

# JOURNAL

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**2023 PARLIAMENT  
OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS**

**A CALL TO CONSCIENCE:  
DEFENDING FREEDOM AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS**



**UNVEILING THE LEGACY OF THE CYRUS CYLINDER:  
ZOROASTRIAN ETHOS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF ZOROASTRIANS**



*With Best Compliments  
From  
The Incorporated Trustees  
Of the  
Zoroastrian Charity Funds  
of  
Hong Kong, Canton & Macao*

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Vol 37 No 4 Winter 2023

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**The winter issue of the FEZANA journal is dedicated to the 2023 convening of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago where the Zoroastrian contingent, both young and old, made significant contributions.**

**T**hroughout the history of the Parliament starting from 1893, Zoroastrians have made contributions with the paper prepared by Ervad Sheriarji Bharucha and Jivanji Jamshedji Modi published in the proceedings. Of the nineteen women whose addresses were part of the main plenary program only one was from outside the US and England. Miss Jeanne (aka Jane) Sorabji of Bombay, sister of Cornelia Sorabji, India's first woman lawyer. Rohinton Rivetna, spearheaded in Chicago 1983 the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1893 parliament and served as founding Vice-President and Trustee. There were participation by Zoroastrians in conventions Capetown (1999), Barcelona (2004), Melbourne (2009), Salt Lake City (2015), and in Toronto. (2018). There was a virtual convening, (2021) with Dolly Dastoor as Vice Chair of the Board and last year in Chicago with two Zoroastrian Trustees, Mahrukh Motafaram and Dolly Dastoor.

In 2023 The City of Chicago welcomed the Parliament of the World's Religions by declaring the month of August as "Parliament of the World's Religions Month." The opening of the Convening, was celebrated by a Parade of Faiths, at the convening, there were over 8000 attendees, representing 97 countries, and media coverage reaching 2.5 billion people worldwide.

The Parliament's work in 2023 was not limited to the Chicago



Convening. In partnership with Seattle University's Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Engagement, the Parliament launched *Seeking Religious Literacy*, an online course open to the public.

The Parliament continues to be a leader in advancing the interfaith field, participating in events such as the American Academy of Religions, the Ripple Conference for interfaith student leaders, University of Chicago Divinity's "Possibilities and Challenges of Interfaith

Organizations," and sponsored side event of the 22nd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Parliament issued an urgent plea to protect the Amazon Rainforest in a plenary of the Convening and as an online event.

The Climate Action Task Force hosted and partnered on a number of significant events, including a World Environment Day event with the Center for Earth Ethics and the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN.

During the *Global*



*Ethics General Assembly* the commentary on the Global Ethic document, the Parliament's signature document, *Toward a Global Ethics* was signed by 25 invited religious leaders including Justice Rohinton Nariman and Dr Sousan Abadian on behalf of the Zoroastrian faith. The original document was signed in 1983 by several Zoroastrians as well. The document, *Toward a Global Ethic*, was showcased in a symposium during the 2023 Chicago Convening, sponsored by the University of Notre Dame's Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion.

The symposium brought together prominent representatives from several religious and spiritual traditions to tackle this question: *"How do we put into practice our commitments to foster a culture of respect for life, of economic justice, of truth and compassion, of women's rights, and of care for the Earth?"*

The Women's Task Force facilitated women to share messages of hope and identify partners and opportunities around critical areas of concern: education for women and girls, justice for children, political literacy, women and community, financial literacy, climate solutions, human trafficking, and women's health and wellbeing. In addition the Parliament published *Women Advancing Knowledge Equity: The Parliament of the World's Religions*, a collection of biographies about women who are noteworthy leaders and participants in the Parliament of the World's Religions. (see page 100)

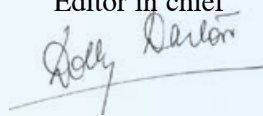
Most of the presentations by Zarthushtis at the Convening are presented in this issue, together with Zarthushtis who have made contributions to society, as well as the significant events which took place at the conferences of the Society of Scholars on

Zoroastrianism in Chicago and the Library Conference in Hoston.

By the time you read this issue we would have entered 2024. May the year bring peace and prosperity to the world at large which is being tormented by wars and destruction. May the Zarathushti community flourish and achieve success.

I thank all our loyal readers, contributors, supporters, advertisers, the journal team and wish them good health and strength to carry on in 2024.

Gratefully  
Dolly Dastoor Ph.D  
Editor in chief



*"You answered this call to conscience, now we invite you take the next step. My great hope for this 9th global convening of the Parliament of the World's Religions is that it becomes clear for us as a community that this is not a time to rest or self-congratulations, it's time for action. We are powerful – together we are something special."*

*Join us in defending freedom and human rights by sharing the bold wisdom, talks, and projects supporting the ongoing impact of the Parliament of the World's Religions worldwide."*

*Rev. Stephen Avino, Executive Director  
Parliament of the World's Religions*



## Message FROM THE PRESIDENT

# The

start of a new year allows us to reset our goals, aims and aspirations for the next 365 days. As we enter 2024, I would like to wish you and your families and loved ones a healthy, happy and prosperous new year. May 2024 bring abundant opportunities for our community, to rise and shine in the months ahead.

The last months of 2023 and the first of 2024 have continued the trend to be extremely busy ones at FEZANA and its member associations, as also for the Zarathushtis world over.

November saw the groundbreaking ceremony at OZCF for their place of worship in Oakville, a suburb of Toronto, Canada. This followed a hugely successful fundraising Gala where they have almost reached their target. On the same day the California Zoroastrian Center inaugurated their new Dar-E-Mehr in San Diego. This is the third center in the CZC fold and the Zarathushti community in San Diego now have their own home and place of worship. FIRES and ZAH in Houston welcomed Dr. Jenny Rose for the Annual Library event.

