying.

That cannot continue.

Instead, religions must look first for the kind of changes that are now required to save the earth, and proceed then to reformulate—even revolutionize—doctrines and beliefs, so thought and action can be mutually supportive in saving the earth.

Next, the religions of the world must reverse and change a ubiquitous and archaic way of thinking: namely, that they can do this world-saving work by themselves, separate from other religious and spiritual communities. They must now join together in this cause of the earth’s salvation. This means interfaith and interreligious communities. That collaboration among the religions of the world should now be a central and absolute necessity.

The religions of the world must also reverse and change their old ways of being accommodating to the powers of the world, be they political, or economic, or ideological, insofar as those powers contribute to the destruction of the earth. So religions of the world, for example, must now join together to take on the false religion of free market capitalism that exploits the earth and divides the peoples of the world between rich and poor. They must together condemn and work to overcome the subservience and corruption of democratic polity to powerful economic forces. They must together stand against tyrannical political and economic and cultural forces that are oblivious to their part in the death of the earth.

Next, the religions of the world must also reverse and change their ways of playing by the rules of the world's dominating powers. They must draw on the depths of their own teachings about compassion and justice and peace, and be subversive—yes, subversive—in undermining principalities and powers that are leading to the earth's death. Religions need to recover the power of civil disobedience and nonviolent action, grounded in love and commitment to the common good and the life of the earth.

Finally, religions of the world must reverse and change their ways of tolerating inequality, discrimination on the basis of race and gender, any and all violations of human dignity, the mistreatment of animals, the destruction of the earth's life-giving resources, and instead be in the forefront of movements that challenge these forces of evil.

It all begins with thanksgiving.

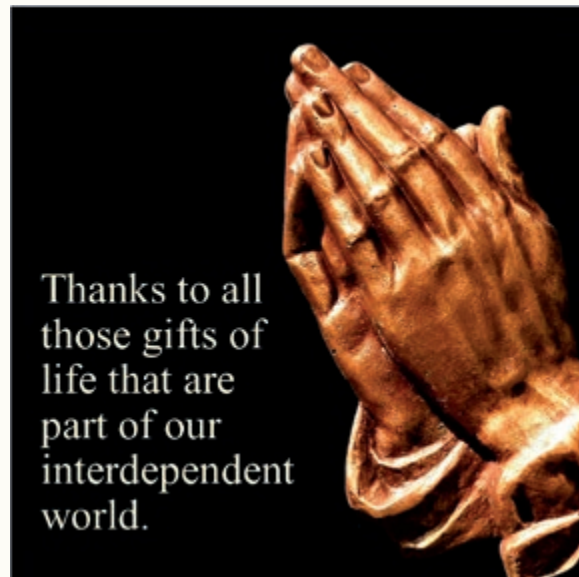
Thanks to each other.

Thanks to all those gifts of life that are part of our interdependent world.

Thanks to all of those who are committed to the salvation of the earth.

Thanks to that holy reality, that sacred reality, that life-giving reality on which we are all dependent.

It is the first word. It must also be our last word.



FEZANA'S PROMISE

By Farishta Murzban Dinshaw

FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America) constitution charted in Chicago and incorporated in the State of Illinois on November 15, 1986 states in its Preamble, "The activities of this Federation shall be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and unity amongst all Members, and with due regard for the principles of goodness, truth, reason, benevolence, implicit trust and charity towards all Mankind." (FEZANA Journal, Fall 2006, pg 10). This is based on "A Airyema Ishya", the closing stanza of the Vahista Ishti Gatha, in which Zarathushta culminates his message with a prayer for a Universal Fellowship of men and women who are guided by their good mind. In the past 30 years, several FEZANA activities have embodied the theme of 2018 Parliament of World's Religions, "The Promise of Inclusion, The Power of Love".



UNITED NATIONS/NGO COMMITTEE

This committee provides opportunities to Zarathushtis, through volunteer action programs, to strive towards a peaceful and unified world. Its activities are anchored by the two annual conferences at the United Nations: the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Department of Public Information /Non-Governmental Organization.

- One of the committee's signature proposals to the UN is to designate "a season of peace" for ten days from 9/11, the day of the launch of M.K. Gandhi's Satyagrah [insistence on truth using non-violent non-cooperation] movement to 9/21, the day of prayer as assigned by United Nations.

- FEZANA is part of the coalition for the “Initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace (2011-2020)”. The UN Decade is aimed at promoting partnership between UN member states, UN agencies, as well as religious communities, spiritual movements, and organizations representing indigenous traditions.
- FEZANA uses the Zarathushti principle of equality of the sexes to promote gender rights at the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, and lends its voice on behalf of marginalized women worldwide by organizing panels such as “Empowering Women to Break Away From the Circle of Poverty” illustrating how lack of education, no access to clean water, malnutrition and lack of employment contribute to the vicious circle of poverty for women.

HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES

FEZANA has several humanitarian initiatives in keeping with the tenets of the “Ahuna Vairya” prayer, which urges Zarathushtis to care for the less privileged.

- The Zarathushti Youth without Borders (ZYWB) program promotes Humanitarian Internships by giving financial support to Zarathushti youth interested in carrying out activities in the area of global medicine, health and hygiene issues, rural education and school support, poverty reduction and hunger relief, and disaster relief. Internships have ranged from working in an orphanage in India to a surgical mission in Chad.
- FEZANA participates in global disaster relief efforts by organizing fund raising campaigns for tragedies such as the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 or the tsunami in South India in 2004. FEZANA often works in collaboration with World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) UK/India/Pakistan offices to partner with authentic relief agencies on the ground.
- The Critical Assistance Committee provides assistance to individuals, families and organizations facing temporary difficulties due to medical emergencies, violence, or legal issues.

INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES

The objectives of FEZANA’s participation in the interfaith arena are (1) to participate in inter-religious dialogue to deepen mutual understanding; and (2) to participate in programs that promote social justice, religious freedom, and world peace. (*ref Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington. www.ifcmw.org*)

- At a global level, FEZANA participates in interfaith conferences and events such as the Parliament of World Religions and “The World’s Religions After September 11th”, and supports the work of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL).
- At a local level, FEZANA participates in events promoting interreligious co-existence, combating violent religious extremism, human rights, and disarmament, such as participation in the “9/11 Unity Walk” arranged in collaboration with Religions for Peace, USA and “the Faiths and Politics Luncheon” in Washington D.C., hosted by the Sustained Dialogue Institute and Interfaith Works.
- At a community level, FEZANA’s member organizations give presentations and set up displays about the Zarathushti faith and heritage to build bridges with other faith communities, such as at an event hosted by the Etobicoke & Mississauga Faith Community Leaders Forum, Toronto. Representatives of FEZANA’s member organizations also attend festivals and functions such as an Iftar dinner during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Volunteers also give presentations in schools, often taking the “sudreh kusti” into the classroom for show-and-tell or setting up the Haft Sheen table at NoRooz.

Correction

FALL Journal 2018 Vol 3 Page 1 Photo Credit Mehrdad Aidun .



THE PAST



2018 ANNIVERSARY BANQUET

Commemorating both the first World's Parliament of Religions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition — the birth of the interfaith movement — as well as the convening of the first modern Parliament in Chicago in 1993, the Toronto 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions celebrated both of its anniversaries at the Anniversary Banquet on November 5, 2018. A century ago, the 1893 World Parliament of religions was not only a convening of Eastern and Western traditions, but a revealing of the immense contributions that Jainism, Yoga, Buddhism, Baha'i, and Christian Science can make to the human family. It was also a watershed moment in the awareness, acceptance, and celebration of women in the worlds of faith and thought; a fight for recognition and equality that still continues to this day. The Anniversary Banquet was an occasion to look back on moments of birth — 125 years and 25 years — and to look ahead to renewed and continued flourishing. One of the speakers at the banquet told the amazing story of how Swami Vivekananda

and Jamsetjee Tata were on the same ship and how it was the discussions that both had during the trip, that the Indian Institute of Sciences and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research was started by J N Tata under the urging of Swami Vivekananda.

(From the PoWR 2018 website. Additional reporting Arzan Wadia).

THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS AND THE ZARATHUSHTI CONNECTION

by Aban Rustomji

The Seventh Parliament of World's Religions in Toronto, Nov 1-7, 2018, drew more than eight thousand registrants from all over the globe. Media reports said attendees came from more than two hundred different religious and spiritual traditions. As one would expect, there were devotees from the largest religions - Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism - and then other smaller religions were also represented including African Traditional, Indigenous, Pagan and Zoroastrians.

The world's oldest and most diverse global interfaith event marked its 125th anniversary by bringing together leaders



and followers to Toronto to “pursue global understanding, reconciliation and change.”

Trustee and Vice President of the Board of the Council of the Parliament, Dolly Dastoor, had Zarathushti registrants and volunteers revved up for a variety of sessions, displays and prominent keynote speakers. Once again, small in numbers, the Zoroastrian presence was felt and acknowledged.

Zoroastrian Presence

The first Parliament was convened in 1893 in Chicago as an auxiliary event to the

Ervad J.J Modi's paper read in absentia at the first Parliament in 1893.

World Columbian Exposition. The Chairman, Rev. John Barrows, invited Dadabhoy Naoroji who was unable to attend. Subsequently, Ervad Jivanji Modi, secretary of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, was asked to prepare a paper on Zoroastrian customs, which was featured in the proceedings. The Parliament billed itself as the world's largest gathering of the representatives of religions from the world. Noted attendees included Susan B. Anthony and Max Muller, the eminent scholar of the comparative study of religions. Muller observed that the Parliament "stands unique, and unprecedented in the whole history of the world." However, the superstar of the 1893 event was a captivating Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda who mesmerized the 5,000 assembled delegates, greeting them with the words, "Sisters and brothers of America!" Swami Vivekananda became a forceful and popular speaker in spite of the fact that he had never before addressed an audience in public.

1993 – Celebrating the Centennial

In 1987, a small but committed group supported by Rohinton Rivetna, embarked on the project to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the event. The second conference was held in 1993, once again in Chicago, to celebrate its centenary. Rohinton Rivetna served as a founding trustee and Vice-President of the Council of Parliament of World Religion, and now serves as Trustee Emeritus. Zarathushti religious leaders from India, Iran, Europe, and North America took their rightful place alongside the major religions of the world. Zarathushti delegates shared their knowledge of theology, history and practices and drew upon the rich and timeless message of Zarathushtra to address contemporary issues. Zarathushtis were especially honored with the presence of Dastur Dr. Kaihushroo Jamasp Asa, High priest of the Anjuman Atash Behram of Bombay, Dastur Dr. Jehangir Oshidari, Vice-President of the Mobeds's Council of Tehran, Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia, Principal of the Dadar Athornan Madressa, Padma Shri Homi J H Taleyarkhan, Dr Homi Dhalla from Bombay. Other dignitaries included Dr. Kersey Antia, High Priest of Chicago, (late) Mehraban Zartoshty, President of the North American Mobed's Council, and scholars from UK, Australia, India, USA, and Canada.

Subsequent Parliaments

The next parliament was held in Cape Town, South Africa (1999). Zarathushtis established a high-profile presence at the Parliament, with Dr. Homi Dhalla, Dastoor Kersey Antia, and Ervad Parvez Bajan representing the Zoroastrian faith at the plenary sessions alongside Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama.

The fourth parliament was held in Barcelona, Spain (2004). About a dozen Zarathushtis from India, UK, USA and Canada, and the sole Zoroastrian resident of Barcelona, Marzban Cooper, joined "to seek peace, justice and sustainability, and actively committed to work for a better world. Dame Dr. Meher Master Moos and Khojeste Mistree chanted the "Zoroastrian Blessing" accompanied by Zoroastrian delegates, at the closing ceremonies.

Melbourne, Australia (2009) was next. Members of the Zoroastrian Association of Victoria, under the leadership of Perviz Dubash were very enthusiastically involved in the event and were joined by a dozen Zarathushtis that came from all over the world.

The Parliament returned to the United States after a period of twenty-four years. Salt Lake City in Utah (2015) hosted attendees and delegates from all over the world for a five day event that brought thought leaders from various religions to discuss, interact, and learn about other religions and to find common group for building better understanding at all levels. FEZANA was proud to be a participant in this dialogue representing the Zarathushti community.

Remarkably, the Zarathushtis have taken a rightful place alongside of other major religions all through the years. The Seventh Parliament in Toronto appears to be a successor to the watershed in 1893. Like the original, the significance awaits us in the future. **

ADDITIONAL READING:

FEZANA Journals are archived and available at www.fezana.org

1. Rohinton Rivetna, *Zoroastrian Presence at the Parliament of the World's Religions*, FEZANA Journal, February 1993.
2. Roshan Rivetna, *History Turns a Page, Zarathushtis at Parliament of World's Religions*. FEZANA Journal, Winter 1993.
3. Dr Jesse Palsetia Parliament of the World's Religions and Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrians' International Presence: Perspectives with Other Religions and Communities. FEZANA Journal Winter 2009.
4. Shernaz Minwalla, FEZANA Presentations and Panels Stewardship of the Environment FEZANA Journal Winter 2015.

DETAILS OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1: Inside Cover	Photograph 2: Title Page
<p>THE WORLD'S CONGRESS OF RELIGIONS THE ADDRESSES AND PAPERS DELIVERED BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT. AND AN ABSTRACT OF THE CONGRESSES HELD IN THE ART INSTITUTE, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.,</p> <p>AUGUST 25 TO OCTOBER 15, 1893. Under the Auspices of THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION.</p> <p>EDITED BY J. W. HANSON, D. D. CHICAGO, ILL. 1893</p>	<p>Page 452, the first page of an article on: "Belief and Ceremonies of the Followers of Zoroaster." Paper by JIVANJI [sic] JAMSHEDJI MODI, of India.</p>

Aban Rustomji's bio appears on page 38.



THE PREPARATION



PRE-PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS CONFERENCE

By Firdosh Mehta

Firdosh Mehta is the Past President and founding member of The Zoroastrian Association of Alberta, Canada. He has served on many Committees and Executive, and is Past President of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA), and received the Outstanding Zarathushti Award from FEZANA in 2012. He has represented Interfaith and community organizations at International religious and peace conferences in Barcelona – Spain; Salt Lake City, USA; London – UK; and Pune - India. Firdosh gives a review of the Pre-Parliament of the World's Religions Conference in this write up.

As a member of the Global Clergy Association of Canada (GCAOC) who organized this forum, in collaboration with Multifaith Action Society, I attended the Pre-Parliament Conference on September 8, 2018. The theme of the conference was Reconnect to Life, Reflect, Renew, Rejoice! This was the 5th conference which was organized by the GCAOC in Metro Vancouver Area. The program was attended by about 100 Vancouver area residents.

The main purpose was to create awareness about the upcoming Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR) in Toronto from 1-7 November 2018. The PoWR is the oldest and largest international religious organization on earth which promotes respect and harmony between diverse cultures, faiths, spirituality, and people, for alleviation of poverty, suffering, injustice, oppression, violence and exploitation. It has been addressing critical issues such as growing disparity between rich and poor, human rights, environment protection, First Nations' issues,



women, youth, etc.

The Unitarian Church of Vancouver was the gracious host. Interfaith calendars and researched data on the Western Oil pipe line from Edmonton to Vancouver were distributed.

The program started approximately at 9.30 a.m. After initial Benediction and introductions, the live video presentation of Chief Phil Lane Jr., a breakout group discussions on social justice issues was conducted by various volunteers. After a short break, we re-assembled in the main church hall again to hear Rabbi Dr. Laura Kaplan. Both the presentations were educative, inspiring, and full of social awareness topics of Canadian history. After which lunch was served and a second breakout group discussions on the environmental protection issues presented. It was collectively recognized that we all are individuals, but must relate to each other respectfully and peacefully. Our collective future can only be reshaped if every human being is treated with love and compassion; and Governments must ensure transparency and accountability.

For more information visit - www.multipaithaction.org.

The FEZANA Booths at the Parliament

Two exhibit booths were set up to spotlight the Zarathushti religion.



The definitive Zarathushti presence at the Parliament was **the FEZANA Exhibition Booth**. It became the homing beacon for everyone who wanted to learn about our faith, and for some a way to quell their curiosity about meeting a practicing Zarathushti! The booth showcased rare books, manuscripts, and other publications were available on sale. It also included a video wall where a specially curated movie was shown on a loop with other Zarathushti themed videos. A Haft Seen table was setup to educate the visitors about the Zarathushti celebration of the New Year in the spring. Specially designed stickers were distributed to all who visited.

FEZANA supports the United Nations Global Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality, and everyone who visited our booth was asked to show their commitment for the HeForShe movement and given a sticker that

they put on their Parliament ID's to show support. Visitors were given informational material specially created for the Parliament, addressing Zarathush-ti religion as a faith being practiced, FEZANA's role in the Interfaith Community and at the United Nations and the role of FIRES in archiving our books and manuscripts amongst a variety of functions it performs out of its headquarters in Houston.