December saw 14 youth from FEZANA attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Return To Roots Trip to India. A total of 28 youth from all over the world

gathered for a 14 day trip through western India. FEZANA has been a partner with RTR since inception and we have hugely benefitted from the Alumni of the program who have then taken on leadership roles at FEZANA.

I also had the opportunity to represent FEZANA at the Global Working Group (GWG) Annual Meeting in Mumbai India, along with Bomi Patel, Chair of FEZANA External Affairs Committee. The GWG met, after 4 years, in person and various topics that affect the faith and the community globally were discussed. I also had the honor of being inducted as a Trustee of the Global Council of Zoroastrians Trust (GCZT) and attended the Board Meeting in Mumbai this January.

In the upcoming months, ZYNA will have its Leadership Retreat in Vancouver, Canada with the youth of Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia, a FEZANA member hosting this sold out event with over 57 youth from all over N.A. participating.

The current issue of the FEZANA Journal covers the Zarathushti presence at the Parliament of World's Religions. My personal thanks to Bakhtavar Desai and Homi Gandhi, Co-Chairs of the Interfaith Committee, Dolly Dastoor and Mahrukh Motafram, FEZANA stalwarts and Trustees of the PoWR, and Jamshed Rivetna and the entire group of volunteers from the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago for assuring that the Zarathushti presence at the PoWR was impactful, meaningful and seamless. We had speakers and panelist from as young as 15 years to veterans in the 80's participating in the 5 day event with gusto and we were able to fly the Zarathushti flag high and be counted and represented on this global stage.

As winter wanes and register and pay: <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/zamc/1146237>

spring beckons I wish you warmer and sunnier days. If you would like to get involved at FEZANA in any capacity, do drop a line at [president@fezana.org](mailto:president@fezana.org)





## **UNITY** & **Welfare Committee**

**In** the spirit of unity and our unwavering commitment to community welfare, the FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee is pleased to recount the remarkable milestones we've achieved so far in 2023.

We've had the privilege to extend financial assistance exceeding \$140,000 to various appeals that have come our way. This monumental achievement demonstrates our collective commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of those in need within our community.

We wish you all abundance of good health, love, peace, contentment and prosperity with your loved ones in this coming year and always. We thank all for your generosity in supporting FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee and we are fortunate and thankful that our community has such giving people.

Nature is a great teacher if we observe and learn from it. Everything in nature is designed to give, to sustain and enhance life. Air helps us sustain life, earth provides us with minerals, crops, fruits, nourishment. Water quenches our thirst and nourishes the life of fishes, plants and mammals.

We, humans are also designed to do the same. We are happy when we are giving, giving of ourselves, of our goodness, of our abilities, giving and sharing of our experiences. Most of us have an abundance of things we can give. Some of us who think we do not have anything to give can always give of our smile, our compassion, our time, share in someone's sorrow and so on. If we start making a list of all the abundance of intangibles that we have it will be an exhaustive long list.

When we are born, we come in the world with nothing, our eyes are closed, our hands are clenched in a fist not holding anything, only our mouths are open and that also to cry to complain about the rough passage that we just experienced!! When we are done experiencing life, we leave without taking anything. All through life we learn and work to acquire stuff that we can use in life, to use for necessities and some we accumulate to boost our ego. In life we go through many challenges and experiences. What do we learn from that? What do we take with us when we go to a different dimension?

A beautiful quote to share, "there is enough for everyone's needs but not enough for everyone's greed."

We wish you the best in 2024 and beyond.

*Houtoxi Contractor, Sanaya Master, Hosi Mehta*  
*Unity and Welfare Committee*





**FEZANA** UPDATE



# 37th FEZANA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING April 26-28, 2024



## FEZANA AGM 2024

**APRIL 26th - 28th, 2024 - CHICAGO**

**Hosted by the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan  
Chicago**



<https://fezana.org/2024-agm/>  
**REGISTER HERE**



Over the last 36 years FEZANA has been able to achieve its programs through the amazing leadership that each of our committee chairs bring to the committees they lead.

They volunteer their time and money to advance the Zarathushti causes in North America, and we are happy to announce the appointment of three new Chairs/Co-Chairs. They have all taken over their roles and responsibilities in the past few weeks.

### **ROOKY FITTER, CO-CHAIR FUNDS AND FINANCE COMMITTEE.**

Rooky Fitter of Huntington Beach, California joins the FEZANA Funds and Finance Committee as its Co-Chair and will serve along with Ratan Mistry. Rooky is a FEZANA veteran having served 4 years as FEZANA Treasurer. She also leads her home association as the President of the Zoroastrian Association of California and has been involved in various roles at ZAC over the past few decades. Rooky brings her professional expertise and institutional knowledge from her years as FEZANA Treasurer to this new role. Rooky can be reached at [sharox2@aol.com](mailto:sharox2@aol.com)



### **ANAHEEZ KARBHARI, CO-CHAIR ZOROASTRIAN YOUTH OF NORTH AMERICA (ZYNA).**

Anaheez Karbhari of Toronto, Canada joins ZYNA as Co-Chair and along with Farzin Avari and Kimiya Shahzadi she will continue to push ZYNA's mission, vision and activities for the next three years.

Anaheez Karbhari is a multidisciplinary designer and entrepreneur, born in Abu Dhabi, and raised in Toronto. She recently graduated with a Master of Information from the University of Toronto, specializing in User Experience Design.

Anaheez has been consistently engaged in Zoroastrian youth leadership initiatives across North America. Her commitment to the community started with founding and directing the Canadian Zoroastrian Students Association at U of T in 2013.

She is an active youth committee member at OZCF her local Zoroastrian association, in Oakville, Ontario, and is a dynamic youth leader in ZYNA as the Communications and Outreach committee co-chair since 2021.

Being part of the ZYNA family is a fulfilling experience for Anaheez for which she has been continually grateful. It's created a space where youth can unite and bring out their unique talents and strengths towards one common goal. Anaheez can be reached at [anaheezk@gmail.com](mailto:anaheezk@gmail.com) and ZYNA can be reached at [zyna@fezana.org](mailto:zyna@fezana.org)



### **PARSHAN KHOSRAVI, CHAIR OF ADVOCACY COMMITTEE.**

Parshan Khosravi of Los Angeles, California starts a new role at FEZANA as the Chair of the newly formed Advocacy Committee. Parshan has stepped down as the Co-Chair of ZYNA which he along with Farzin Avari jump started in late 2019 after the hugely successful 7th World Zoroastrian Congress 2019 which he chaired.

Parshan is a policy advocate, business owner, and former candidate for city council. He brings with him over 10 years of experience in legislative advocacy and systems change organizing, and currently serves as the California Policy Director for uAspire, a national nonprofit leading the efforts to address the college affordability crisis.

Parshan is also a devout Zoroastrian and first-generation Iranian refugee who spends his spare time organizing within his faith community as member of the board of directors for the California Zoroastrian Center.

As the former co-chair of the Zoroastrian Youth of North American and chair of the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress, Parshan plans to center youth voices at the forefront of his work as the Advocacy Committee chair for FEZANA. Parshan is a Return To Roots Fellow, having attended the 4th Return To Roots Trip to India in 2017.

A double alum of the University of California, Parshan received his Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Education Sciences from UC Irvine and his Master's Degree in Public Policy from UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Parshan can be reached at [advocacy@fezana.org](mailto:advocacy@fezana.org)



FEZANA Journal welcomes and wishes all three cochairs much success in their term of office.

XVIII NORTH AMERICAN ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS

**NAZC2024HOUSTON**  
DECEMBER 29, 2024 - JANUARY 1, 2025 Houston TX

**Generation Z:**  
Propelling Zarathushti Resurgence

Generation Z:  
Propelling Zarathushti Resurgence



Good day everyone! We are extremely excited to announce the dates of our **XVIII North American Zoroastrian Congress 2024** (NAZC2024) to be held in Houston, Texas from **December 29th, 2024, to January 1st, 2025**, so please save these dates.

**Registration, hotel booking and other details will be coming soon so please stay tuned.**

We are expecting a full house with almost 650-700 attendees and the NAZC2024 organizing committee is preparing a compelling multi track program catered to all age groups / interests. Some of the key features of our Congress are:

- A primary track based on our theme with thought provoking topics comprising of expert panelists.
- Major focus on Youth and Young Adults (40% under 40) with dedicated interactive hands-on sessions.
- Fantastic hotel rates (including 3 days before and after Congress) – Only \$109 for up to 4 occupants.
- FREE entrance for all delegates to the “Grand Behram Roj Jashan” at the ZAH Bhandara Atash Kadeh along with a visit to ZHCC, home of FIRES and to lunch thereafter on January 1st, 2025.
- World class entertainment with a lavish New Year’s Eve banquet bringing in the New Year 2025 along with superb mouth watering dining options.
- Excellent pre-Congress Youth and Young Adults program organized by our local Youth.
- A dedicated Tween-Teen and kids Congress.
- Post-Congress Western Caribbean Cruise and other attractions being planned.
- WZCC day preceding Congress comprising of activities and field trips.

For more details, please feel free to go on our website

**NAZC 2024 | 18th North American Zoroastrian Congress**

or on our social media accounts,

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/nazc2024houston>

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/nazc2024/>.

If you have any questions or need clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact us at

[contact@nazc2024houston.com](mailto:contact@nazc2024houston.com)

Sincerely, NAZC2024 Organizing Committee





## SHEER-E-SHIREEN: ADDING SUGAR TO THE MILK

MAHTAB B. DASTUR

**Teaser:** Famous, QUEEN lead singer, Freddie Mercury and the Zoroastrian community there is another connection

**Quote:** “Within the Zoroastrian tradition, the performance of good deeds, the putting into effect the power of good through the action of good thoughts that benefits those in need, is a moral imperative from the earliest articulation of the religion.”

“Good thoughts, good words, good deeds. Just like you taught me, Papa.” said Farokh Bulsara, better known as Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of QUEEN, as did Dr. Jenny Rose when starting her “Sheer-e-Shireen” talk at the Annual FIRES ZAH Library Event, held at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston on November 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 2023.

The 24<sup>th</sup> annual FIRES ZAH Library Event began on the evening of Friday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, as a meet-and-greet kicked off with a story-telling of the Shahnameh story of Gordafarid. The story was told by Natasha Dungor and Mahtab B. Dastur, and together, they led the wine-drinking, cheese-eating audience through an exhibition designed by Vehishta Kaikobad and Edul Chikhliwala. After some more wine drinking and cheese eating, Aban Rustomji, the Co-Chair of the FIRES Committee, formally started the Library Event with an introduction of the members of the Library Committee, giving special recognition to the newest members, *Sharmeen Mehri (of Buffalo, NY) and Nazanin Sarkari (of Houston, TX)*. Arzan Sam Wadia, FEZANA President, and Aderbad Tamboli, ZAH





President, also shared a few words of gratitude and encouragement.

Finally, Dr. Jenny Rose enthralled us with her “life-story”. Her grandmother was born a Parsi! And although her grandmother wore a sari and cooked spicy food, as grandmothers do, Dr. Rose, growing up, never asked her grandmother about her Parsi heritage, and regrettably did not get a chance to before her grandmother had a stroke. Dr. Rose was always interested in religion, and decided she wanted to pursue a masters degree in religion to increase her knowledge. So, she enrolled at SOAS, and her journey in Zoroastrian Studies began when she attended a class by Mary Boyce on Zoroastrianism. She is especially interested in the role of women in religion, as well as how the Western world has received Zoroastrianism and other Eastern religions. Dr. Rose also spoke expansively about her tours! She has led study tours to some of the most important sites in Iran and Central Asia and is hoping to go on a tour of museums in Europe in the near future. She is especially interested in visiting sites where “Zoroastrians roamed”. No wonder that her speech was followed by resounding rounds of applause and then a delicious potluck dinner (also several rounds for some!).