The special video was put together by Jennifer Rose and Bruce Benedict along with inputs from Aban Rustomji Dolly Dastoor and Arzan Sam Wadia. Video footage was provided by Tanya Hoshi and others. The video was in memory of Khushroo Bharcha-Reid, who served in the United States Army and lost his life to cancer.

The overall booth design was curated by Aban Rustomji, Dolly Dastoor and Arzan Sam Wadia.





Afreed Mistry helped with the local logistics. Three new publications were created for the event. The booth graphics were handled by Zara Contractor, Leaa Contractor. The brochure graphics were done by Anaheez Karbhari. The printing of all the material for the Exhibit booth was done gratis by Marzi Byramjee of Regal Press, who unequivocally said that doing so was his way to support his community. That spirit of giving is alive and kicking in our community, and the exhibition booth was a perfect testament of that.

The Parliament had a special section, **Family Festival Fair**, where participating religious groups showcased fun activities to expose children to the beauty of the world's religions.

Nawaz Merchant and Armaity Anandasagar teamed up to create a Zarathushti booth for children. The theme "What's in your pocket?" focused on the Gereban, or symbolic pocket of good deeds in the Sudreh. An enormous five-foot sudreh was displayed, accompanied by a diorama of three mannequins, showing a dastoor/priest in white jamo, a child navjotee in sudreh, kusti and topi and the mother in purple gara saree. Posters explained the tenets of our religion, Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, as well as the navjote /sudreh pushi initiation ceremony where the child is invested with sudreh and kusti as daily reminders to live a good life.



adults, who made crayon rubbings of the farohar, atash, and lamassu, the winged bull symbols. They collected stickers of Atash, Farohar and Cyrus's Cylinder, and learned about Cyrus the Great's declaration of Human Rights from 2500 years ago! Each child got a small envelope labeled 'my pocket of good deeds'. Visitors also wrote messages of love and condolence to the Tree of Life, Pittsburgh, congregation in memory of the lives lost in a violent hate crime in October 2018. Many thanked us for doing this and providing them with the address, so they could send their own letters as well. Volunteers from Ontario and New York managed the booth during the six-day festival to welcome and address visitors throughout the day, as well as to assemble and disassemble the booth. *(In the photo above volunteers from left Nawaz Merchant, Armaity Anandasagar, Perveen Katila, Yasmin Memon, Gulnar Jeffereis).*

The pamphlets, stickers displayed on page 14 can be obtained from FEZANA office, Chicago or FIRES in Houston, for use by member associations at their events

From reports by Arzan Wadia and Nawaz Merchant



FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA SUPPORTS UNITED NATIONS WOMEN SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY



MISSION

FEZANA Information, Research, and Education System (IRES) is FEZANA's centralized collection of books, manuscripts, libraries, magazines, and scholarly research materials in print and electronic form, primarily pertaining to the Zoroastrian faith, culture and history, and to disseminate this information to the public.

IRES is headquartered at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston, where the main collection of books, manuscripts, audio/visual materials, and historic memorabilia are located. IRES maintains a centralized database of all books, manuscripts, and resources held in other North American Zoroastrian Associations' libraries.



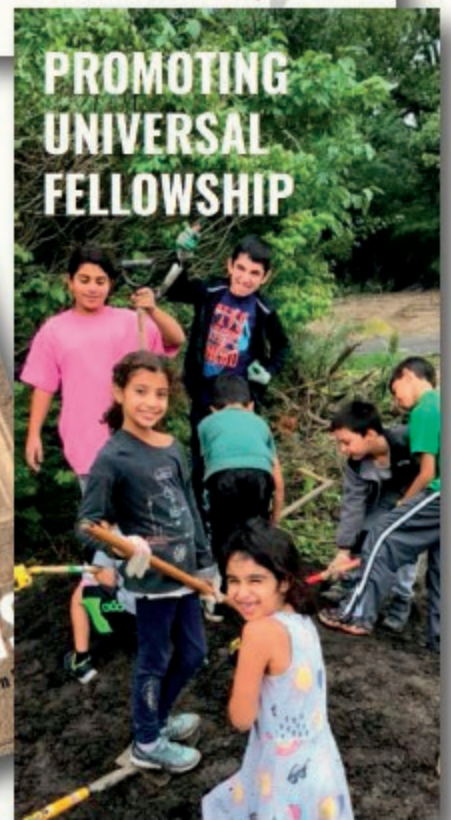
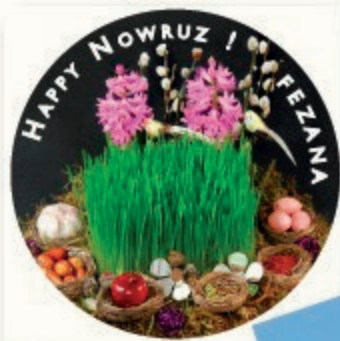
ABOUT FEZANA

Founded in 1987, FEZANA is the coordinating body for 18 Zoroastrian centers, 26 Zoroastrian members, and 15 corresponding groups throughout the United States and Canada, working to restore the religious and cultural heritage of the Zoroastrian faith.

and practice of the Zoroastrian faith in the United States and Canada, and to promote the religious and cultural heritage of the Zoroastrian faith.

Website:

Education System.





THE PRAYERS



SACRED CEREMONIES AT THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS

Katayun Kersi Kapadia is the FEZANA Congress Committee Co-Chair (2016 to present) and has served as a FEZANA President (2012-2016). In this write up she reports on the sacred rituals demonstrated at the Parliament and explains their significance.

FIRE “BOI” CEREMONY



It was 7 a.m. and a very cold, but sunny Sunday morning on November 4, 2018 when 40 individuals of different faiths from the Parliament of World Religions (PoWR 2018) gathered to participate in the Zarathushti Boi (Sacred Fire) Ceremony. Ervad Tehemton F. Mirza, Vice President of the North American Mobeds Council (NAMC) performed this abbreviated Boi ceremony at the Sacred Fire site tended by the Canadian Indigenous Peoples hosting this Parliament.

Ervad Mirza explained that the ceremony delivers reverence to the sacred fire and seeks its blessings for a successful and productive PoWR. “May the fire grant us the wisdom to create interreligious harmony and a framework for expressing many visions of a just, peaceful and sustainable future.” He explained that Zarathushti ceremonies and rituals are performed in the presence of a sacred fire or source of light that represents purity of

elements and God’s wisdom and light. Atash is the most amazing of Ahura Mazda’s creations and Zarathushtis use Fire as a medium to pray to Ahura Mazda. He described the three types of fires and the white clothing worn by him as a priest, signifying purity. He explained that the covering of his nose and mouth prevent him from polluting the sacred fire during the ceremony. He also mentioned that there are 11 Atash kadehs (places of worship) in North America of which two are located in Toronto.

The prayer Atash Nyaayesh was recited during the Boi Ceremony to sing praise to the Sacred Fire and sandalwood was offered at certain important stages. At the words “Dushmata, Duzukhta, Duzvarshta”(bad thoughts, bad words and bad deeds) Ervad Mirza struck the bell at each of these words to drive away all bad thoughts, words, and deeds. Ervad Mirza had distributed pieces of wood as well as sandalwood to the participants and at the completion of this ceremony he requested them to offer the wood to the Sacred Fire, so that the Sacred Fire may bless us all with good health, good mind and prosperity. He also went around the circle offering them to take a pinch of the ashes of the Sacred Fire and to put it on their forehead as a sign of humility and respect to the Atash.

SACRED WATER CEREMONY: The Zarathushti faith places great importance on purity of water, recognizing that pure and clean water is a vital source to all on this earth. So, on Tuesday, November 6, 2018, I found myself participating in this ceremony performed



by Ervad Tehemton Mirza. It was 7 a.m. and pouring rain, cold and wet so we moved the ceremony inside and, to our surprise given the weather, we had 25 interested individuals of various faiths avidly listening and watching with keen interest this ceremony being performed by a Zarathushti mobed.

Ava Ardvisur Anahita personifies water and blesses those who are respectful to water. We witnessed a small part of the Yasna ceremony. This ceremony is performed by two mobeds (priests) and used fresh natural water to purify the Aalat (instruments) used in this ceremony including a mortar and pestle. The mobed uses milk (representing animals) and cleanses the plants and twigs (representing plants) whose juice will be extracted. The central rite of the Yasna ceremony is the “ab-zohr” i.e. preparation of a liquid extract “hoama” which is said to have healing properties. Ervad Mirza while expressing the reverence for each element mixed the water, milk and twigs while reciting yasna prayers. At strategic points in the ceremony he hit the pestle on the mortar to create a sound which is supposed to drive away the evil. Part of the “ab-zohr” was offered to the participants for their benefit, and the other part was offered to a nearby stream thus completing the circle of life from its source to its destination

ZOROASTRIAN THANKSGIVING RITUAL - THE JASHAN CEREMONY



Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli accompanied by Mobedyar Guloo Austin performed an abbreviated version of the jashan ceremony and explained its implications to the vast audience standing room only on Tuesday, November 6, 2018 at PoWR. This presentation would give an insight into the Zoroastrian faith and why Zarathushtis consider themselves to be stewards of creations. *(photo above Ervad Jehan Bagli on left and Mobedyar Guloo Austin on right)*

A Jashan is performed to celebrate various occasions ranging from a festivity for a private family, a communal festival of Nature or a memorial service. The prayers are recited in Avesta language with some parts in Pazand. The layout for a Jashan includes all six elements of creation –fire, water, earth, plant, animal; and humans. The worship started with the liturgy specially composed to Extol the Fire which is addressed as the Son of Ahura Mazda, implying it as the very essence of the Supreme Divinity. The verses recited were parts of the hymns known as the Gathas composed by prophet Zarathushtra. Dr. Bagli then explained the important significance of the flower ceremony enacted during the Jashan. The prayers were finally concluded with the Zoroastrian greetings of the ritual handshake “*Hamazor Hama Asho Baad*” meaning “*May We Be United in Strength with All That Is Righteous*”.

Listening to the questions being asked and the interest that was kindled among the participants at all the above three sessions it was very clear and heartening to see that the Zoroastrian religion continues to have its place among the world religions. Thanks to Ervad Tehemton Mirza, Ervad Jehan Bagli, and other mobeds we will continue to create an awareness about the Zoroastrian religion around the world.

I would like to thank Ervad Tehmton Mirza and Ervad Jehan Bagli for sharing with me their handouts on the above topics that they distributed to the participants during the performance of these Zoroastrian religious ceremonies. I have used the contents from these handouts in preparing the above write-ups.



THE PRESENTATIONS



Zarathushtis participated in a total of 16 presentations as individuals or panelists. Summaries of some of the presentations are given below.

PLENARY PRESENTATION

By Parisa Khosravi/ Thursday, November 1, 2018



The Opening Plenary of the 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions laid the foundation for all of the programs, productions, and plenaries that followed.

Parisa Khosravi, a strategic adviser and a multi award winning veteran journalist and news executive was a keynote speaker at the opening ceremony. With over three decades of experience on the global stage, Parisa has first-hand experience dealing with world leaders, dignitaries and high-ranking officials across the globe and opening doors to difficult and dangerous parts of the world where freedom of speech is in no way guaranteed. Throughout her career as senior vice president for international news gathering, national news gathering, global relations and the first ever ambassador for CNN Worldwide, Parisa directed historic coverage of countless award-winning news stories. Parisa left CNN in 2015.

Parisa spoke on the topic of compassionate leadership to audiences across private and public sectors.

The transcript of her speech is given below:

It is wonderful to come together at this interfaith gathering, and celebrate our diversity. Our theme is: The Promise of Inclusion and The Power of Love. Tonight, I would like to share with you my perspective on these topics, and how we'll never know what is inside someone until we give them a chance.

A little background about me. I was born in Tehran and moved to Chicago with my family in 1979 just before the revolution in Iran. As we are an interfaith gathering here, I want to tell you a little about my faith. I am a Zoroastrian, which is an ancient religion. It is recognized as one of the first, if not the first monotheistic religion in the world. Our prophet is [Zarathushtra] Zoroaster, Zartosht. We have a holy book, Avesta. Our three principles are: Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, which is *Pendareh neek, Goftareh neek, Kerdareh neek* in Persian.

I have tried to live my life by following these three simple, yet all-encompassing principles and values of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.

Cyrus, the great Persian king who followed this faith, wrote the first human rights charter about 2600 years ago. He called for freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of movement. This was over two and half thousand years ago. Think about it. The Cyrus Cylinder with these inscriptions of the first human rights charter presently sits at the British museum.

I have always enjoyed being a student of history.

As a journalist and a news executive in my 28 years at CNN, I had the awesome responsibility of covering and watching history from the front row seat. I directed the coverage of countless historic events, from the fall of the East Bloc, to the genocide in Rwanda, the tsunamis in Southeast Asia and Japan, to the earthquake in Haiti and the Arab Spring. I have had the opportunity to travel the world over and over again, meet popes and presidents, and every day people and seen so much of humanity's best and worst. It was humbling, sobering and full of life lessons.

Life as you know, is full of challenges and opportunities. Sometimes challenges turn into opportunities, sometimes opportunities turn into challenges. I consider all of it gifts which help one grow and evolve as a person. When life has tested me with the real big ones, the real heartbreaks, I try not to take it personally or become a victim to it. I don't say: why me? Because frankly, why not me, why anyone? I don't say why me, instead I think: Wow Me!

As hard as it may be, I try to look at it as a way to grow, become stronger, more compassionate, and empathetic. It may not change the outcome, it probably won't but certainly the attitude we have while going through a tough challenge, will change the experience for us and those around us. People are not born leaders, we become leaders by how we respond and handle ourselves in the valleys of life and during the difficult times. And how we choose to apply the lessons that life has taught us.

I want to tell you about the person who has had the biggest influence on my life, my ultimate teacher, my son: Payam! His name actually means "message" in Farsi in Persia. He is my heavenly message.

Payam is a teenager, he is on the autism spectrum and he is non-speaking. Couple of years ago at the age of fourteen we finally had a communication breakthrough. Payam is now essentially spelling to communicate, he expresses his thoughts letter by letter by pointing to an alphabet board.

We shared our very personal story in a talk I gave in order to help others, open hearts and minds and change perceptions about autism. The talk is called: The Power of Finding Your Voice. I invite you to watch it and share it with others who it may benefit. It may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-AE1CIEZEA>

For all those years we had no sense of Payam's cognitive level and understanding. When we finally got a glimpse inside his thoughts, we realized that he is wise *beyond* his years. Soon after he started to communicate, during one of his lessons his teacher read to him about Geysers. At the end of the lesson she asked him to write about what makes him erupt? This is what Payam wrote at the age of 14: "Centuries of discrimination have created geysers of hate and intolerance. These acts erupt and hurt the children of the world needlessly. Teaching acceptance is my life's work."

This message of love and inclusion was written letter by letter on an alphabet board by a young man who as he describes his "unruly body...mouth that disobeys...and outward façade" would challenge our perceptions and understandings of many with autism.

Earlier this year, Payam was invited to give a presentation at an education conference.

He titled his speech: *Rethinking Autism and Therapeutic Approaches*. You may see it at <https://youtu.be/obVvXcwTgtw>

He opened live in front of the audience by typing on a keyboard. The audience was mesmerized watching the overhead screen as words and sentences formed letter by letter as he typed his message.

Our passion and calling sometimes evolves and even changes. Giving voice to the voiceless was always my passion and joy as a journalist. It has now taken a completely different meaning as I advocate for my son and his peers, or as he calls them: "other silent champions" to ensure their voices are heard.

My perspective has evolved throughout the years as an immigrant, a journalist and as a mother. I have seen both man-made and natural disasters turn lives upside down, overnight. I didn't just cover revolutions, I lived through one personally, and experienced my own life change dramatically after the 1979 Revolution in Iran.

As a journalist, I have seen countries self-destruct as one group has dehumanized another group.

I have seen fear show up as hate and intolerance, leading people to lose all perspectives. I worry about how civility is breaking down. Not much shocks us anymore. We watch the news and the latest tragedy and outrage with a hopeless

and helpless attitude. And we numb ourselves with meaningless material goods and are concerned about acquiring even more, while so many on this earth on this very day don't even have the basic essentials such as clean drinking water or safety.

The thing is, none of us knows what life has in store for us.

What if we end up in a war zone, a natural disaster zone, be designated into a discriminated group, or become disabled? Would we want to be treated the way so many of our fellow human beings are treated this very day under the same circumstances? Since we don't know what is down the road for any of us, shouldn't we for no other reason but self interest be more responsive to the plight of others?

Who knows, one day, we may be the ones in need of a helping hand.

The advancement of technology has democratized the media, the flow of information has been exponential. We have unprecedented access to knowledge, but are we more informed? I don't believe we are. We need to know the facts, reach across borders and barriers, marvel at our sameness and find compassion and solutions for the less fortunate. Inclusion and compassion. Values which this gathering is all about, and our world needs much more of.