The following morning, Saturday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, the Zoom was set-up, online attendees had muted their mics, the talking had ceased to mere shuffling, and everyone waited in anticipation for yet another inspiring day. Soon enough the occurrences for the day began with an impressive introduction by Aban Rustomji, following which Dr. Jenny Rose took the stage and whisked everyone into stories of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. She began with a story of her last tour with 2 other professors, in Texas, during which she had visited Houston and Dallas. During her time in Dallas, Dr. Rose explored what children thought of the mantra, Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds. She stated that children seemed to have difficulty defining what they understood by Good Thoughts and were able to identify what Good Words meant (not to lie or badmouth someone, etc.), but that they “came to life” when discussing Good Deeds as it was visible and tangible. She then referenced the Ahunavar Prayer (Yatha Ahu Vairyo), which ends in words that encourage good action, stating that the way to put into effect good thought is through good action.

Dr. Rose reminded us regarding the actions that “famous” Zoroastrians had enacted, such as Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy funding hospitals and schools throughout India. But of course, not everyone has resources to fund such large institutions, and thus Dr. Jenny Rose began what would be the heart of her talk – smaller, tangible actions which she had personally witnessed in several areas across the globe. Dr. Rose spoke about sharing food at the Maidyozarem Gahambar in Taft and Mazra’e Kalantar, Iran, during which everyone came together to share the nuts, fruits, and food (Chasni). Cooking Sirog was also something she experienced both at the Gahambar in Iran and also during a visit to the California Zoroastrian Center. She points out that humbandagi means combining together, providing not only a sense of community but, in the case of community celebration, also providing food for those who may not otherwise eat well. She stated that food is an important part of the community (and of course everyone agreed!). In Yazd, good occasions (such as a birth, exam passed, or a successful surgical procedure) are often celebrated with the cooking of “charity soup” which is then distributed not only amongst the Zarathushti community, but also the broader community at-large. The celebration, not necessarily a religious custom but rather a social one and a practical act of service, brings friends and neighbors together, despite differences in social status or religion. She then spoke about a ceremony in some Zoroastrian homes in Iran, which parallels the “Mushkil Asan” ceremony observed by Parsis, as another manner of celebration, during which food (chickpeas) are prepared and then shared by and with women in the community. She recalled how, on her first visit to India, she was selflessly received by the Aga and Eduljee families who housed her, took her to a Navjote, spoke with her about the religion, and even taught her how to make Parsi dishes, such as Akuri, Sev and Ravo! Such is the hospitality that she continued to receive throughout her journey. Another example of selfless kindness she experienced was in Yazd Province (Mazra’e Kalantar), where the village leader (a complete stranger!) invited Dr. Rose into her home for a cup of tea. She also mentioned seeing residents at the Parsi Hospital in Navsari, India reading newspapers aloud to those who were unable to do so themselves; and the Pouruchista Skills Foundation in Yazd where women volunteered their time to teach vocational skills (i.e. sewing, cosmetics, etc.) and Kusti weaving to other women in need.

Going into the environmental aspect of good deeds, she mentioned the Ab Anbar, in the Zoroastrian villages such as Zeinabad, which provides clean water for all, and the FEZANA Ava Project with its focus on awareness and water conservation. She mentioned Dr Rashna Pardiwala who has undertaken the task to restore the forests around the land of the Doongerwadi in Mumbai, India.



Dr. Jenny Rose ended her expansive talk by summarizing that although an individual can be effective, community action can more broadly amplify that effect, by practicing hamazori which literally means *strength together*.

Natasha Dungor and Mahtab B. Dastur then gave a brief explanation regarding the Ava Project which is a 10-year initiative focusing on addressing the 30 Sustainable Goals of the UN, specifically Goals 6, 14, and 17 which revolve around clean water and sanitization, life under water, and partnerships respectively. In addition, they mentioned several projects such as the distribution of educational materials for the youth and community at the World Zoroastrian Congress in 2022 in NYC, and the several presentations, including at the Parliament of World's Religions.

Soon after it was time for audience participation and engagement. Everyone was asked to gather in smaller groups to brainstorm and reflect on good deeds that they perform every day and discuss what other good deeds they can do as a community. Following the stimulating discussions, many good ideas emerged such as participation in charities, saying prayers, being kind to oneself, event transportation for the elderly, recycling at the Center and many more. Then the much-awaited Naushad Mehta's delicious lunch was served!

Post lunch it was time for Meheryar Rivetna's talk on *Politics and Power: The Birth of the Younger Avesta*. The interesting talk discussed the evolution from Zarathustra's Gathic teachings to contemporary practices and beliefs. Mr. Rivetna began with the question, "Is the Zoroastrian religion monotheistic, dualistic, polytheistic, or henotheistic?". Tracing the history from Cyrus the Great to Darius II through the rise and falls of empires, he told the history of Zoroastrianism, pointing out the important religious role of the Magi throughout time. Mr. Rivetna stated that the magi infiltrated the political structure of the times, and self-appointed themselves as the true custodians of the Zoroastrian religion. Mr. Rivetna further explained that they [the Magi] gave us the Niyashes and Yashts which we pray today, reiterating that the Gathas were the only true compositions of Zarathustra. Mr. Rivetna ended his talk by answering the question he began with, stating "Hence, the Zoroastrian religion as practiced today is henotheistic. Monotheistic in name, Polytheistic in practice!". The afternoon ended with hot tea and happy conversation.

Following the end of the event, there was a warm buzz of energy, a reinvigorating motivation, a fire beneath each individual to go take action, to perform a good deed... together - Hamazor



Library Team with speakers





## *Sadeh*

### *Added To The List Of Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity*

This month, UNESCO, during the 5th Ordinary Governing Council Meeting of the Regional Research Center for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, added to its prestigious list the ancient jubilation of Sadeh festival. This elicited waves of joy among Iranians who have cherished their enduring legacy through generations. The festivity, usually occurring on January 30th, derives its name from the Farsi word for “one hundred” (Sad), marking 50 days and 50 nights before Nowruz. Rooted in ancient traditions, it is celebrated predominantly by Iranian Zoroastrians in cities like Yazd, Tehran, Shiraz, and Kerman. The festival commemorates the mythical discovery and domestication of fire by king Hooshang Pishdadi and it is observed with the lighting of a large woodpile during its zenith.”



The Sadeh festival, aka Jashn-e Sadeh in Persian, was registered as a common heritage between Iran and Tajikistan.” The Zoroastrians making fire for the Sadeh Festival in Kerman.

In the folk calendar, it marks the day when farmlands are prepared for their next spring plantation and when people celebrate the end of the coldest winter days, with 50 days and 50 nights remaining to spring. The element enjoys diverse manifestations in Iran and Tajikistan. It involves singing, dancing and praying around a fire and offering blessings and dry or fresh fruits. The day also marks the traditional start of agricultural work for the new season, with farmers sprinkling fertilizer in their lands and gardeners pruning their trees and bushes. After the Sadeh celebration, people in the villages meet outdoors to collectively clean water-streams and pools and to repair bridges. In both countries, the practice, including the preparation of traditional dishes, is transmitted through participation, observation and storytelling. Media, social networks, scientific works, articles, conferences and symposiums also contribute to the transmission of Sadeh. The practice unites people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, providing an opportunity for peaceful interactions around agricultural and food traditions and promoting diversity and the continuation of oral expressions and memory.



## The 2023 SSZ Conference

Report by Jehangir Darukhanavala



**SSZ**  
Society of Scholars of  
ZOROASTRIANISM



Prof. Miguel Ángel Andrés-Toledo, the FEZANA Professor of Zoroastrian Languages and Literatures at the University of Toronto, was Chair and Keynote Speaker at the 2023 SSZ (Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism) Conference, on “Zoroastrian Religious Texts and Manuscripts – Ancient Times to Recent Discoveries,” hosted by Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago on November 18, 2023.



Clockwise, presenters Dr. Ted Good, Prof. Miguel Ángel Andrés-Toledo, Prof. Enrico Raffaelli and SSZ President Zal Taleyarkhan.

**The Morning Session:** The Academic Symposium on ZOOM in the morning (attended by about 70 persons online and 20 in-person) was conducted by SSZ President **Zal Taleyarkhan** (Director of Product Development and innovation at Charlie Baggs Culinary Innovations) and SSZ Director **Noshir Contractor** (Professor of Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University). The audience, spanning over 15 different countries, included academics from Yale, SOAS, Université de Strasbourg, Freie Universität Berlin, University of Toronto, and other academic institutions.

Master of Ceremonies **Prof. Miguel Ángel Andrés-Toledo**, FEZANA Prof. of Zoroastrian Languages and Literatures at University of Toronto, presented his research -- **“Few Means a Lot: The Recent Discovery of Zoroastrian Manuscripts in Armenia.”** Prof. Andrés-Toledo has held academic positions at the University of Salamanca, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, University of Copenhagen, Freie Universität Berlin, working on projects like the Avestan Digital Archive and Middle Persian Dictionary. He currently offers courses on Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and Zoroastrian Literature of Ancient and Late Antique Iran.

**Prof. Enrico Raffaelli**, talked about **“The Structure of the Zoroastrian Month and Its Impact on Ritual Practices”** a very informative topic that delved into the significance of our calendar and its origins. Prof. Raffaelli did undergraduate studies at the University of Rome, and Ph. D at University of Naples and Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris. His present areas of interest include pre-Islamic Iranian literature, with focus on Avestan ritual and Middle Persian texts.





**Dr. Ted Good** presented a very thought provoking and inspiring translation of *Denkard III* titled “*The Effusive Soul: The Theory of Emotion in Dēnkard III.*” It showcased the subtle and nuanced philosophy within our religion that so few really know about. This is a manuscript that is still being painstakingly translated. Dr. Good received M.A. in Religion from SOAS, London and University of Chicago, and started his Ph.D. at University of Toronto.

The in-person attendees at the Morning Session, with Session Chair **Eruch Rustomji**, were led in prayers by **Mobedyar Boman Damkevala**, accompanied by **Ervad Vispi Karkaria** [photo right] in a recitation of the *Atash Neyayesh* – a Hymn to Light Divine. He explained that in the *Us-moi uzareshva* stanzas we say, “Enlighten me Oh Ahura! On virtue of my gentleness, humility and righteousness grant me strength and supremacy ...”



**The Afternoon Session.** After a sumptuous lunch, the in-person Community Forum, with Session Chair **Afshan Barshan**, opened with a Benediction by **Mobedyar Damkevala** [far left] with a recitation and explanation of the *Tandarosti* prayer; and a beautiful recital by **Mani Rao** [far right] of the monajat *Dadar Hormazd*, written by Jamshed Modi, grandson of Jivanji Modi.