I want to wrap up by again quoting Payam, who shares his Good Thoughts by using his alphabet board to spell out his Good Words, and advocate for Good Deeds. "My dream is for the entire world to abolish the pain those experience from unnecessary judgments because of each person's unique differences. People need to recognize how their attitudes are negatively impacting our growth for humanity as a whole."

A message from my non-speaking teenage son on the autism spectrum who has been quietly observing everyone, and everything all along and is now finally able to share his message, his Payam with the world. Love and inclusion! **

BICYCLE BRIGADE

By Armene Modi/Saturday, November 3, 2018

Armene Modi founded Ashta No Kai (ANK), a non-profit organization to educate and empower rural women and girls in 10 villages in Pune District, India in 1998. Although her work for gender justice at the grassroots level has involved many challenges, Armene's efforts towards empowering rural women have resulted in their finding a voice to become active change makers in their villages. Various interventions she launched to promote the education of rural adolescent girls, including a Bicycle Bank, a scholarship program, and a life skills education program have helped to improve the educational outcomes of hundreds of adolescent girls. Armene was selected as an Echidna Global Scholar by The Brookings Institution in 2017, and is the recipient of several national awards for her contribution to the empowerment of rural women including the CNN-IBN network's "Real Heroes" award.



*In her presentation, on the panel, **"To Give Voice To The Voiceless: Empowerment Of Marginalized, Vulnerable Women And Girls Through Education Programs"** she moved beyond talk to concrete straightforward action. The ANK has been an incredible holistic model of ongoing efforts to provide opportunities to the most vulnerable. It focuses on the physical access to education as well as dismantling the ideologies and policies that prevent girls from thriving. It has prevented early marriages and teenage pregnancies.*

I would like to focus on child marriage, a critical issue of gender injustice that affects, 650 million women worldwide who were married as children, according to a 2017 UNICEF report. Each year, 12 million girls are married before the legal age of 18. In India, the obsession with marriage as the end goal of a girl's life is a widely accepted practice with the result that 27% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday. India, in fact, has the largest number of child brides in

the world — one third of the global total.

Child marriage has devastating consequences. Besides perpetuating patriarchy, gender inequality and poverty, it denies girls their rights to health, education, and opportunity. It denies them the social support and autonomy they need to promote their wellbeing, explore their potential, and live a life of dignity. It also denies girls a right to a childhood and puts them at an increased risk of experiencing violence. It is also an almost insurmountable barrier to adolescent girls' education. Sadly, child marriage negatively impacts not just the girl herself, but also imposes very significant social and economic costs on the community around her.

Ashta No Kai, which means "For a Better Tomorrow" in Japanese is a non-profit I founded that works in 10 villages near Pune, India, and aims to empower and educate rural women and girls. In the early years, the challenges to adolescent girls completing high school were a high rate of child marriages and distant schools.

Parents, fearful for their daughters' safety and skeptical of the benefits of educating them, tended to marry them off soon after they reached puberty. In the belief that the educated girl of today will become the empowered woman of tomorrow, ANK introduced a Bicycle Bank to enable easy and safe access to high school in distant villages for rural girls. This helped to lower school dropout rates and arrest early marriages. A recent study conducted in our villages, showed that the mean age at marriage for girls, which was 12 prior to the introduction of the Bicycle Bank is currently 19.

However, merely providing two wheels to access education and keep girls in school was not enough. ANK launched several other initiatives to deter child marriages, including a Life Skills Education program that provided instruction on important issues affecting girls' well-being. The program while focusing on daily life skills promoted their empowerment by building their self-confidence and agency.

Moreover, an offshoot of the Bicycle Bank was a scholarship program which enabled more than a thousand rural girls to follow their career choices. Some have become dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, others, computer, and automobile engineers, agricultural researchers, and IT specialists, etc. The initiatives ANK launched for adolescent girls to curb child marriages also included engaging mothers as allies.

Efforts were made to sensitize them to recognize the ill effects of child marriage and convince them of the importance of educating their daughters. These messages resonated with the mothers, as many of them had themselves been married off as child brides and had to forego an education. They wanted a better life for their daughters.

In these ways, ANK has shown how a serious social problem like child marriage can be addressed with simple low-tech, cost-effective community level interventions such as a Bicycle Bank. As Susan B. Anthony, the famous American women's activist once said "the bicycle has done more to emancipate women than anything in the world".

Someone once said: "Ordinary people when they come together can achieve extraordinary things. Ordinary people when they come together can change the world. Emotion without action is useless. It is not enough to feel bad about wars, about poverty and gender injustice and wish we could give the future a different world. We ARE the future. If we don't take action now, there will not be a future." **

HOMEWORK OVER HOUSEWORK: THE PRATHAM SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM

By Adina Mistry/ Saturday, November 3, 2018

Adina Mistry is a high school senior and, at 17, was the youngest Zarathushti presenter. She is a member of her school's academic honors society, founder and President of the Pratham Club, and teacher for 9-11-year-olds at the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York religion class. Her commitment to the education and empowerment of young women, coupled with her belief in Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, inspires the several volunteer community service efforts in which she is actively involved.

As a 17-year old, it was an honor for me to be invited to participate as part of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) team for the Women's Dignity Track to present on "Homework over Housework: The Pratham

Second Chance Program”.

I am always excited to present on the topic I am passionately committed to - the education and empowerment of young women - and was proud to introduce our audience to Pratham during my presentation on the panel.

My presentation brought attention to the different stories of struggles for young women in India and their reasons for dropping out of school. However, many of these young women are united in their endeavor to get back what they once lost – a chance to complete their secondary education. Pratham’s Second Chance Program gives them just that, a second chance to put education first.



Presenting alongside accomplished panelists, Armene Modi and Father Tomy Karyilakulam, gave me a unique insight into how organizations, with differing goals, serve a common larger purpose. It was truly inspiring to hear about the work of Ms. Modi’s NGO Ashta No Kai, and Father Tomy’s Bel-Air Hospital of the Indian Red Cross Society, and the change they have been able to bring about through their efforts. I hope that one day I will also be able to effect change on a larger scale.

Personally, I am fortunate to have access to a good education and opportunities to study what I am passionate about - parts of my life I took for granted until I was introduced to the Pratham Second Chance Program in 2015 when I presented at the 58th Commission on the Status

of Women at the United Nations. After learning more about the Program, I was drawn to the plight of young women struggling to get an education and felt compelled to do my part to help them. In the summer of 2015, I volunteered at a Pratham balwadi, or preschool, in the slums of Mumbai, India and taught English and math. Through my first-hand experience with Pratham, I now know that getting even a basic primary education is a struggle and privilege for millions of children around the world. I returned home determined to improve the access to education for children, especially young women, in India. Throughout my high school years, I have used the resources available to me to benefit those, especially girls, who are struggling to get an education. I founded a Pratham Club at my high school aiming to raise awareness and funds for women’s education in India. In less than one year, we raised over \$1,000 for Pratham’s Second Chance Program, enabling two young women to complete their secondary education.

Today, I benefit from those that have come before me and made education an equal opportunity for men and women. Pratham has given me the inspiration to dedicate myself to the spread of education as a tool for gender equality. I truly believe that knowledge brings independence and freedom of thought, and as Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”



Adina Mistry on right, Dolly Dastoor on left

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Homi Gandhi, Behram Pastakia, and Dolly Dastoor of FEZANA for their encouragement which motivates me to continue to present Pratham’s Programs at public forums to raise awareness. Man

"WE CANNOT SUCCEED WHEN HALF OF US ARE HELD BACK "

MALALA YOUSEFZAI

MOVING BEYOND PIOUS THOUGHTS, PRAYERS AND HUG FESTS: HOW CAN RELIGIONS REALLY CONTRIBUTE TO WORLD PEACE?



By Kersi Shroff /Saturday, November 3 2018

Panelists: Mr. Homi Gandhi, Ms. Jasvir Singh, Mr. Arvind Vora.
Moderator: Kersi Shroff.

Kersi B. Shroff, Presenter and Moderator of the Panel, is a member of the Executive Committee of the Montgomery County Interfaith Council, Maryland. The topic was developed to counter a Syrian cleric's declaration that "the resolution of conflict is beyond the scope and ability of [religious] entities." Here is a report of the panel he moderated.

Jain, Sikh and Zoroastrian leaders were tasked with discussing their faith-based approaches towards solving conflicts and achieving peace. The teachings and practices of world religions reveal spiritual and moral principles that support peace, social justice, reconciliation and harmony. An extensive experience in 'religious peacemaking' has been achieved. Many examples can be cited of contributions that religions have made to peacemaking – from Europe, South Africa and Sudan to the Middle and Far

East. In the Balkans, religious leaders inspired by scriptures worked effectively to achieve peace. In the Philippines, a conflict between the Catholic and Muslim populations in Mindanao was peacefully resolved by the intervention of multifaith leaders. Religious leaders have also played prominent roles as mediators, to support an interreligious track, parallel to political diplomacy.

Arvind Vora, a **Jain**, and a founder of the Shanti Fund and the Long Island Multi Faith Forum (LIMFF), gave an account of his multifaith activities under the Shanti Fund banner.

With both organizations working together, Mr. Vora created the synergy for a tolerant, peaceful community on Long Island, a fact attested to by both Sikh and Muslim leaders who gave credit to LIMFF for not having suffered a single backlash after the 9/11 attacks, even though Long Island, a suburb of NYC, had the highest number of casualties. This showed the practical application of religion in maintaining communal peace on Long Island.

The Shanti Fund was honored by Suffolk County for its work and was invited to install a statute of Mahatma Gandhi. Mr. Vora concluded that by actions and activities - not simply prayers and pious thoughts – the Shanti Fund and LIMFF have made a peaceful impact.

Jasvir Kaur Singh, a co-founder of the **Sikh Healing Collective**, a mental health relief effort, described the life of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion who stated, "Do not divide people on the basis of faith, caste or culture; we are God's children, hence equal. Do not consider anyone alien. We all belong to one brotherhood, but speak many different languages and practice many different ways to worship Him." Guru Nanak was a champion of human rights of the weak and protested religious and political terrorism.

Sikh history is full of people who stood up for justice by calling out blasphemy, not being afraid to tell the truth, not being afraid to talk across the table and standing up for their rights as well as that of "others". We cannot be bystanders, but have to love, protect and stand for those in need and stand up to the bully. This is our everyday duty, this is how we will have more peace. Being a beacon of light in a world of darkness!

Homi D. Gandhi, **President, FEZANA**, acknowledged that faith-based leaders extensively engage in Interfaith meetings locally, nationally, and internationally and exchange ideas on how to live peacefully. He noted that all faiths are expected to respect other faiths, speak good words, and to follow up on those words. In the Zoroastrian faith they are recognized as *Humata, Hukhata and Huvarshata*. Human beings are the ultimate creation of the Wise Lord (Ahura Mazda) and are endowed with the intellect to think, to decide, to choose right thoughts and use the right words. But the most important aspect of this is to follow-up with the right actions.

Homi proposed that the Good Deeds to be pursued should be based on Love and the pursuit of Global Understanding, Reconciliation, and Change. It is possible to work for a peaceful world so that development and progress can be achieved without conflict, loss of lives and destruction. Since many conflicts have a religious undertone, the UN must be equipped to respond, based on faith engendered principles. A religious branch of the UN, separate but equal to the secular organ must therefore be created to address all religious based conflicts.

At the 6th Parliament of the World's Religions in 2015, the Zoroastrian and Sikh communities had introduced a petition urging the creation of a Religious Arm of the UN. Homi asked all faith leaders to join the two communities in once again signing the petition to present to the next General Assembly. **

INCLUDING MINORITY RELIGIONS IN SCHOOL AND INTERFAITH CURRICULA AND CONFERENCES

by Maneck Bhujwala and Ardeshir Irani /Tuesday Nov 6, 2018

Panelists: *Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala, Dr Rini Ghosh and Dr Jaideep Singh.* Moderator *Dr Ardeshir Irani*

Maneck Bhujwala is the co-founder of Zoroastrian Associations in California and is involved in interfaith activities including serving as the past-president, Greater Huntington Beach Interfaith Council; Board Member, South Coast Interfaith Council; North American Interfaith Network, Director, World Zoroastrian Organization. He also serves as volunteer priest. He serves as the cochair of the Interfaith Activities Committee of FEZANA

Ardeshir Irani's bio is in the Introduction section.

The panelists discussed the lack of proper representation of their faiths in school and college curricula as well as at interfaith events, and what can be done to improve this situation in future.

Dr. Jaideep Singh was not able to make it for the session. **Dr Ardeshir Irani**, the moderator, introduced himself and the two panelists, Rini Ghosh and Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala. He asked the audience if they had heard about the Holy Land and all raised their hands. Then he asked if the audience had heard about the other Holy Land which was the birthplace of the world's four religions, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism & Sikhism and is also a place of refuge for a fifth religion, Zoroastrianism for the last thousand years.

There was a mixed response to that question, but it set the tone for the presentation.

Photo above from left Dr Rini Ghosh, Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala and Dr Ardeshir Irani



Dr. Rini Ghosh was the first presenter. She talked about arriving in California many years ago and realizing how poorly the non-Abrahamic faiths were represented at various interfaith gatherings. Being a Vedanta scholar, she worked hard to increase awareness in minority faiths and beliefs, and now Los Angeles has one of the most vibrant interfaith communities with many diverse religions and beliefs being represented. Dr Ghosh runs her own program of feeding the needy as part of her social activism.

Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala spoke about his experiences with increasing awareness about the Zarathushti faith in the Greater Los Angeles area and all across California and the USA. He also talked about being ordained as a Mobedyar and how that has energized his IntraFaith and InterFaith action. He talked about the need to have full representation of all faiths in order to have more meaning dialogue. He included a lot of personal experiences throughout his presentation. After a brief Q&A session, Dr Ardeshir Irani concluded the session with another audience vote. He asked if all who are present believe that all humans are created equal and should be treated as such. All hands went up. Then to the question if all religions are created equal and should be treated as such, brought a majority show of hands. **

TIME FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR INTERFAITH ORGANIZATIONS TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE

by Rohinton Rivetna / November 6, 2018

Panelists: Asayo Horibe & Balwant Hansra, Susan Pudelek and Myriam Renaud. Moderator: Rohinton Rivetna

Rohinton Rivetna was founding trustee and vice-president of Parliament of the World's Religions; Zoroastrian representative on Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago; founding president of FEZANA; president and founding trustee of Zoroastrian Association of Chicago. Rohinton retired in 1997 as Director of Environmental Engineering at American National Can Corp. In this write-up, Rohinton summarizes the panel discussion he moderated.

This session was meant to spawn serious dialogue and deliberation to make interfaith organizations more effective towards the goal of bringing peace and respect among religions of the world. The panelists -- all informed individuals who have participated in Interfaith affairs and are familiar with the workings of Interfaith organizations -- presented their thoughts.

The goal of Interfaith work is to bring world peace between the faiths, through understanding and respect for each other. As Hans Kuhn has said:

*"There shall be no peace on this earth,
until there is peace among the faiths."*

But, are we getting any closer to that goal?

The function of Interfaith work is to mobilize the peoples of the world, of all faiths, to work towards world peace. But "Preaching to the Choir" is often heard. Is this true? And if so how do we elevate to the next level and engage a wider circle of individuals?

The Structure of Interfaith work is through Interfaith dialogue, for it is believed that:

Dialogue ➡ Understanding ➡ Respect ➡ Peace

Our Interfaith organizations have followed this process for decades. Yet, peace eludes us! There are disturbances throughout the world, mostly with religious undertones.

SUGGESTION FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

For some time now, voices have called for the promotion of "Intrafaith" dialogue, within each religious community; where Interfaith organizations serve as incubators for Intrafaith dialogue, to spread the message down to the grass roots of each religious community. The panelists explored this concept of "Intrafaith" dialogue further, and presented how it was practiced within their faith communities.

Dr. Balwant Hansra (Sikh Religious Society of North America and Trustee emeritus of the PoWR) presented his experiences and thoughts on how the message of Interfaith organizations can be disseminated within the Sikh community.

Susan M. Pudelek (Coordinator for Interreligious Relations, Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Archdiocese of Chicago) spoke about the "Parish-to-Parish Learning Community," which provides resources for relationship building and connecting with other religious communities; learn about other religions; explore outreach ideas and encounters with people of other religions. *(photo above from left Asayo Horibe, Rohinton Rivetna, Susan Pudelek, & Balwant Hansra, Myriam Renaud.)*



Dr. Myriam Renaud (Principal Investigator and Project Director of the Parliament of the World's Religions' Global Ethic Project) described the five shared ethical directives of the Global Ethic, which provide a moral foundation for a better global order: non-violence and respect for life, solidarity and economic justice, tolerance and truthfulness, equal rights for men and women, sustainability and care for the earth - a vision that can lead society away from chaos. **

WOMEN AND MEN OF FAITH NEED COLLABORATION TO PROMOTE PEACE

By Dr Dolly Dastoor/Tuesday November 6, 2018

Panelists: Dr Sakena Yacoobi & Dr. PL DeSilva, Ervad Kobad Zarolia, Moderator: Dr Dolly Dastoor

Dolly Dastoor has been active in women's organizations, especially Zonta International and attended CSW meetings in Vienna and New York. Here she summarizes the panel discussion she moderated.