After a welcome by ZAMC President **Jamshed Rivetna** [below left] SSZ President **Zal Taleyarkhan** [below middle] explained the goals of SSZ -- “... to provide a platform to universities, students and professionals conducting research on topics that build the archive of knowledge and history – to share research on Zoroastrianism. **Rohinton Rivetna** [below, right], who co-founded SSZ, with late Dr. Pallan Ichhaporia in 2006,

explained the Mission of SSZ -- to promote scholarship by bringing together academics, theologians, educationists and lay scholars, worldwide, for dialogue, and encourage scholarship within our own community. As SSZ treasurer, he thanked FEZANA and WZO-US Region for their financial support, ZAMC for their generous hosting, and SSZ directors and Prof. Andrés-Toledo for orchestrating the Conference.







Our honored guest speaker, **Prof. Andrés-Toledo** [left] gave a very informative “*Historical Review of the Corpus of Zoroastrian Religious Texts and Languages*”. He enumerated the main Zoroastrian languages (Avestan, Pahlavi, Sogdian, Sanskrit, New Persian, Yazdi/Dari, Gujarati), in which the literature resides. He gave examples of prayers such as “*Yatha Ahu Vairio*” and “*Ashem Vohu*” that are in Old Avestan, whereas some other parts of *Yasna*, *Visperad*, etc, are in Young Avestan. He explained the time periods when these languages were used, e.g. Avestan in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE, Sasanian Pahlavi in 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, New Persian and Gujarati in 15<sup>th</sup> CE – today, etc. Manuscripts in several of the above languages are preserved in institutions around the world.

Everyone then participated in a “*Quiz to Sharpen Your Knowledge of Zoroastrian History and Scriptures*”, consisting of 14 multiple choice questions conducted by **Meheryar Rivetna** [left] (active member of Houston ZAH Library and FIRES committees, author of *Zarathustra: The Man and the Message* and instructor on several NAMC courses), **Kamal Saher** [center] (B.S. in Math Education, has taught High School, worked in publishing educational materials), and **Vispi Karkaria** [right] (Ph.D. candidate at Northwestern University focusing on Artificial Intelligence and Design, serves as a Mobed in Chicago, and active with WZCC-Chicago and NAMC). They reviewed each correct answer in detail with explanations, references, details and dates of events, and cultural and religious significance in each case. Prizes were awarded to the three top scorers. All agreed that they learned



**Q 11. Embedded in the Yasna are the Gathas, Yasna Haptanghaiti and the 3 cardinal prayers: Ashem Vohu, Yatha Ahu Vairyo and Yenghe Hatam. What language are they written in?**



- a. Old Persian
- b. Young Avesta
- c. Old Avesta

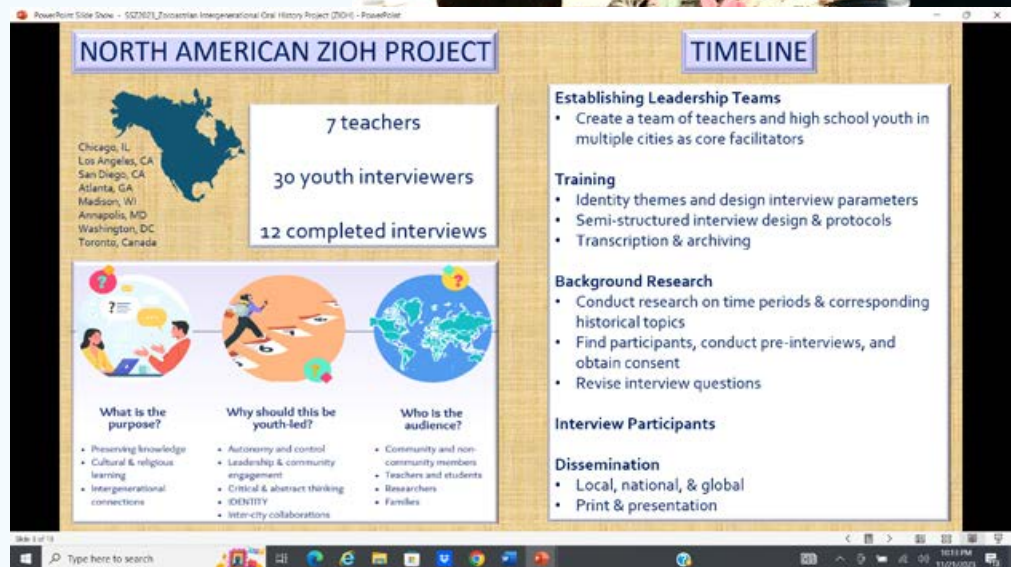


something from this exercise.

A review of an ongoing “*Oral History Research Project*” was presented by **Persis Driver** (Phd in Educational Psychology, Professor of Developmental Psychology at Dominican University, co-chair of FEZANA and ZAMC Rel. Ed. Cttees; and author of “*Black and Brown Education in America: Integration in Schools, Neighborhoods and Communities.*”) and four ZAMC youth, **Yohaán Guard**, **Zane Damania**, **Zara Engineer** and **Rayhan Driver**. The project is an exercise in Historical inquiry, Research, and Preservation, aimed at capturing the wealth of knowledge residing in stories and memories of Zoroastrians dispersed across the world. It gives the youth the opportunity to preserve our history, connect with members, and disseminate collective wisdom of the community. To date, 30 youth (8<sup>th</sup> grade through High School) from 5 Associations have conducted interviews with community members.

The youth explained their training and preparations, including ensuring that the interviewed person fits the theme, gaining their trust, asking open-ended questions with active listening. They plan to document and archive their findings. They will present them to venues such as Chicago History Museum, FEZANA Journal, and other Zoroastrian and other religious events.

The Conference concluded with cocktails and a traditional community Thanksgiving “*Patra-nu-Bhonu*” feast on banana leaves, prepared by ZAMC volunteers, and served by “celebrity servers” – the ZAMC youth.