In her opening remarks, Dolly Dastoor said, "People especially women and girls become weapons of war and suffer violence, gender discrimination, sexual abuse, in conflicts caused by civil societies and religion. Violence, sexual abuse and gender discrimination is prevalent in all countries. By including all who suffer we are offering solutions based on love." It is not enough for people of faith to come to these organizations and talk about problems in their religions, They should also discuss the situations faced by their communities on the ground as a result of wars and violence and suggest solutions to stop the violence and on how to help the people who suffer. In this presentation there were three presenters from different faith communities who have witnessed devastations firsthand. They will describe what their faith has motivated them to do to correct the situation. All faiths need to come together to solve the problems.

Our first speaker was **Sakena Yacoobi**, a Muslim, the founder and Executive Director of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) an Afghan women-led NGO founded in 1995. She is well known for her work for the educational rights of women and children. Since 1996, 16 million Afghans have benefited from AIL's education, training and health programs. The Sakena Yacoobi Hospital has been built in Herat. She supports four private high schools and a radio station has been established to disseminate information about the importance of education, values, and harmony.

She has earned international recognition for her work and received numerous awards including the Opus Prize, WISE Prize in Education, Sunhak Peace Prize and the Sri Sathya Sai Award for Human Excellence in Education, as well as 6 honorary degrees including one from Princeton University. AIL was the first organization to offer human rights and leadership training to Afghan women and when the Taliban closed girls' schools AIL supported 80 underground home schools for 3,000 girls.

Sakena Yacoobi spoke about the importance of education for both women and men of faith, and only with education can they be included in peace processes. She spoke about the work that she and AIL have done along that line in Afghanistan including conferences on Love and Forgiveness, using the poetry of Rumi and many workshops with youth and adults both male and female on peace and love and forgiveness. Using grass roots strategies and holistic approach. AIL now serves hundreds of thousands of women and children each year through training programs, learning centres, schools and clinics in Afghanistan. She gave personal experiences of how she confronted war lords when they forced underage girls to marry men the age of their fathers.



The second speaker was **PL Di Silva**, a Christian, a former combatant in the Sri Lankan civil war spoke on ***Finding Our Common Humanity in Deeply Divided Societies***

He is the Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies and Democracy, (ISSD) Malta. Previously an international civil servant working on the UN Global Compact, he was attached to the Executive Office of the late Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He is the co-editor with Professor Robin Andersen - *The Routledge Companion to Media and Humanitarian Action* (2018) and co-editor with Professor Ronaldo Munck - *Postmodern Insurgencies: Political Violence, Identity Formation and Peacemaking in Comparative Perspective* (2000). Since mid-1980s he has hands-on experience on country-risk analysis, ethnic conflict, terrorism/counter-terrorism, ethnic cleansing, human trafficking, forced migration, peace negotiations, mediation in deeply divided societies. His current focus is on Libya and combating human trafficking and forced migration - which includes a multi-country field based research study (ongoing since 2011).

He mentioned in his presentation that there are numerous attempts to reach peace in deeply divided societies across the world. The Israeli-Palestinian divide is a classic example, where decades of attempts to reach a peaceful settlement and final status talks have failed on account of political machinations, big power politics, and the fact that the vast majority

of Israelis and Palestinians have not been able to find their common humanity. His presentation focused on finding our common humanity without which we are lost as a species. So, how do we find our common humanity and generosity of spirit in deeply divided societies? There are no shortcuts or quick-fixes, it takes a great deal of sincerity of purpose and years of arduous collective action involving peoples of all faiths and walks of life - women, men, the elderly and even children.

The third speaker was Ervad Kobad Zarolia a Zoroastrian Priest from Ontario who has been serving North American Zoroastrian community for the last 47 years. Ervad Zarolia is the founding president of the North American Mobed Council, the founding president of Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation, and past president of Zoroastrian Society of Ontario. He was a speaker at the “Ancient Traditions Contemporary Realities: A Meeting of Israel-Asia Faith Leaders Conference in Israel in Sept. 2016. Ervad Zarolia represented the Zoroastrian Community at the 1993 & 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions.

He postulated that the title indicates that there is no collaboration between people of different faiths to promote peace. He disagreed with the title of panel as he said that he has seen lot of collaboration between people of different faiths for all kinds of occasions including keeping peace in communities, villages, city, and countries. **

(photo above from left PL Di Silva, Dolly Dastoor, Ervad Kobad Zarolia)



MAKING THE “DECLARATION TOWARDS A GLOBAL ETHIC” ACTIONABLE: THE ASHA VAHISHTA INITIATIVE (AVI) AND ITS 101 INSPIRATIONS.

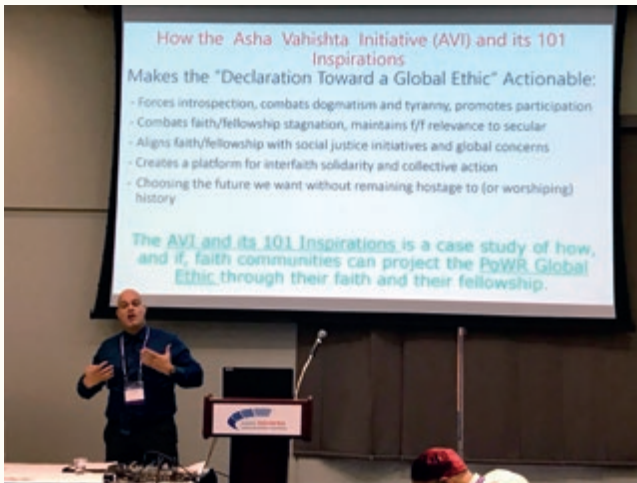
by Dr. Neville Panthaki /Tuesday November 6, 2018

Neville Gustad Panthaki completed a Tri-Program Collaborative Ph.D. in Social Justice Studies, Comparative Development Education, and South Asian Studies. Neville also completed Ph.D. (ABD) work in History, earned his M.A, B.Ed., and B.A. He is the creator and director of the Asha Vahishta Initiative (AVI) and gives more insight about the project in this write up.

The Asha Vahishta Initiative (AVI) is a project I began in 2016 to re-imagine faith and re-claim fellowship in diaspora. Its associated components, to which I refer throughout this summary, may be examined on the Ontario Zoroastrian Community Fund (OZCF) website.

A focus issue of the PoWR 2018, was The Declaration towards a Global Ethic (DTGE). The DTGE was the inspiration of Father Dr. Hans Küng. He envisaged the capacity for interfaith solidarity to be mobilized for global social justice, “towards” (re)shaping a “global ethic”. Küng drafted a vision document¹ that articulated a mission statement and operating system for relevant faith and fellowship, binding spirituality to activities of secular transformative education and empowerment. This DTGE was presented at the PoWR 1993, and 40 faith group representatives (including Zarathushti) signed this “declaration”.

My PoWR 2018 presentation was a case study (AVI project) of how diasporic Zarathushtis might re-imagine their faith, to re-claim their fellowship, in a manner which promoted the DTGE. I observed that 25 years post-DTGE (1993-2018), two things seemed inescapable. Faith and fellowship must contextualize their expression as part of secular activities, rather than simply a practice of the perpetration or commemoration of history. And, individual faith communities must constantly re-imagine their fellowship as living faith rooted within their environment. I concluded that for the DTGE to be made actionable, individual faith communities consciously had to articulate a vision document, mission statement,



and operating system, that projected the future they wanted. This involved consciously choosing to emphasize from within their own spiritual traditions, that which was congruent to the DTGE.

I began the AVI without consulting the DTGE. The impetus for the AVI was essentially an introspective interrogation of identity, belonging, and the nature and goals of faith and fellowship. I posited that an attitudinal shift would be beneficial, to move from ZarathushtiISM to *Daena Mazdayasni*. That is, from what we now treat and perceive as a religion of dogma (strictly procedural / judicial/ legislative/ prescriptive), to an acquisition of awareness /consciousness / Wisdom. Alternately, from a strictly creedal doctrine (dos and don'ts), to a covenantal understanding (be in right relationship, multiple ways knowing and being). It was only after the PoWR 2018 announcement accepting proposals that I reflected upon the convergence of how the AVI makes the DTGE actionable. And I was pleased to note spiritual congruence, rather

than contrived manipulation.

I described that I launched the AVI as a series of Education-Informative (EI) seminars which investigated the nature of belief, the purpose of faith, and the relevance of fellowship. For example, the anjuman (at OZCF) created a chart of what they desired from religion, compared to a listing of what they thought Zarathushti faith was about and how it currently operates for them. This dissonance is at the root of contemporary Zarathushti malaise.

The AVI also undertook Resolution-Building (RB), finding justification for desired path from within the tradition itself. So it became clear that the faith and fellowship we have, is due to a choice of emphasis towards a model of creed-procedure-prescription, and an (willful?) ignorance of a substantive part of the covenantal-wisdom discernment basis of our traditions.

An articulation of the latter, to project the nature and operation of faith we choose to emphasize as diasporic, relevant, lived, and in solidarity with the cause of global social justice, is the document 101 Inspirations. **

https://parliamentofreligions.org/pwr_resources/_includes/FCKcontent/File/TowardsAGlobalEthic.pdf

COMBATING SOCIAL MEDIA SEXIST HATE SPEECH: A ZARATHUSHTI MODEL

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw/Tuesday, 6 November 2018

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw has presented on issues related to violence against women at conferences across Canada as part of her work raising awareness among ethno-cultural communities about gender-based violence prevention. In this presentation, she focused on social media, which has fueled an onslaught of degrading memes, insults and threats of violence, pornography, and celebration of violence targeting women.

Social Media Sexist Hate Speech is "...a specific form of gender-based violence mediated and facilitated by technology that is unleashed whenever women are seen to threaten deeply entrenched patriarchal norms... women could threaten the status quo simply by being women who have an opinion, and articulating it". (Kate Manne)

The purpose of sexist hate speech is to objectify and shame women, make them feel fearful and powerless, and shut down democratic debate. Sexist hate speech is not a new phenomenon, but the onset of social



media, which allows hate perpetrators to largely remain anonymous, has fueled an onslaught of degrading memes, insults and threats of violence, pornography. It encompasses:

- offensive comments on appearance, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender roles
- body-shaming/fashion-shaming
- victim blaming and re-victimization
- “slut-shaming”
- “revenge porn” (the sharing of explicit or sexual images without consent)
- brutal and sexualized threats of violence, rape, death

The typical response to a person speaking up against hate speech is to attack them: “You have no sense of humor”, “You take yourself too seriously”. Other responses include normalizing it as an online reality and blaming the victim (“You should expect blowback if you blog about controversial stuff”, “What did you expect when you shared naked pictures?”), hiding behind the right to free expression, and dismissing it as a rant of a drama queen seeking attention or as ‘boys being boys’.



Sexist hate speech needs to be addressed by the public, law enforcement and other actors of the justice system, the private sector and civil society. At an individual level, bystanders can play a vital role in stopping the spread of sexist hate speech on social media by using the Zarathushti blueprint of *Humata* (good thoughts), *Hukhta* (good words) and *Hvarashta* (good deeds).

Humata: Bystanders should cultivate a progressive mind free of anger and fear and expose themselves to new ideas with an open mind so they are able to challenge existing beliefs and stereotypes. They should proactively seek knowledge to counter the “I don’t know what to do” response.

Hukhta: Deleting hate speech is the first step. When bystanders speak up they should target the content of the statement, not the author. It is best to refute false claims where possible with facts from reliable sources. Another strategy is to have a prepared statement or image to post to save time and effort e.g. an image from www.nohatespeechmovement.org

Hvarashta: Bystanders should report hate speech by flagging it on Facebook or YouTube, and write to Google ads to complain about problematic sites on which their ads are featured. Even if they do not have time to engage directly, they can outnumber the negative messages by uploading positive ones and applauding others by clicking on the ‘thumbs up’ or ‘like’ icon. Bystanders can also be a role model offline by being a strong voice against discrimination when policy and legislation is debated and advocate for digital literacy to be taught in schools

Women and men of good conscience have to work collaboratively to make cyberspace free of gender-based violence. **

RETROSPECTIVE: MODI, KHOSRAVI SHINE WITH MESSAGES OF EQUALITY, INCLUSION AT 7TH PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS IN TORONTO

JIM ENGINEER

Young village girls in rural western India are far better off today than before Arlene Modi began her life's work outside Pune, India. Rather than face the prospect of having to exit the public-school system by the 7th standard and take on work in the fields and eventually becoming young subservient brides, Modi's work has helped to transform their lives, enabling greater access to education, and ultimately realizing their agency and worth within a dynamic and complex society.

On the other side of the world in the United States young Payam Khosravi defies expectation by offering a window into his life struggle on the autism spectrum and delivering a global message of inclusion *through* his mother, Parisa, and the wonder of modern technology. For 28 years, Parisa Khosravi served as CNN's senior vice president of international news gathering. As one of the world's leading journalists, she would go on to bringing the most pivotal news into living rooms around the world.

Modi and Khosravi, both women and both Zarathushtris, were prominent plenary speakers at the 7th Parliament of the World's Religions, held Nov. 1-7, 2018, in Toronto. Parliament Trustee and former president of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, Dr. Dolly Dastoor was responsible for the Zarathushti presence at the Parliament, an effort that had been years in the making.

Her goal: to organize and effectively represent Zoroastrians on the world stage, and to serve as the bridge between the Parliament and the Zoroastrian religion, fostering goodwill, the opportunity to present powerful stories and compelling speakers, and to showcase the ancient Zarathushti religion alongside the world's major religions in the packed exhibit hall.

Working with her co-chair, Dr. Ardeshtir Irani, Dastoor led a contingent of Zarathushtris that would stand out by offering powerful life examples promoting love, inclusion, hope, education, gender equality and empowerment.

Khosravi's opening plenary: *The Promise of Inclusion and the Power of Love* inspired the audience of more than a thousand attendees and introduced many to Zoroastrianism for the first time.

"As a journalist and a news executive in my 28 years at CNN, I had the awesome responsibility of covering and watching history from the front row seat. I directed the coverage of countless historic events, from the fall of the East Bloc, to the genocide in Rwanda, the tsunamis in Southeast Asia and Japan, to the earthquake in Haiti and the Arab Spring. I have had the opportunity to travel the world over and over again, meet popes and presidents, and every day people and seen so much of humanity's best and worst. It was humbling, sobering and full of life lessons."

Her current work, however, has been far more personal as she works with her son Payam (fittingly meaning *message* in Farsi) to share his message of love and inclusion.

"Payam is a teenager, he is on the autism spectrum and he is non-speaking. Couple of years ago at the age of fourteen we finally had a communication breakthrough. Payam is now essentially spelling to communicate, he expresses his thoughts letter by letter by pointing to an alphabet board," Khosravi said.

She shared Payam's insightful and touching messages with the audience: "I want to wrap up by again quoting Payam, who shares his Good Thoughts by using his alphabet board to spell out his Good Words, and advocate for Good Deeds.

Payam: "MY DREAM IS FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD TO ABOLISH THE PAIN THOSE EXPERIENCE FROM UNNECESSARY JUDGMENTS BECAUSE OF EACH PERSON'S UNIQUE DIFFERENCES. PEOPLE NEED TO RECOGNIZE HOW THEIR ATTITUDES ARE NEGATIVELY IMPACTING OUR GROWTH FOR HUMANITY AS A WHOLE."

Khosravi's remarks deservedly received a standing ovation and inspired many questions about Zoroastrianism from Parliament attendees in the days that followed. The Parliament then tackled the issue of gender inequality around the world, and Modi's inspirational story of empowering young village girls took center stage. Backed by a recent research scholarship from the Brookings Institute, a leading Washington, D.C.-based think tank, and profiled on the global stage as a recipient of the CNN IBN Real Heroes Award, Modi is a social advocate and an agent of change whose story captivated the Parliament.

Her organization, Ashta No Kai-India, was established in October 1998, with a desire to improve the quality of life for women and girls in India's underdeveloped rural areas. In the almost 20 years since its inception, Ashta No Kai which means 'For a Better Tomorrow' in Japanese, has successfully transformed the lives of thousands of women and girls in 10 villages in the Shirur Taluka of Pune District, Maharashtra, by presenting them with opportunities that their mothers and grandmothers would never have dreamed of.