**Grateful Thanks.** We are deeply grateful to SSZ Directors – Zal Taleyarkhan, Rohinton Rivetna, Pervin Taleyarkhan, Noshir Contractor, Meheryar Rivetna and Kersi Shroff – and Prof. Andrés-Toledo for orchestrating this Conference; ZAMC for being such gracious hosts and providing IT support; and all the food volunteers organized by Roshan Rivetna for the delicious breakfast, lunch, tea, cocktails and “*Patra-nu-Bhonu.*” For financial support, we are deeply grateful to: FEZANA and WZO-US Region (Kayomارش Mehta) for their sponsorship of \$500 each; SSZ directors for handling all expenses -- for the website, Eventbrite, lapel pins, printing, etc; ZAMC members for handling all expenses for the food, drinks, table rentals, banana leaves, etc.; and all conference participants for their registration fees and donations.

For further information, visit [www.s-s-z.org](http://www.s-s-z.org). The recording may be viewed at <https://bit.ly/SSZ2023>.





## *Message from SSZ President* **Zal Taleyarkhan**



**SSZ**  
Society of Scholars of  
ZOROASTRIANISM

It was a privilege to host another successful SSZ Academic Lecture Series.

The Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism is an organization focused on providing a platform to Universities, Students, and Professionals in the field; conducting research on topics that build the archive of knowledge and history, pertaining to that of Zoroastrianism.

This platform has been specifically created for intellectuals who are invested or are intending to take on a career in academia, with a focus on empirical research of Zoroastrian history.

We, the Directors of this endeavor have committed to investing our time, to build this platform and this Lecture series as a way to provide an internal news feed of sorts. Our endeavor is to compile, preserve and actively assimilate historical truths, on the impacts, and evolution of Zoroastrian philosophy, and its subtle ripple through time beyond its founding Empire.

For the 2023 Academic Lectures, we were honored to have Prof. Miguel Ángel Andrés-Toledo the first FEZANA Professor in Zoroastrian Languages and Literatures at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto, along with Prof. Enrico Raffaelli, and Dr. Ted Good. Our academic audience joined us from Yale, SOAS, Université de Strasbourg, Freie Universität Berlin, The University of Toronto, and other Academic institutions. The audience spanned over 15 different countries. This is the purpose of the SSZ and we were successful in bringing these individuals from diverse backgrounds to learn and grow together in their study of this Ancient Religion.

Thank You to all who attended!

I would like to acknowledge the Directors of the SSZ, Mr. Rohinton Rivetna, Ms Pervin Rusi Taleyarkhan, Prof. Noshir Contractor, Mr. Meheryar Rivetna and Mr Kersi Shroff for working together to make this event come to life. I would also like to thank ZAMC for hosting us here in their beautiful dar-e-mehr and Roshan Rivetna for planning out all the logistics.

*Zal E. Taleyarkhan*  
*President, Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism*





# FEZANA'S Participation in the 2023 Parliament of the World's Religions

**Bakhtavar Desai**

**Co-Chair, FEZANA Interfaith Activities Committee**

**In** August, 2023, the Parliament of the World's Religions returned to Chicago, the birthplace of the modern interfaith movement, after 30 years, to celebrate 130 years of its history in this great city. This 9<sup>th</sup> convening of the Parliament took place at the beautiful and peaceful McCormick Place Lakeside Center in Chicago from 14th to 18th August. This Parliament attracted participants from more than 210 diverse religious, indigenous and secular beliefs and traditions and from more than 95 nations, to advance the theme of "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights". Over 8,250 people attended this year's Parliament! Catch a glimpse into the 2023 Parliament by viewing the YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZyRFFx5YOO>



This was one of the largest interfaith conferences and festivals of global scale, featuring jam-packed days of mainstage talks from luminaries across the globe, critical issues' plenaries, interactive programs, profound spiritual performances, and even a Parade of Faiths!!!— all centering on a promise of **peace, justice, and sustainability for our world!**

Along with the two Zoroastrian Trustees/Board Members of the Parliament, Dolly Dastoor and Mahrukh Motafram, Homi Gandhi and myself, who Co-Chair the FEZANA Interfaith Activities Committee, had called out to our entire FEZANA community in the summer of 2022 to join us in planning and representing FEZANA at the 2023 Parliament of World's Religions.

Our goal was to enable participation in this Parliament from as many people as possible, of all ages, all walks of life, and diverse backgrounds, from our North American Zoroastrian Community. We succeeded in getting close to fifty speakers and performers. Counting all the attendees, volunteers, performers, speakers, and the large group that participated in the Parade of Faiths, our Zoroastrian delegation at the Parliament must have easily reached one hundred people if not more!

We also invited dozens of distinguished speakers from other faith communities to participate in several of our FEZANA organized/sponsored Interfaith Programs, because the Parliament was the best Platform we could get, to have the most meaningful and productive dialogs with representatives from other faith communities!

FEZANA presented over two dozen programs at the Parliament on tracks of Faith & Interfaith Understanding, Climate Action, The Global Ethic, Peace & Justice, The Next Generation, Women and Girls, Science & Religion, and Music & Dance performances. The Parallel Sessions of many of the tracks were not recorded by the .organizers Volunteers tried to record as many programs as they could, and some, maybe posted on FEZANA's YouTube channel.

Among the several amazing Luminary Speakers invited by the Parliament. were three Zoroastrians. Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman was invited to speak in the Community Plenary, Parisa Khosravi was invited to speak in the Conscience Plenary, and Dr Sousan Abadian, was invited to speak in the Crisis Plenary. All the Main Stage programs including the Luminary talks, were recorded by the Parliament and can be viewed at

Crisis Plenary: <https://app.powr.org/e/2023powr/portal/stage/290372>

Conscience Plenary: <https://app.powr.org/e/2023powr/portal/stage/290373>

Community Plenary: <https://app.powr.org/e/2023powr/portal/stage/290374>

Besides presenting dozens of programs at the Parliament, FEZANA also had an **Exhibit Booth**, a **Kids' Booth in the PoWR Kids section**, as well as a **Zoroastrian Faith Room** where we had daily talks on Zoroastrian ceremonies and exhibits on our cultural and religious art and artifacts to spread further awareness about our heritage. The **theme** of the Kids' booth was the **'Birth of Human Rights'**, and **'Care for Creation'**. A special word of gratitude to Vehishta Kaikobad, from Houston, on helping us create the Kids' Booth Activities, and thanks to dozens of adult and youth volunteers who managed this booth throughout the week.