More than 10,000 women have benefitted from the Ashta No Kai commitment to education, literacy, financial independence, and social justice. The combination of added financial autonomy and increased confidence levels has given rural women a significant voice in their communities. Moreover, the lives of hundreds of rural girls have been transformed, thanks to Ashta No Kai innovative strategies like the Bicycle Bank, Life-skills Education and Scholarship program, which have helped to transform lives of young girls and unlock their potential.

Modi's remarks were powerful and pointedly shed light on India's child marriage problem:

"Each year, 12 million girls are married before the legal age of 18. In India, the obsession with marriage as the end goal of a girl's life is a widely accepted practice with the result that 27% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday. India, in fact, has the largest number of child brides in the world — one third of the global total.

Child marriage has devastating consequences. Besides perpetuating patriarchy, gender inequality and poverty, it denies girls their rights to health, education, and opportunity. It denies them the social support and autonomy they need to promote their wellbeing, explore their potential, and live a life of dignity.

It also denies girls a right to a childhood, and puts them at an increased risk of experiencing violence. It is also an almost insurmountable barrier to adolescent girls' education. Sadly, child marriage negatively impacts not just the girl herself, but also imposes very significant social and economic costs on the community around her."

Both Modi and Khosravi showed how Zarathushti leadership in the world is advancing our collective moral compass. Moreover, their stories are focused on empowering the disadvantaged, the voiceless, who for no fault of their own, deserve a hand up and a chance to be included as the gaps between wealth and gender inequality continue to widen.

Fittingly, the Parliament's timing coincided with the premier of the blockbuster movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*, in Toronto on Nov. 2, and created a broader cultural backdrop and focus on Zoroastrians, and Parsees, in particular. The movie chronicles the life of Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury, spotlighting his upbringing from Zanzibar to southeast London, and onward to stardom and legendary status as one of the world's elite vocalists.

The Parliament experience for me was an awakening and an affirmation. I had first attended and represented Zoroastrians in the next generation plenary of the 1993 Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago. The 1993 Parliament marked 100 years since the first Parliament was held in 1893 at the World Columbian Exposition on the shores of Lake Michigan in Chicago.

I had many questions on what the Parliament as an organization had done to affect change in a world where so many of our conflicts are tragically waged in the name of religion. What had previous Parliaments accomplished? Is the Interfaith movement relevant? Does it carry any weight on the world stage? Does it have the power to advance the messages it promotes and to ultimately affect positive change?

The 7th World Parliament of Religions in Toronto helped bridge the gap for me and showed just how important a role

the Parliament has in educating and inspiring. Nothing is more powerful than watching a speaker who leads by example. Both Modi and Khosravi are shining ambassadors, Zarathushti women who have gone beyond the confines of our vibrant community to be the change they wish to see in the world. Their mission and purpose remind that each of us has the power to make a difference, and that so much more work is yet to be done.

To learn more about Parisa Khosravi and view her acclaimed and moving Ted Talks presentation, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-AE1CIEZEA>

To learn more about Armene Modi and Ashta No Kai, visit: www.ashtanokai.org



Jamshed (Jim) Engineer serves as co-chair of the Public Relations Committee for the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) and as secretary of the board of directors for the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago. He is a contributing writer for the FEZANA Journal, Parsiana and Parsi Khabar news outlets; and serves as a founding director of NextGenNow, an advocacy group on Facebook. In 2018, Jim was invited to participate in the first World Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum at the Asha Centre in Gloucestershire, England. He works actively with his peers to foster Zarathushti inter-generational dialogue, unity, and leadership incubation through panel discussions at conferences and congresses; articles in journals; focus groups; social media engagement; and in contributing thought leadership to future-focused strategic planning initiatives.



THE FEZANA GROUP AT THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS, NOV 1-7 2018 , TORONTO



THE PROJECTS



ZARATHUSHTI CHOIR

Sunday, November 4, 2018



Mani Rao, a celebrated singer, led a group of 15 FEZANA delegates in singing Zarathushti devotional songs called monajats. An explanation of their significance was also given. Music is Mani's passion, and she has produced a CD of monajats, some traditional and some new ones composed by her.

Monajats are mostly in Gujarati, the language understood by the majority of Zarathushtis. They were published in the mid-19th century on historical and religious subjects. One of the most famous monajats is "Khudavind a Khavind" sung as a lullaby.

FILM SCREENING: "ON WINGS OF FIRE" (2001)

Monday, November 5, 2018

Meherji Madan presented the film, "On Wings of Fire". This film covers the history of the Zarathushtis over a period of 3,500 years. It traces the pre-Zarathustra's era to the modern day Parsees. The film shows King Vishtaspa, who first accepted the religion, to Cyrus the Great, Alexander's burning of the palace at Persepolis, the Renaissance by the Sassanians and their defeat by the Arabs. Maestro Zubin Mehta traces the footsteps of his people with the help of a scholarly priest who takes him on a journey to his hometown of Navsari where he discovers his ancestral home. During this time he discovers the British influence on the Parsees and the great achievements of many eminent Parsees of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Very few, if any, productions exist today that can match its scope and breadth in quality and performance.



VISIT TO THE ZARATHUSHTI SOCIETY OF ONTARIO'S RUSTOM GUIV DAR E MEHR

By Roshan Rivetna

As part of the "Sacred Spaces -- Excursions Around Toronto" program, organized by Dolly Dastoor, about 40 delegates from the Parliament of the World's Religions joined the bus tour to visit the Mehraban Guiv Dar e Mehr on November 1, 2018.

Zoroastrian Society of Ontario President, Mitra Jam, and Board Member, Roozbeh Farhadi, greeted the visitors, gave them a short tour, and invited them to the prayer hall, where they all sat reverently, and took in the serenity of the beautiful dimly-lit hall, as Mobed Athiavian Bamji recited *Tandarosti* prayers in front of the Fire in the *afargan* and gave a brief explanation.

After a hearty breakfast (leftovers of which were packed up for volunteers at the Zarathushti booth at the Parliament) the guests listened with interest to a presentation on the Zarathushti faith by Avesta class teacher Bahram Bahrami. The talk elicited many questions, which Mr. Bahrami was happy to answer. Many thanks to Mitra Jam for organizing the event and supplying all the refreshments. “All in all, it was a wonderful event,” she said, “we enjoyed socializing with people from all walks of life.”



DISPLAY OF MODELS OF PLACES OF WORSHIP

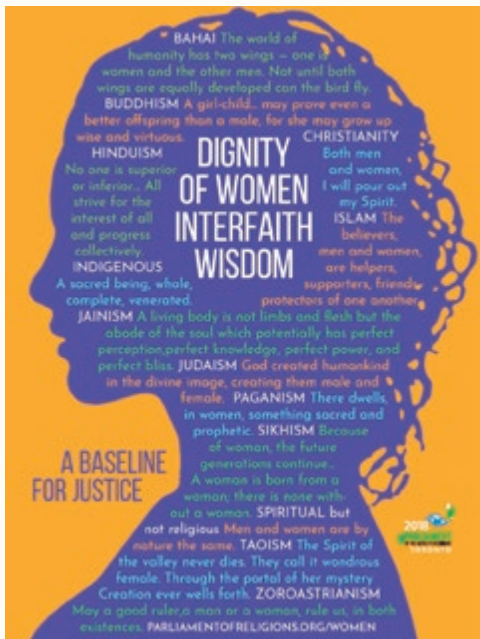
Model of the Bhandara Atash Kadeh of Houston (so named after benefactors Feroze and Shernaz Bhandara) designed by architect Cyrus Rivetna, was one of six models on display at the Parliament. This model was the only one representing an Eastern faith.

1. First Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
2. Assumption Greek Orthodox Church
3. Holy Family Catholic Church
4. St. Benedict the African Catholic Church
5. Bhandara Atash Kadeh (Zoroastrian Temple)
6. Unity Temple

These models are among a larger collection of models of Houses of Worship commissioned by Suzanne Morgan, “Sacred Space” ambassador for the Parliament, permanently on display at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Suzanne chose to include this Houston model (and funded its construction) as representing a design that facilitates the full range of traditional Zarathushti religious practice for present-day North American Zarathushtis. In the accompanying photograph, Suzanne can be seen in the yellow jacket talking to Cyrus.



DEBUT OF THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN INTERFAITH WISDOM POSTER



The Parliament of the World's Religions Women's Task Force (PWTF), in partnership with the Women's Caucus at the American Academy of Religion, has created this Dignity of Women Interfaith Wisdom Poster. The poster highlights wisdom teachings that support the Dignity of Women from various religious, wisdom, and faith traditions.

Alicia Panganiban, Co-chair of the Women's Caucus at the American Academy of Religion states, "Our generation has declared that now is the time to champion dignity of women. Thus, this Dignity of Women Interfaith Wisdom Project is among AAR-SBL Women's Caucus and Women's Task Force of the Parliament response to the cry of our time. We envision this joint project as a threshold in this moment in history where the dignity of women is upheld everywhere, locally and globally-at home, schools, churches, workplaces, communities, and worldwide. We wish to highlight the important role of faith and religion in this movement. Thus, through this Interfaith Wisdom Project, we hope to raise public awareness of the wisdom sayings of various traditions that support the dignity of women. As we debut the Dignity of Women Interfaith Wisdom Poster at the Parliament, we hope to have copies of the poster displayed in our homes, schools, and workplaces as a dazzling emblem of our generation."

At the Women's Assembly, Adina Mistry, the youngest member of the Zarathushti delegation, read aloud the section the role of women in Zarathushti faith from the Dignity of Women Interfaith Wisdom Poster

"May a good ruler, a man or a woman (nā vā nāirī vā), rule us, in both existences" (huxšaθrastū nā vā nāirī vā xšaētā ubōiō ayhuuō). **In Y. 41.2 Women and men were considered capable of being good leaders in both the corporeal and spiritual worlds.

SPIRITUALITY AND ART DIALOGUE

Mani Rao has produced a CD of monajats, Zarathushti devotional songs, and donated it for sale to a few Zoroastrian Associations in North America for their fund raising. Her interest is to translate traditional hymns and songs as well as to create music and lyrics in English relevant to the next generation of Zarathushtis and other faiths to inspire and to spread the message of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds. "Spirit Soaring: A Women's Art Salon" was a part of Circle Sanctuary, facilitated by Earth Spirit Community artist Kate Richardson who invited Mani Rao to participate. Mani gives her review of the session below.



There was a Women's Art space on the 600 level, near the Red Tent area where we had displayed our art work. My art being music, I had displayed my one or two CDs and my flier for the website which I have recently developed www.soulfulserenades.com

During our Art Salon which was on Monday, Nov. 5th, for a brief introduction we were supposed to describe our art, and then talk about how our creative process reflects, expresses, connects with our awareness and experience of spirituality. I got to talk about the art of music - how I feel connected and experience spirituality with the expression of music. I talked about a couple of my experiences when I felt really touched with a sense of spirituality.



A mother coming to me and saying that my son who is only 3 years old wants me to play your CD whenever he is in car with me. One lady telling me about her mom who has Alzheimer Disease, who perks up whenever she listens to Monajat CD. Somebody who has chronic illness, feels soulful when she listens to my CD. These were all gratifying and touching experiences. Music being my art, I did Ahura Mazda chant for two minutes towards the end.

I believe that the arts offer ways of bringing ourselves and others into deeper connections with spirit of spirituality, however we describe it. This Art Salon was really an inspiring, energizing and a unique experience for me.

INTERFAITH OUTPOURING OF SYMPATHIES

Nawaz Merchant was instrumental in setting up and co-ordinating the Zarathushti booth for children at the Parliament of World's Religions, where they invited visitors to write a note to the Pittsburgh Tree of Life Congregation, who tragically lost eleven loving lives to a racist shooter on October 29, 2018. Nawaz reports on the response to the project.

Visitors noticed the poster request and stopped to write heartfelt messages of love and sympathy, sharing their thoughts about the tragedy and their desire to tell the bereaved about their feelings of solidarity. A hundred and eleven messages filled seven sympathy cards, covering them with notes, large and small, in different languages. Many took the address labels so that they could write their own notes and cards as well.

Here are some of the messages:



- "Sending you love from Toronto. We are thinking of you."
- "The world is so cruel, but please don't lose hope!! There is more good than bad."
- "I join your great sorrow. It is my great sorrow. May we meet in joy."
- "May divine light bring healing and grace to your community."
- "To my FRIENDS and FAMILY, My heart is overflowing with prayers of love and comfort for you. I AM so sad. I feel with you and for you."
- "My brothers and sisters, my heart breaks for you. You are in my prayers."
- "Greatly saddened by the loss of innocent and precious lives. We stand with you united in this moment of grief. We pray for the departed souls and for their families, for God to give them strength to bear this great loss of their love ones."

- “In my heart and being I am with you in solemn contemplation of this event. We will gain strength from each other, growing, rising and moving forward.”
- “My heart is rent asunder by the confused actions of destruction upon your light.”
- “What is remembered, lives! My heart is full and overflowing with love and sorrow. May you receive that which you need in abundance and stand forever encompassed in God’s love. May your pain be lightened and your sorrows water the souls as they live on in our hearts.”
- “I am so, so sorry that intolerance and hate are directed to you, a kind loving compassionate beautiful community. Please feel the support of us that love you.”

Parliament attendees were members of two hundred different religions, a warm, generous body present to feed their spirit and connect with like minds. They stopped by our booth to write a note and learned about the ancient monotheistic religion envisioned by Zarathushtra. Twelve hundred school children also visited, families with toddlers, older adults in wheelchairs and walkers. One gentleman from Korea asked, “What can anyone do to prevent this from happening again?” I thought of the national gun debate — how could someone outside the USA understand it? Guns and bigotry, a deadly combination. Instead, we spoke about how modern technology can make you feel alienated, and the need to strengthen bonds of friendship with all people, those who look like us, are in our families, and also those who don’t, who we might see in the supermarket, or pass in the street.

“How hard is it to say a word to someone in the line, to ask, is everything alright?” he wondered.

“We do what we can. Many of us donate to charities and non-profits,” I replied.

“Perhaps it is also rewarding to spend some time helping, volunteering, or teaching,” he murmured.

Volunteering does indeed warm the heart. Yet I wondered if we are reaching those most in need? Perhaps it is the troubled ones, those who are ‘off’, who we roll our eyes at, that need kindness the most.

“We are one continuum, one universal family,” the Parliament speakers seemed to say, each in their own way, leaving us with a life-long message, “Let’s go big, let’s care for ALL of life.”

Our sympathy cards were mailed to the Tree of Life Congregation. We hope they will bring them solace to know so many people care deeply. Here is the link to read them: [Sympathy Cards POWR.zip](#)



FAMILY FAIR BOOTH
Armaity Anandsagar with visitors at
The Family Fair Booth



FEZANA BOOTH
From Left Mitra Jam. Mehrdad Dastur, Armaity
Anandsagar, Nawaz Merchant



PARTICIPANTS' PARLIAMENT



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Nawaz Merchant, USA, is a writer, social entrepreneur and committee chair at FEZANA, (Federation of Zarathushti Associations of North America), board member with Non-profit Shine and Inspire, and Coordinator of the Senior Program at ZAGNY, (Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York).

This was my first Parliament, so I had no idea how enormous the scale of this event was. It's the 7th Parliament since inception. Many have heard of the first one in Chicago, 1893, when Swami Vivekananda introduced Hinduism to a western audience. In 2018, 220 religions were represented and thousands attended in various capacities.



Imagine Toronto's Metro Convention Centre, an enormous eight floor space, filled with international people in the traditional regalia of all countries and regions, music and shows on various stages, twenty sessions on various topics being held in different rooms at the same time, enormous art exhibits and service projects, an exhibit hall so large one could not cover it in a day, and you get a sense of what the parliament was like. It was impressive!

Participants enjoyed exquisite music, singing, indigenous dances and drumming, and short talks by articulate speakers in the opening and closing plenaries. Multiple tracks focused on themes to organize the talks, film viewings, and workshops. The Sikh community sponsored free "langar" lunch for over 2,500 people daily, with welcoming smiles and fantastic organization. Throughout the day, interfaith groups performed music and singing circles, which invited viewers to join.

Parisa Khosravi's dynamic speech at the opening was a first exposure to Zarathushti religion for many people. The Zarathushti team participated with two booths, a choir which performed monajats in Gujarati and English to a full house, and a number of speakers, on topics as varied as countering gender hate speech, to sacred ceremonies and Jashan ceremony. Armene Modi's talk on her work at Ashta No Kai was well received. Many talks were held at the same time.

The Parliament introduced me to many topics I had not previously understood: how indigenous children were sent to Residential schools in Canada and the US, the plight of Hopi tribes whose native lands are being commercialized even now, and who have no voice in Federal courts; the Sikh people's sorrowful remembrance of the 1984 genocide in India; the plight of North African refugees of whom only 7% will make it to Europe after repeated attempts to escape the refugee camps. Speakers exhorted us that leaving religion out of politics should not leave ethics and morality out of it too! While most stayed away from current issues, the mid-term election was impending, drawing both amusing asides and hopeful remarks.

The sheer number of interfaith activities and initiatives is staggering and awe-inspiring. Key takeaways were: each faith directs us to the same goal. There are many highways, but all of them lead to the same place. In essence all humanity, all life and the planet, is one. If we act with this in mind, we cannot go wrong. **



Dr. Ardeshir Irani, USA, is a solo pediatrician practicing in the MetroDetroit, is founding member of the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan and currently the President. See Bio on page 5

This being my first Parliament, I was not sure what to expect. The theme of the Parliament "The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love, Pursuing Global Understanding, Reconciliation & Change," certainly captivated me. Also the active approach to Empowerment of Women, something that had been long overdue was also a guiding factor. I was fortunate to attend the

Parliament in its entirety, and thus got a good feel of all that it offered.

I was most impressed by the importance placed on the Indigenous Peoples and their beliefs & forms of worship. They were featured prominently at the opening & closing ceremonies. There was an entire area of the convention center called Lodge of the Nations that had all forms of activities relating to the Native Americans. There were tepees set up inside & outside the center and a ceremonial fire that was kept burning all through the Parliament.

The Empowerment of Women was a theme that was very clear right from the start. There were women speakers at the opening ceremony, one of whom was Parisa Khosravi, former Senior Vice President of CNN Worldwide in charge of Global Affairs. She spoke very well and talked about her own son, Payam, who is autistic and has never spoken but learnt to communicate using a letter board when he turned thirteen and has shown wisdom beyond his years. There was an entire plenary session devoted to Empowerment of Women where Armene Modi was a keynote speaker and talked about her grassroots project in Pune, India where girls are given education right through high school and up to professional college and how she has changed the way of thinking when it comes to women's education. It was great to see Zarathushti women featured prominently on the world stage being applauded for their groundbreaking work.

**



Neville Gustad Panthaky, Canada, completed a Tri-Program Collaborative Ph.D. in Social Justice Studies, Comparative Development Education, and South Asian Studies. Neville also completed Ph.D (ABD) work in History, earned his M.A, B.Ed., and B.A. He is the creator and director of the Asha Vahishta Initiative (AVI).

My impressions of the Parliament of World's Religions are:

- Massive: An interfaith effort of global proportions.
- Overwhelming: Having God introduced to you, repeatedly, in multiple 'languages' of faith/fellowship.
- Inspirational: Becoming aware of the wisdom of emotional intelligence, a truly liberating and insightful awareness for decoupling dogma from spirituality.
- Indebtedness: Recognizing the Zarathushtis are guests upon Turtle Island, of First Nations peoples.
- Gratitude: For the vulnerability shown by artist-presenters regarding how they channel the spiritual.
- Rage: Of an indignant nature regarding transgressions of Asha, when participating in social justice sessions or visiting their visual displays. For example the talk of Dr. Vandana Shiva regarding Earth Democracy, or the Gendercide Awareness Project which made one walk through a display of girl-child booties.
- Awareness: That an extremely essential and important means of communicating faith and fellowship, is through emotive, tactile, sensory, participatory experiences. The exhibition hall had a first-ever attempt by the PoWR to provide such means of interaction with the unknown. It was geared to children, but I feel that this methodology is applicable and necessary for all.
- Recognition and Learning: Of my own ideals regarding effective transmission and sustainability of faith and fellowship, being present and active among many ethnocultural and diasporic communities. Thankful that many interactions resulted in both a substantiation of the Asha Vahishta Initiative (AVI), as well as constructive ways for its continuance.
- Concern: That Zarathushtis articulate/project a vision of global social justice based on actual lived faith, to fully participate in future PoWR, interfaith forums. **

Aban Rustomji, USA, is the founding chair of FEZANA Information Research Education Service (FIRES). An advocate for education and libraries, Aban is an avid reader and traveler and is a proud member of the Zarathushtis Association of Houston.

I had heard so much about the Parliament of World's Religions from many friends who consistently attend and rave about their experience. As I had expected, it was a place where there was inter-religious dialogue about ideas and theology. The week's activities provided a place to talk, to learn, and to engage with others. This was an experience of inclusion, a kaleidoscope of diversity, and an opportunity to further connect. Zarathushtis participated as keynote speaker at the opening ceremony, plenary sessions, taskforces, panels and talks and a full-length movie, *Wings of Fire*, was featured. Small in numbers we were recognized and rewarded with thoughtful questions and comments by attendees.



And then there were several unexpected learning experiences. The first one was the range of religious groups and religions I had never heard off – Auminism (France), Band of Light (UK), and Eckankar (USA). The second surprise was that I met no fundamentalists or representatives of faiths that teach “exclusivity” of the “one true way”. Rather, there were scientists, humanists and many other secular group representatives who came concerned about the stewardship of the planet and political concerns. And that was refreshing.

But the one that left an indelible mark was Larry Greenfield, the Executive Director of the Parliament, who cited in the closing plenary, “the religions of the world can and must be the central agents of change, but to do that, the religions must also change”. The Parliament meets every few years, however, one doesn't have to wait on such “parliaments” to find ways to reach out and connect and change. There are opportunities all around us if we simply look for them. **

Marzban J. Austin, Canada, is a retired electrician engineer and resides in London, Ontario.

My first visit to the Parliament of World's Religions Conference was an eye opener for me. Before the conference I was skeptical about the benefits of such a conference considering the high cost for a week of listening to presentations on “The Promise of Inclusion – The Power of Love”.



Upon my return from the conference, my thinking has changed, not completely though. I now feel that the one week's expenditure of nearly \$3000 was not a complete waste of time or money; the knowledge gained about our religion and the religion of other communities, the time spent re-connecting with old friends and making new friends will remain with me for many years to come.

The key note speakers talked about “Pursuing Global Understanding, Reconciliation and Change”. A bit of the sceptic in me questions the ultimate goal of bringing peace to the world through “Inclusion and the Power of Love”. Regrettably that there were NO REPRESENTATIVES from the Present Political World Leaders who are holding the Reins of Power. Change is hard to come when one is preaching to the converted! The seven conference days were filled with attendees' smiles, hugs, love and peace talk while the Worlds Newspapers were flashing the appalling news of overwhelming force being used in the Holy Land to subdue the neighbors. As one of the presenters at the conference said “Peace, Salaam, Shalom; If Not Now, When?”

One session I found interesting was “A New Axial Age”, Rev. Dr. Brian Arthur Brown of Niagara Falls, Ontario presented The Three Testaments and The Four Testaments in which



Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna, Homi Gandhi, Mani Rao and Rusi Surti at the “langar”. The local Sikh community served vegetarian meals every day to over 7000 people for the entire duration of the event.

Zarathushti faith has been the connecting point between the Vedic Religions of the East and the Hebraic Religions of Christianity and Islam. Dr. Brown talked about Alexander's elimination of Zarathushti Scriptures and the hope that ancient texts in Uzbekistan, etc., will emerge.

And lastly, but not the least memorable experience was the Ontario Sikh and Gurdwara Councils hospitality. The Langar or "open kitchen" fed hundreds of attendees throughout the week with a simple vegetarian meal. The Langar Institution represents "sharing" and treating all humankind equally. **

Afreed Mistry, Canada, has been volunteering for the Zarathushti community since the age of 13. She has been actively involved with the local Toronto community, FEZANA, and the global Zarathushti community. Recently, she was one of the Masters of Ceremonies at the 11th World Zoroastrian Congress in Perth, Australia. Afreed is also FEZANA's main representative to the United Nations.

I was very excited to learn that the Parliament of World's Religions was coming to my local city of Toronto! I read the story about the first Parliament in 1893 when Swami Vivekananda met Jamsetji Tata and how that encounter changed India. I was very happy that I would get to be one of the attendees of the 2018 PoWR, along with many other Zarathushtis! Since I was local, I also volunteered to help out the FEZANA attendees, and to plan and setup the FEZANA booth.



The Parliament days were long and very informative. I had a chance to meet numerous friendly people of all faiths represented in the 8000+ attendees over the course of seven days. I even made some local friends who then invited me to represent the Zarathushti Faith at the Cardinal's Dinner, the night after the Parliament ended.

I spent my days going to workshops, the opening prayer ceremony by the Indigenous people, chants by the Indigenous Women's group and the Zarathushti sessions. It was a real pleasure to go through the aisles of 200 booths setup by different faiths and NGO's. Some were very elaborate and beautiful booths. There was a 10-foot long banner for all to write support messages to our Jewish brethren in Pittsburgh.

The PoWR days coincided with the opening of the movie, "Bohemian Rhapsody", which is the story of Farrokh Bulsara (Freddie Mercury) so it was fitting that we got a large group of POWR attendees and locals to attend the show.

Our local Zarathushti associations, Zoroastrian Society of Ontario and Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation organized an event for all our Zarathushti visitors to meet local people and tour our Darbe Mehr and ZRCC.

The Toronto Mehraban Guiv Darbe Mehr was listed as a tour site for PoWR attendees on the first day. ZSO hosted one bus load of attendees along with some more visitors at the Darbe Mehr with a tour, prayers, an explanation about Zarathushti faith and breakfast. On Day 2, OZCF and the local WZCC Chapter hosted a dinner meeting at the Zoroastrian Religious and Cultural Centre location with guest speakers, Armene Modi and Father Tomy from India, Edul Davar from the USA and Phil Sidhwa from Toronto. The meeting was very informative and people got a chance to network and re-unite with old friends. **



Katayun Kapadia, USA, is the FEZANA Congress Committee Co-Chair (2016 to present) and has served as a FEZANA President (2012-2016).

I was one of the 51 Zarathushtis who participated in The Parliament of World's Religions (PoWR) 2018 in Toronto from November 1-7, 2018. However, this small number were successful in creating an awareness about Zarathushti religion for the 8,500 who attended the PoWR.

Parisa Khosravi, as the keynote at the opening session, generated the spark for the Zarathushti religion and the buzz lasted all through the Parliament. Dolly Dastoor as the Vice-Chair for the Parliament motivated all of us to participate as speakers, moderators and exhibitors, and her efforts ensured us a seat on the stage of world religions.

The Zarathushti Boi and Water ceremonies as well the Jashan ceremony performed by our mobeds had people of all faiths gathering around us to participate & inquire about our religious practices. The two booths had a wealth of information on Zarathushti religion, customs and practices and both children and adults who visited them were very interested to learn more about Zarathushti religion.



I also visited the Mehraban Guiv Darbe Mehr on the Sacred Spaces Excursions around Toronto organized by Dolly Dastoor for the PoWR. The 32 convention attendees on the bus were very pleased to be welcomed into the Zarathushti religious space, the sharing of the Zarathushti religious ceremony and traditions as they took this tour. It felt wonderful to meet old friends and make new ones.

Some of us made time to enjoy the movie, “Bohemian Rhapsody” (about aapro Farrokh Bulsara) and dine at the 360 Revolving Restaurant on top of CN Tower. I had a great time sharing my daily experiences with my roomies, Dolly Dastoor & Aban Rustomji (In the photo, L to R: Katayun Kapadia, Dolly Dastoor and Aban Rustomji). My first experience at this PoWR was an indeed an eye opener as there were 250 faiths participating! Memorable indeed! **

PERSPECTIVE FROM THE NEXT GENERATION

Shayda Sales is a senior at The George Washington University studying International Affairs, Middle East Studies, and history. She is the Vice President of the Iranian Student Association and has been involved in interfaith organizing since her freshman year of high school. She has represented The United Religions Initiative, The Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, and youth groups at interfaith events and conferences around the world. She is originally from San Jose, CA, loves the beach, and is constantly planning her next trip abroad.

“May we join hands with all the faithful, and all the good people of the world.”

Hamazourbeem! . In my last year of university, I feel the difficult and beautiful tension of creating my own individual identity, while also staying closely connected to community and family. As I prepare to graduate, move away, and take other big steps Hamazourbeem reminds me that cultivating community can be one of the most important ways to find oneself.

My journey towards faith and Zarathushti religion is intertwined with my compatriots' journey to establish ourselves as the strongest and most diverse community we can be. I am excited to see FEZANA doing just that at the Parliament of World's Religions in Toronto in November 2018. I'd also like to shed light on what matters to youth, the important role we play, and the direction I see interfaith and our community moving in the future. .

At first I felt overwhelmed. With over 8,500 international attendees, hundreds of sessions, and a conference hall more massive than I could imagine, it was unforgettable. As I settled in, I felt the genuine ambiance of this interfaith space; incredibly diverse, massively beautiful, and exciting. exploring two hundred booths of different organizations and faith groups, When I found the FEZANA booth it quickly became one of my favourite places at the Parliament! . People I had only ever heard of by name greeting me and welcomed into the FEZANA family.



The professional looking booth featured a video, brochures, a beautiful altar, and a schedule of the numerous Zarathushti events held each day. Nearby the FEZANA kids' booth was one of my favorite parts of the Zarathushti presence. Because it was so interactive booth, I had many interesting conversation with the volunteers. As an Iranian American Zarathushti, I learned about Parsi interpretations of the Gathas, traditions, and practices. interacted with others demonstrating genuine curiosity, seeking to understand our similarities.. This experience grew my faith in Zarathushti beliefs and my connection with the Parsi community, a connection that has historically been weak and I believe, desperately needs to be healed.

My favorite event of the entire parliament was a networking session for Zarathushti women, a part of a series of networking and mentoring sessions to encourage women to advance in leadership within their own faith. Dr. Elizabeth Ursic co-hosted the Zarathushti iteration of the event with FEZANA's Dr Dolly Dastoor, along with Mobedyar Guloo Austin who shared her experience of becoming a mobedyar in 2012, following the North American Mobedyar Council's decision to accept women as assistant priests. Her decision was "need provoked"—when she saw a need for female mobedyars to pave the way, she stepped up. This decision is an inspiration for me, showing how Zarthushti women can step up and be the change that is needed (*photo below, Mobedyar Guloo Austin with Dr Elizabeth Ursic*)

I learned that historically within Zarathushti faith there were female priests, but over time new versions and conceptualizations of patriarchy made the priesthood hierarchical. While women like Guloo Austin are leading the way towards gender equality within Zarathushti institutions, they face discrimination: female modedyars are not allowed to be on stage with other male mobeds in certain situations, and there have even been situations where invitations to events were rescinded when male mobeds refused to conduct ceremonies with them. Further, there are numerous restrictions placed on a mobedyar, male or female, that inhibit their ability to fully embrace and practice their faith. They are not allowed to conduct weddings or child confirmation ceremonies.

My own grandfather is a mobedyar, and his leadership in Zarathushti spaces has played a serious role in inspiring my personal faith. Seeing female mobedyar represented will encourage other women to feel more empowered and push them to continue practicing Zarathushti tenets, mark themselves as pioneers for women in interfaith spaces, and provide an opportunity to learn new female perspectives of our faith. To see female mobedyars restricted for no reason is disrespectful to a lineage of faith leaders and the inclusive nature of our faith. We brain-stormed how we can share our views with the North American Mobeds' Council, I made a commitment to make my voice heard and partner with youth to share our desire for gender equality. To join this group, please email shaydasales@gwmail.gwu.edu I thank Guloo Austin and all female mobedyars for leading the way for young passionate women like me who care about Zarathushtis and keeping the faith alive.



Seeing Zarathushtis represented at many spaces in this conference was empowering and exciting. However i noticed a gap where we did not participate in the track on addressing sexual violence, and the role of religious leaders in allowing violence against women. The challenge of our next generation will be keeping the fire of our faith alive. In order to engage youth, we need to be vocal in rejecting all forms of misogyny. By joining interfaith activism to address sexual violence we can be impactful in ending violence against women and demonstrate Zarathushti leadership. Addressing this may be difficult, but is essential in preserving our community.

Overall, I learned that Zarathushtis have many opportunities to make our voices heard. The important role FEZANA plays in interfaith and our community addresses real issues, helps preserve our faith, allows our voices to be heard in interfaith and global spaces, and ultimately keeps our community close together. I hope to continue youth-led interfaith activism and will continue to represent my faith where ever this life may lead me. **



GENDERCIDE AWARENESS EXHIBIT

One of the most powerful exhibits of the Parliament was a hall filled with thousands of little baby booties clustered row upon row upon row. The GENDERCIDE exhibit showed us that a total of 3.5MILLION precious female lives are lost each year, simply because they are female.

EACH and every tiny pair of shoes represents TEN THOUSAND girls lost EACH year to violence against women, from infanticide to lack of maternal care, socially sanctioned violence or other gender based cruelty. This is more than wars and natural disasters and is utterly ignored in most public policy. By showing the enormous scale of this social injustice, the exhibit opened many people's eyes and mind to the fact that gender equality is still far from reality.
(photos Nawaz Merchant)





THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



CLOSING MESSAGE

By Homi D Gandhi

Homi Gandhi current President of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America has been committed to community service. Mr. Gandhi has been involved with many public interest initiatives such as the activities done by the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York in memory of 9/11, Mainstream for the development and education of the Bombay Urchin children, and organized aid relief projects for communities after the Bam earthquake, the South Asian earthquake, the Asian tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina. He has provided pro-bono accounting services to many non-profit organizations, raising money for the Revlon Breast Cancer Walk, and volunteered for the Junior Achievement Program for teaching High School children in New York City.

Homi strongly promotes Zarathushti women in leadership, and encourages youth in many ways. As a result a Zarathushti youth was nominated to the Working Committee of the Religions for Peace (North American Chapter) in 2005, and in 2006, to the 8th World Assmblly of the Religion for Peace. In 2004, Homi had the honor of ringing the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange. He has received many awards for his commitment to helping others including the Temple of Understanding's Interfaith Visionary Award in 2010.



A little over a year ago, FEZANA set up an Ad-hoc Committee of 11 individuals to drive FEZANA's participation in the 7th Parliament of World's Religions under the joint leadership of Dr. Ardeshir Irani and Dr. Dolly Dastoor. As the time progressed and activities were getting planned, many Zarathushtis volunteered and worked together to participate in different roles. Including the volunteers at the two Exhibit booths, four times the original committee number was represented at the PoWR with participants from 15 member associations, one corresponding group, and Zarathushti from India.

Post-Parliament, we can recount our achievements many times. But to make it all that possible, Ardeshir and Dolly worked and organized ceaselessly through the year. And for that on behalf of FEZANA, from all of you, and myself, I would like to offer our BIG THANKS to Ardeshir and Dolly. As the ad for NY Lottery says, "you have to be in it, to win it". We have to be always at the table if we have to increase our community's awareness in the world at large.

We have created a tremendous goodwill in the interfaith world. Each of us might have personally experienced that from the comments from your friends and colleagues from other faiths. On my part, besides hearing such comments from friends, two individuals came to me on my train ride to Toronto's Pearson airport and thanked me for FEZANA booths and other presentations!

So let us not fritter away that goodwill. Share it at your local member associations, involve others, and then go out to actively participate in many Interfaith or social action events. Let us not stop at Humata and Hukhata, but take it to HVARASHTA!

Thank you, Dolly and Ardeshir for opening the space for all of us.

Hama Zor, Hama Asho Baad!

May We All be United in Righteousness!



ZOROASTRIAN DELEGATION TO PARTICIPATE AT THE 63RD COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW), MARCH, 2019 AT THE UN HEADQUARTERS , NEW YORK

NEW YORK, December 28, 2018- FEZANA will be presenting a panel titled "*Educating Girls: An Empowering Tool to Promote Prosperity and Gender Equality*". The Panel representing Zoroastrians at the CSW Conference will comprise of

Tanya Bharda, Rosheen Birdie, Behram Pastakia, Nadia Jam, Nurelle Mehta, Adina Mistry, Afreed Mistry, Behnoosh Sethna and Anahita Verahrami.

Social change to uplift society comes when men and women are treated equally with respect and dignity. This aspirational

goal cannot be reached without educating the girl child. The panel will discuss how education empowers girls in the villages of India and Africa to eliminate poverty. The workshop will cover UN Sustainable Development

Goal #1 No Poverty,

Goal #4 Quality Education and Goal #5 Gender Equality .

Panel discussion details are :

Date : Wednesday, March 13th, 2019

Time: 12.30 PM.

Location: Aqua Room, 4 W 43rd Street, New York, NY

All local Zoroastrians are encouraged to attend to support the FEZANA presentation. Visitors do not need a surity pass to attend the session.

In The News

The First World Institute for Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry Institute

SARAH STEWART

What was the genesis of the new SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies? How will it contribute to the study of the Zoroastrian religion and what is its future potential? These were the questions posed by Dolly Dastoor when she invited me to write for this issue of FEZANA. They are questions the Zoroastrian community has every right to ask, the more so given the generous donation made to SOAS last year, without which the Institute would not exist.

SOAS has a long tradition of Zoroastrian studies, undertaken by scholars whose research and teaching have covered both the ancient and modern worlds. Leading academics in the field such as Walter



Bust of Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry

Bruno Henning, Harold Walter Bailey, Mary Boyce, ADH Bivar, John R. Hinnells, Philip Kreyenbroek and Nicholas

Sims-Williams made SOAS a centre

of excellence in Iranian Studies. The languages of the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, Avestan and Pahlavi, as well as other Iranian languages such as Sogdian and Bactrian have long been studied here. In 2000, the Zartoshty Brothers Chair in Zoroastrianism was established. The incumbent, Professor Almut Hintze, has continued SOAS's proud tradition, enhancing knowledge of the Zoroastrian religion and languages through her many publications. The late Professor John Hinnells, best known for his work on the Parsis in India and the diaspora, established the Department for the Study of Religions at SOAS in 1993. This culturally inclusive

environment, together with SOAS's dedicated exhibition space, proved ideal for mounting the exhibition *Everlasting Flame, Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination* in the Brunei Gallery in 2013. Supported initially by the ZTFE in London and Dr Cyrus Poonawalla in India, the five curators of the exhibition, Ursula Sims-Williams, Firoza Mistree, Pheroza Godrej, Almut Hintze and myself, were joined by others who helped shape its narrative and content.

In 2016, the *Everlasting Flame* went on show at the National Museum in Delhi where it lent its name to a grand international programme of educational events and exhibitions. The *Everlasting Flame* provided an unprecedented opportunity for Zoroastrians, and the public at large, to learn about the religion and its culture by means of a visual narrative. The goodwill, support and enthusiasm that this generated within Zoroastrian communities prompted us to strive for a Centre, financially secured in perpetuity, that would allow young people, year on year, to study the subject. Thanks to the vision and generosity of Mr Shapoor Mistry, we have realised this ambition in the SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies (SSPIZS), with a remit to enhance research and teaching as well as outreach activities.



The Institute (above) is housed in the Department of History, Religions and Philosophies (HRP) in the main building

In The News

of SOAS. All activities to do with Zoroastrian Studies from now on will come under the auspices of the Institute, unless they are funded by an independent academic research grant.

Our aim, through enhanced teaching programmes, is to reach beyond SOAS via online learning and summer schools. Those who come to study Zoroastrianism on campus will be offered the opportunity to learn within different contexts, for example in modules which focus on oral traditions, or migration studies, or Iranian studies and Persian literature.

Outreach activities will include exhibitions such as the one on *Living Zoroastrianism* currently on show in the Foyle Gallery at SOAS—one of the outcomes of a five-year major research grant from the European Research Council awarded to Almut Hintze in 2016 to film, record and document the Yasna ceremony. The centrepiece of *Living Zoroastrianism* is a virtual reality experience. The viewer dons a VR headset and is immediately transported into the ritual space of the Yasna where every detail of the performance is visible. The Multimedia Yasna (MUYA) project will also produce a printed edition of the Avestan text together with a translation, commentary, dictionary, and, in collaboration with partners internationally, a set of digital tools with which to transcribe, collate and evaluate manuscripts.



Dr. Sarah Stewart, Baroness Valerie Amos, Mr. Shapoor Mistry, and Professor Almut Hintze.

remaining Zoroastrian communities in Iran. Its focus is the aftermath of the Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent changes to the religious lives and social structures of Zoroastrians as a religious minority. Between 2007 and 2011 over 300 interviews were collected from Zoroastrians living in urban centres and in the villages surrounding the city of Yazd where an ever-diminishing number still live or own property and/or land. The interviews, most of which are in the Dari language, have been digitized in the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at SOAS, thereby providing a rich archival resource for future research. Extracts from recorded interviews presented in the exhibition consist of comments and views on ritual and devotional life drawn from lay members of the community rather than from priests.

Listeners hear the excerpt in Persian or Dari and the translation appears on the screen accompanied by film footage provided for this exhibition courtesy of Mr Ali Attar. Textiles, ritual objects and beautiful *garas* and *jabhlas* are also on show in *Living Zoroastrianism*. The exhibition's

One of the unique attributes of this project is that it renders Zoroastrian liturgical texts and rituals—hitherto difficult for anybody to understand—both meaningful and comprehensible. In the two-dimensional film, which was made in addition to the Virtual Reality film, just a click on a ritual implement seen on the screen will prompt an explanation.

A second installation in the Gallery provides a snapshot of lay customs and views about priestly rituals. The recordings presented here are the result of my own British Academy-funded research project that maps the



Guests experiencing virtual reality

In The News

opening on October 11, 2018 was preceded by a memorial ceremony for Professor John Hinnells with a lecture on *The Study of Religions at SOAS and Beyond*, presented by Almut Hintze. She gave a moving account of his many achievements both in his life and work. The event was attended by family, friends and former students.

The future potential of the SSPIZS lies with the younger generation and should be shaped by their desire to preserve their heritage, to learn about their religion and to adapt and practise it as best they can in a fragmented world.

Our programmes are developing in two directions. On the one hand we see the preservation of the tradition as a high priority. To this end we have begun a project to source and digitise endangered Zoroastrian heritage, manuscripts and recordings. The SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji digital manuscript and sound archive is already established in the SOAS library. Almut Hintze and her team will be researching, documenting and collating newly-discovered manuscripts in India next year. On the other hand, we wish to provide a neutral platform for contemporary issues to be debated and consequently to invest in modern technology to make our methods accessible and to disseminate ideas. As far back as 2009, in the Fall issue of FEZANA Journal dedicated to Zoroastrian youth, there were ardent appeals to learn, discuss and address the dichotomy between the old and the new:

“To pass on identity and spirituality to our children, we must educate and empower our own understanding. Religious information and people-connection is at our fingertips – the internet, libraries, and knowledgeable dasturs – we merely need to seek it. Our generation is creating better coalitions of educators, dasturs, scholars, and parents to enhance age-appropriate, engaging religious information. But every parent has personal responsibility to expose their children while young, to religion and community involvement; instilling knowledge, curiosity, and spirituality. We need to savor our religion. If we can’t do this for ourselves, how can we expect the next generation to want connection with each other?”

The confluence of old and new is aptly summed up in footage from Almut Hintze’s introduction to her MUYA project in *Living Zoroastrianism*. An elderly priest is shown teaching a young boy his prayers. The setting is the Cama Athornan Institute in Andheri, Mumbai. One is struck by the simple solemnity of the occasion as they walk together along the verandah of this stately building. At the same time the pathos of the situation cannot be ignored, for here is just one student in what used to be a busy *madrasah* – now in need of repair - surrounded by empty classrooms and dormitories and a garden that once was full of trees and flowers.

It is for the next generation to manage the future of Zoroastrianism and those of us in a position to help with this process should listen to them. We are fortunate indeed to have the SSPIZS, which, as an academic institution, enables us to collaborate with like-minded bodies across the world.

Above all, SSPIZS allows us to secure the fast-disappearing past whilst simultaneously providing a platform that promotes the continuing relevance of the study and practice of Zoroastrianism; not just for Zoroastrians, but also for those of other faiths and for those of none.



Memorial lecture for Professor John Hinnells conducted by Almut Hintze

Dr Sarah Stewart is a Senior Lecturer in Zoroastrian Studies and Co-chair of the SSPIZS with Professor Almut Hintze, Zartoshty Brothers Chair in Zoroastrianism.

2018 SSZ CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO

REPORT BY ROSHAN RIVETNA



Over 70 persons participated in the SSZ (Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism) conference, October 19 – 21, 2018, at the Arbab Rustom Guiv Darbe Mehr in Chicago. The conference started with a “Meet and Greet” reception on Friday evening, followed with the first of three presentations by keynote speaker, Dr. Brown.

Rev. Dr. Brian Arthur Brown [photo below, with Rohinton Rivetna] who holds a Masters in Theology from McGill University, and a doctorate from University of California) presented his research on “*The Dead ‘Zee’ Scrolls*”:

Zoroastrian concepts buried in the scriptures of the world religions” showing how the Magi spread Zoroaster’s thoughts along the Silk Road from Greece to China, impacting the birth of the seven World Religions, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam, pointing to the debt they all owe to Zoroastrianism. Brown also captured the audience with his “big reveal” -- of the tomb containing Zoroaster’s bones, in a crypt beneath the Blue Mosque in Afghanistan.



On Saturday, the program opened with a Benediction by **Mobedyar Boman Damkevala** and a Monajat by **Mani Rao**. Participants were welcomed by ZAC President **Afshan Barshan** and **Kayomarsh Mehta** (WZO President US Region, co-sponsor of the Conference). **Rohinton Rivetna** explained the Vision of SSZ, which is to revive the tradition of learning and scholarship and urged all – academics, priests, educationists, lay scholars, students, and above all, community members -- to participate in these conferences.

Mobed Kobad Zarolia [photo below] founding president of the North American Mobeds Council and Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation, and past president of Zoroastrian Society of Ontario, presented “*Photographic Journey of Airyana Vaeja*” – an account of his tour of Uzbekistan and search for Zoroastrian connections. **Pervin Taleyarkhan** [photo far right] an in-house legal counsel with Whirlpool Corp. in Michigan, engaged the audience with an interactive and informative discussion on the Zoroastrian religion, its teachings, and its practices.

The afternoon session was chaired by **Persis Driver**, professor of Developmental and Educational Psychology at Dominican University, and teacher at the children’s Religious Education classes at ZAC-Chicago. **Er. Tehemton Mirza**

of London, Ontario, Navar and Maratab from Udvada Atash Behram, Vice President of the North American Mobeds Council, and an accomplished orator, gave an inspirational sermon, on “*Vohu Manah – the Good Mind*”. **Dastur**

Dr. Kersey Antia, high priest of the Zarathushtis in Chicago area, Avesta-Pahlavi scholar and author, stressed how Zoroastrianism is the only religion that had relations with most other religions.





Photo left Dastur Dr Kersey Antia at the podium with panelists Cyrus Rivetna, Khursheed Ichaporia, Kamal Saher and Zenobia Ravji

In the **Panel discussion** moderated by **Persis Driver**, the Next Generation panelists: teachers **Khursheed Ichaporia** and **Kamal Saher**, journalist **Zenobia Ravji**, and architect **Cyrus Rivetna** discussed (1) aspects of the Zoroastrian religion that people of diverse faiths could learn from and vice versa; and (2) aspects of Zoroastrianism that have relevance and application in their professional life.



In the Social Hour [*photo left above Brian Brown, Er. Tehemton Mirza and Er. Kobad Zarolia*] participants had an opportunity to network and socialize over cocktails and hor's d'oevres. On Sunday morning, speakers and community members gathered for a **Roundtable Discussion** over breakfast at the Rivetnas' [*photo above right*]. They discussed: critique of the 2018 Conference; structure and organization of the SSZ; planning for the 2019 conference; and brainstormed on how to inspire more interest in the SSZ conference, especially among the next generation.

Upcoming SSZ Conferences. The next SSZ conference is planned for October 2019 in Houston, by Sarosh

Manekshaw and Aban Rustomji, in collaboration with FIRES and ZAH, where Almut Hintze, professor of Zoroastrianism at SOAS, London, will be the keynote speaker. The October 2020 SSZ conference is planned for in Toronto organized by Mobed Kobad Zarolia and NAMC vice-president Mobed Tehemton Mirza, in collaboration with ZSO and OZCF.

Grateful Thanks. We are deeply grateful to: Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna for spear-heading the Conference; ZAC for hosting it; WZO and Kayomars Mehta for donation of \$500; Bomi Damkevala for video-recording; scribe Jehangir Darukhanavala, Pervin Taleyarkhan for organizational help, and above all, the speakers who gave of their time and talents to come and enlighten us. For the presentations and photos, visit the SSZ website www.s-s-z.org (for which we are deeply grateful to Yazdi Tantra and his firm on-lyne.com). To view the video recordings (on youtube) click on “2018 SSZ Conference Videos”

ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA CELEBRATES 2nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE ATASHKADEH.

The 2nd Salgreh (ANNIVERSARY) of Zoroastrian Association of California Atashkadeh was celebrated with great religious fervor on November 13th. The day started with Zerkxis Bhandara doing Chowk and with the Boi ceremony. In the evening a one kg pure Sandalwood Hama Anjuman Machi was offered to the holy fire, the sandalwood was brought from Framroze shop, outside Banaji Atashbehram, Charni road, Mumbai, India. This was followed by a Hama Anjuman Jashan performed by Ervads Zarrir and Zerkxis Bhandara, Jal Birdy, Minoo Katrack, Fariborz Shahzadi and mobedyar Maneck Bhujwalla. (photo left).



After the Jashan a very informative and interactive talk on fire was delivered by Ervad Zarrir Bhandara which was simultaneously interpreted by Ervad Fariborze Shahzadi in Persian for the benefit of the Persian speaking crowd. Zarrir explained the definition of energy showing the uncanny similarities with the characteristics of God. He explained that according to Physics energy can never be created or destroyed, has always been and will always be there, always moving into/ out of form and through the form. All these characteristics apply directly to God as well. He further extrapolated that the purest physical form of energy that the human eye can see- according to science- is fire and we Zoroastrians worship

Ahura Mazda through fire. So, we can further deduce that God is energy and that our reverence to fire and various natural elements is further justified. Moreover, Zarir stated that the holy fire performs the dual function of being a receiver and a transmitter, which receives the energy from the eternal fire of Ahura Mazda and when a devotee stands in front of the fire he/she receives the blessings from the fire. Additionally, he explained the three different grades of fire and the consecration process of the same. ZAC's president Mrs. Houtoxi F. Contractor thanked all the attendees and the priests, which was followed by a delicious dinner made by Reshma and Adil Rustomi and a birthday cake brought by Dr. Farhad Contractor.

REPORT BY ZARRIR BHANDARA

ZOROASTRIAN INFLUENCES & CONNECTIONS IN ARYANA VAEJAA

Report FIRDOSH MEHTA

The 28 people who attended the Second Seminar, (including Speakers), held on Sunday, October 7, 2018 at the Arbab Rostam Guiv Dare Mehr, Burnaby, BC, were indeed fortunate.

Organized by Firdosh Mehta, under the flagship of ZSBC and supported by FEZANA & ZSO through the Jamshed Pavri Religion Education Fund, it was a day well spent. Firdosh and his wife, Rashna, organized a volunteer team of Sepand Gojgini, Anahita Kaviani, Manochehr Dini, and Percy & Zahan Billimoria, who not only catered to our mental rejuvenation, but also to our gastronomical enhancement with plenty of food and beverages during two breaks and a light lunch, during the seminar from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Firdosh opened the program, with a benediction prayer contributed by Er. Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia. He recognized the donation from the Nirumvala Family of DELTA 4 Productions of the large screen to ZSBC. This was followed by a welcome address, house keeping requirements and sale of the 2019 Canadian Multifaith Calendar. The two speakers were then introduced.

Firdosh also showed the covers of 3 books, *RELIGIONS OF THE SILK ROAD* by Richard Foltz, *THE SILK ROADS* by Peter Frankopan and *STORY OF THE SILK ROAD* by Zhang Yiping.



Dr. K. E. MEHRFAR (California)

ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL IMPACTS IN ANCIENT ARYAN LANDS

The influence of the ancient Persian culture & its official religion of Zoroastrianism was presented & discussed. There were slides & images for better understanding the topic. The wide reach of the influence, not only along this ancient silk road but also miles away in some of the remote areas that still exist, was presented. The audience was pleasantly surprised to know the extent, and far & wide outreach of the Zoroastrian religion, and its cradle of creation, the ancient Persian culture.



Mr. K. E. EDULJEE (Vancouver)

Title: SPREAD OF ZOROASTRIAN-ARYAN INFLUENCE FROM ARYANA VAEJAA, THE ARYAN HOMELAND.

Mr Eduljee spoke where the Aryan homeland Aryana Vaejaa was, and how the Aryan lands grew to include an expanse from China to the Mediterranean. He pointed out the role of trade in the expansion of the lands, who the Amazons were and what was their connection to Aryan history and the role of women in Aryan society. He explained about the connection between the Indus Valley Civilization and the Aryans; where Mehrgarh was and what was discovered there.

The presentation also included topics: was there ever an Aryan invasion of the Indus Valley, and what do archaeological finds tell us about Aryan history. The role of cotton in the Indus

valley and silk in Central Asia to the growth of the Silk Roads. He talked about the mysterious land of Kangdez and what was its connection to silk and the legend of the final days before Frasho-kereti; the connection between the oracle bones discovered in China and Zoroastrian-Aryan influence in China and the rest of the Aryan world.

Dr. K. E. MEHRFAR

Title: ECONOMIC & SOCIAL IMPACTS ALONG THE SILK ROAD

Silk road in some academia & research centers around the world is known as the first global trade route, and perhaps the seed of the global trade in specific, and globalism in general as we see today. This is a suggestion with no hard evidence or proof to present. However, based on what information we currently have & in some institutions including Smithsonian & the University of Chicago, etc., and based on layman term “common sense,” we can presume this claim may have some roots in factual reality. As of now, there is no other ancient trade route that is discovered to have such a status or put into that category. This presentation focused on the importance of economic and social impacts of the ancient silk road from a more or less Zoroastrian point of view.

A bouquet of flowers was presented to Mrs Roya Mehrfar by Rashna Mehta. Gifts of books were given to Mr. Eddie Eduljee by Percy Billimoria, ZSBC Treasurer, and to Dr. K E Mehrfar by Anahita Kaviani, ZSBC Immediate Past President.

The seminar ended with a “vote of thanks” to ZSBC, FEZANA, all the volunteers, both speakers, for such an interesting, informative and educational seminar, with expectations to continue this activity next year.

Dr. Khosro Esfandiar Mehrfar was born in Tehran, moved to U.S. in 1979 to pursue graduate studies receiving his Ph.D. in 1986. His interest in Zoroastrian religion started as a child due to his parent's strong belief & his maternal grandfather Khosro Jamshid Hooshangi who was a Dastur in Taft, Yazd.

He attended the weekly Avesta classes at Sazman Fravahar, Tehran during his schooling days and later was elected as educational committee member at Tehran's Kanoon Daneshjooyan Zartoshti (Center of Zoroastrian college students).

With the help of 2 other Zarathushtis he created Vohuman.org, the first online Zoroastrian education source, which is widely referenced by academia & the media like CNN, etc.

In 2003 he was elected by the board of trustees of CZC to chair the UN 3000th anniversary of the Zoroastrian culture in S. California. CNN had the 1st interview with Dr. Mehrfar regarding this important global event via London office. In 2004 he was invited by WZO to present a paper in WZO H/Q in London.

Dr. Mehrfar initiated, planned, coordinated & managed 12 cultural & religious conferences from 1996 to 2016 with the help of many Zoroastrian youth at CZC & Anaheim Convention Center.

For 20 years & until its closure, Dr. Mehrfar was one of the 3 editors of Peyk-e-Mehr along with the late Mobedan Mobed Rostam Shahzadi & Mehrafzoon Sassanfar Firoozgar. Peyk-e-Mehr, established by Dr Shahrivini of Vancouver was a global Zoroastrian publication, sent to 43 countries, He currently has an investment firm Mehr U.S. Corp. & teaches at UCI School of Business for MBA graduates.

K. E. Eduljee began to research the role of Iranian peoples in trade in the 1990s. The subject features prominently in his Zoroastrian Heritage website, as well as his Zoroastrian Heritage Facebook group page. His article ‘Was Central Asia the Ancient Home of the Aryan Nation & Zoroastrian Religion?’ was the lead article in the summer 2014 issue of the FEZANA Journal. In the FEZANA article, Eduljee proposed that the Aryans (ancient Iranians) were traders par excellence and that the Aryans owned the trade roads commonly known as the Silk Roads. In December 2016, the Zoroastrian Association of Houston invited Eduljee to make a presentation on the history of the Silk Roads and their connection to the Zoroastrian migration to China after the Arab invasion of Iran in the seventh century.

K. E. Eduljee was a silver medal winner at the 2017 Independent Publisher Book Awards for his article on the Oracle Bones.

ZAOM visits Gleaners Food Bank

The Zoroastrian Association of Michigan (ZAOM) and the Religion Class group visited the Gleaners Food Bank in Warren, Michigan, on Saturday, Oct 6, 2018 as part of their community service initiative. Their visit coincided with the celebration of Mehergan, the ancient Persian Thanksgiving & Harvest Festival which is a time of sharing with the poor & the needy. The visit was also motivated by the FEZANA Interfaith Committee initiative to coordinate the “Season of Sharing” where individual communities are encouraged to organize events in the fall to help our needy neighbors.



A group of 24 volunteers of all ages 10 and up arrived at Gleaners at 1pm. After a quick orientation they were all assigned to the “Cooler” where an enormous amount of frozen vegetables that were originally destined for the landfill (because they were not cut to the right size !!) was being stored. They were assigned a load of frozen diced beets that had to be transferred from

cardboard containers into 2 lb portions, sealed into plastic bags and then repackaged into boxes for delivery to food pantries.

What initially seemed like a daunting task, turned into quite a fun event and everyone settled into their roles to keep the process rolling. The beets were frozen solid and so one volunteer was assigned “pick-axe duty” where he had to go around and pound away with the pick-axe before the frozen diced beets could be loosened up and be repackaged.

At the end of 2 hours they had packed 2104 lbs of food, enough to feed 1683 people!! A big thanks to all who attended and to all those could not attend but sent in their food donations to Gleaners.

What a great way to put the Yatha Ahu Vairyo Prayer into practice!



Contributed by Ardeshir N Irani, MD

BIRTHS

- Zain Irani**, a boy, to Natalia and Cyrus Irani on June 21, 2018. (ZSBC)
- Cyrus Kade Billimoria**, a boy, to Xerxes and Corrine Billimoria, grandson to Soonoo and Daraious Billimoria on July 13, 2018. (ZSO)
- Nina Kekobad**, a girl, to Dilshad and Jamshid Kekobad, sister to Zara and Karl, granddaughter to Meher and Kersi Choksey and Jerroo Kekobad in Santa Clara on July 14, 2018.
- Clayton Yezdi Press**, a boy, to Erin and Carl Press, grandson to Zarin and Minoo Press and Perveen and Yezdi Guzdar, great grandson to Freny Katrak, nephew to Anna and Cyrus, Amy and Eric, cousin to Raina on October 16, 2018. (ZAC-CHI)
- Ava Lisa Austin** a girl to Lisa and Navroze Austin, grandparents Denise and Cyrus Yazdi and Marzban and Guloo Austin, sister for Darius, in Ottawa, on November 17, 2018.
- Francesca Gray Hills**, a girl, to Shauna and Sean Hills, granddaughter to Vahishta and Jambi Canteenwalla, great granddaughter to Shiawax Canteenwalla in Ottawa, ONT on November 25, 2018.
- Rayan Eric Engineer**, a boy, to Thrity and Eric Engineer (Austin, TX), grandson to Yasmin and Rustom Engineer (Sugarland, TX) and Roshan Bharucha (Quetta, Pakistan), brother to Aaron in Austin, TX on November 26, 2018.
- Hormazd**, a boy to Fareeza and Dinsha Mistree, grandson to Meher and Zarir Doctor, and Yashfara and Farrokh Mistree in Stanford, CA. on December 5, 2018.

Logan Jimmy Sethna, a boy to Whitney and Jimmy Sethna, grandson to Sherry and Jal Sethna, nephew to Sean, in Houston, on December 7, 2018

NAVJOTES

Pehzad Yohan Banaji, son of Gulshan and Yohan Banaji, grandson of Nergish and Aspi Bharucha and Roshan and late Mehernosh Banaji in Cincinnati, OH on July 22, 2018.

Riyan Billimoria Kadribegovic and **Auren Billimoria Kadribegovic**, children of Coomy Billimoria and Nerin Kadribegovic in Los Angeles, CA. (ZAC-LA)

WEDDINGS

Burjis Darabna to **Sharmin Kooka** on August 10, 2018. (ZSBC)

Farhad Roueintan, son of Homa Farahmand (North Vancouver, BC) and Mehrdad Roueintan (Tehran, Iran) to **Mahsa Yazdani**, daughter of Sima and Khosrow Yazdani in San Francisco, CA on August 4, 2018.

Roxana Jangi, daughter of Faramarz and Viloo Jangi (North Vancouver, BC) to **Ravinth Latour**, son of Ruben and Panchi Latour in Priddis, Alberta on August 5, 2018.

Joshua Nanavaty, son of Kershaw and Jane Nanavaty (Vancouver, BC) to **Jennifer Wills**, daughter of Brian and Jacqui Wills in Vancouver, BC on August 5, 2018.

Freda Irani, daughter of Nargish and Phiroze Irani (Naperville, IL) to **Trevor Hill**, son of Jamie and late William Hill in Chicago, IL on August 18, 2018.

Mozaad Irani, son of Nargish Irani (Richmond, BC) to **Nisha Balsara**, daughter of Khursheed and late Sarosh Balsara in Richmond, BC on September 1, 2018.

Gohar Firozgari, daughter of Farrokh and Mahnaaz Firozgari to **Adam Stevens** in Austin, TX on November 25, 2018.

DEATHS

Daisy Mehar Mehta, wife of Mehar, mother of Zersis (Jennifer), Zenobia (Randy), grandmother of Jack and Mason in Miami on August 30, 2018.

Dadi Panthaki, husband of Nergish, father of Mahiyar, Farhad (Boston, MA), Navaz (India) on September 8, 2018 (ZSO)

Keki Gandhi, husband of Rosemary, father of Jimmy, Shireen, son-in-law Michael, grandfather of Ellis, Wilson, brother of Adi, Minoo and late Perin Amaria on October 8, 2018. (ZAC-LA)

Fereidoon Pashoutanizadeh, 90, husband of Golbanou Khoshsar, father of Shahin, Combiz, Parvin, Parviz, Farshid on October 12, 2018. (ZSO)

Banoo Cawas Dastoor, 92 mother of Firdaus (Tehmi) Dastoor, Ruzbeh (Linda) Dastoor (Arizona), grandmother of Sarosh and Neville Dastoor on October 28, 2018. (MANASHNI)

Meheroo Jangbarwalla, 72, in Vancouver, BC on October 28, 2018.

Verlin Allbritton, husband of Dhun Mehta, father of Verlin Allbritton II, Vincent Allbritton, Angela Allbritton, Yvonne Albritton, Barbara Coleman, Selene Mehta on November 13, 2018. (ZAPANJ)

Rashid Irani, 61, husband of Libby, father of Johann and Samamaz, brother of Shaheen Rustom (Sugarland, TX), Shireen and Shahnaz (India) in Pune, India on November 18, 2018. (MANASHNI)

MILESTONES

Kaikhosro Farahmand, 67, husband of Arnavaz, father of Kaivan, Farahnaz, Kamran, father-in-law of Haley, grandfather of Kya in Clayton, CA on November 20, 2018

Mani R. Rao, 86, wife to Rusi B. Rao, mother of Bakhtavar (Fred) Desai, Anahita Rao, and Yasmin (Rayomand) Bhumgara,. grandma to Shireen-Kevin, Havovi, Farah, Behroze-James, Kashmin, and Nasreen in Cincinnati , OH Nov 22, 2018 .

Shirin Yazdani Bioki, 94, mother of Bahram Soroosh in Karaj, Iran on November 27, 2018 (ZAMWI)

Dadi Navroji Divecha, husband of Freny Divecha, father of Firdous and Zubin Divecha (Sydney, Australia), brother of Tehmi Danny Vakil (Toronto, ONT), Nerges Pervez Birdie (New Jersey) in Karachi, Pakistan, on November 30, 2018.

Sillo Pesi Behrana, wife of late Pesi Eduljee Behrana, mother of Mahrukh Behrana and Tanaz Divecha, mother-in-law of Zareer Divecha in Toronto, ONT on December 3, 2018.

Shireen (Silla) Ebrahim, daughter of late Dhunjishaw and Mithamai Bharucha (Karachi, Pakistan), sister of Katy (Noshir) Mulla, late Farokh (Goolu) Bharucha, late Amy and Lovji Tengra in Kitchener, ONT on December 5, 2018.



FEZANA Journal will coordinate initial contacts between interested parties. We do not assume any responsibility for verifying credentials. Contact Roshan Rivetna at roshanrivetna@gmail.com.

Female, 30. Matrimonial alliance invited by parents of 30-year old doctor (MBBS, MD, PhD) from New Zealand, willing to settle in Australia, New Zealand, USA or Canada. Girl is vegetarian and prefers a vegetarian partner. Contact saroshbala@yahoo.in or +91 98 6761 2083 [F18.60]

Female, 26. Parents of 26-year old doctor doing residency (MD) in Pediatrics in New York, invite correspondence from well-settled boys, preferably doctors, in USA, Canada or Australia. Contact saroshbala@yahoo.in or +91 98 6761 2083 [F18.61]

Female, 26, 5' 5", majored in Social Science and Political Science (University of Toronto), flight attendant with Air-Canada and Advocate at Abused Women's Shelters in Ontario. Fun-loving, out-going, fluent in several languages, widely traveled. Contact tbharda@hotmail.com. [F18.66]

Female, 27, 5' 2", slim, attractive, LLB from Law College (Pune), working in legal department at law firm in Mumbai. Widely traveled, willing to settle abroad. Contact fssvacumaster@gmail.com. [F18.71]

Male, 31, 5' 10", Bachelors in Business Management, working in family business in New York. Born in India, brought up in New York. Enjoys tennis, yoga, did some modelling and acting in his early 20s. Contact hanoshf@yahoo.com. [M18.72]

Male, 34, B.Com. (South Gujarat University, Surat) working in HDFC Bank. Enjoys traveling and music. Contact delzad_mirza@yahoo.com. [F18.74].

**PLEASE SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS FOR
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