Many thanks to Roshan Rivetna and Aban Rustomji for creating a lovely FEZANA Exhibit Booth. You will read more about the Faith Room in this Journal.(page 68)

We had displays of three well received Exhibits: 1) Cyrus & the Cyrus Cylinder; 2) A Collage of messages on Human Rights from Zoroastrians around the world, displayed in the shape of a Farohar; and 3) an Exhibit on the Swastika symbol. All three of these exhibits were in alignment with programs on these themes organized by FEZANA.

Chicago's Zoroastrian community, under the leadership of President Jamshed Rivetna, helped us significantly, in recruiting a large team of enthusiastic and willing kids, youth, and adult volunteers to help at our various booths and the faith room throughout the week. We are very grateful to them.

Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago (ZAMC) also led the planning of our successful participation in the Parade of Faiths, on 13th August, a day before the start of Parliament. We had a good size delegation marching in the parade in FEZANA t-shirts made specially for this Parliament, carrying ZAMC & FEZANA banners and signs with Zoroastrian messages, and the Farohar symbol. (page 70)

Several Zoroastrian music and dance performers of all ages from the US and Canada, performed in music and dance programs at the Parliament. Three amazing Zoroastrian star performers, Tara Jamshidian, Tina Siganporia, and Ardavan Tarapore performed in the Sacred Music Concert Night. (Pge 78) The concert recording can be viewed at:

<https://app.powr.org/e/2023powr/portal/stage/290375>

It was really heartwarming to see close to a hundred Zoroastrians working together, happily, in good fellowship throughout these past several months, which helped make this journey very spirited, inspirational and memorable for many of us. Overall, our Zoroastrian presence at the Parliament was strong and meaningful. It truly took a village to make FEZANA's presence felt at this year's Parliament!

**Stephen Avino, the Executive Director of the Parliament sent this to me, "No one would know that the Zoroastrian community is one of the smaller communities of the world's religions because they played no small role in the 2023 Parliament. FEZANA brought excellence to the Parade of Faiths, plenaries, break-out sessions, and more."**

Homi Gandhi, my friend and co-chair, joins me in extending our gratitude to FEZANA for its tremendous support towards our work throughout the planning and execution stages for over a year, and to each and every person we worked with along the way, including the PoWR Trustees/Board Members, the amazing PoWR Team led by Stephen Avino, the panelists & performers, the attendees, and all our wonderful youth and adult volunteers, all of whom helped to make our participation and presence at the Parliament successful and very much felt.

It is my greatest hope that the momentum generated by our delegation's motivated spirit and enthusiasm, to be a part of such a wonderful global interfaith event like the 2023 PoWR, continues to remain with us, inspiring us all to seek out other faith groups and work shoulder to shoulder with them in our local communities, on social action and building even more peaceful and beloved communities. Our active participation in **interfaith work for the common good**, will influence our younger generations to become more engaged, and make them realize that we **absolutely cannot live in our own little cocoons, but that, we all have to embrace our fellow humans** knowing, that, we are **all one big human family** before everything else, and is the most important thing for each one of us to keep in mind. If we can succeed in passing on this message to our younger generations, they **will be able to live in a better and safer world with more love, peace and respect among the family of mankind!**



# PARADE of FAITHS

## General

Thousands of people, representing over 200 faith denominations, taking 2 hours to cover 1 mile, all marching to the beat of their conscience, for the promise of unity, for the courage to oppose authoritarianism. Each faith was represented through its followers, posters, banners and cheers through megaphones; some faiths had special items such as “dhols”, or drums, a dragon, even a throne-like carriage. The parade was overflowing with proud people. Proud to represent their faith, proud to march, proud to be part of the fight, proud to be part of the 2023 Parliament of World’s Religions, *A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom & Human Rights*.

FEZANA with the partnership from ZAMC, and their President, Jamshed Rivetna, participated successfully with a float and more than fifty Zoroastrian delegates in the Parade of Faiths, which took place on 13th August, a day before the Parliament of World’s Religions convened. Our delegation marched in the Parade in maroon-colored t-shirts with the FEZANA logo, made specially for this Parliament by the FEZANA Interfaith Activities Committee. Our delegates added more charm and cheer to the PoWR Parade with ZAMC & FEZANA banners, signs with Zoroastrian messages, and the Farohar symbol, all carried by a host of youth, mainly from ZAMC! Thank you to everyone who participated in this Parade, especially many thanks to ZAMC!





## Personal (Mahtab Dastur)

I've never been in a parade quite as large as this one, nor as meaningful. I was just one of nearly 20 or 30 Zoroastrian youth, holding banners, wearing t-shirts which proudly stated that we were Zarathushtis. Strangers, who looked just as happy as us, if not happier, on the side of the road waving, yelling, cheering, take pictures and videos – lots of them! The cheers only intensified as we got closer to the end of the parade; the crowds became thicker, the noise amplified, the energy skyrocketed, the number of starry-eyed children watching from the back seat of their cars, stuck in slow-moving traffic increased. It was an incredible, awe-striking several hours, an absolute unparalleled experience.



**Parade Of World Religions  
Chicago 13 Aug 2023**



*The Plenary on Conscience is a thought provoking gathering that explores the ethical and religious importance of conscience, not just as an individual and collective moral compass, but as a dynamic call to action to defend the dignity, freedom, and human rights of all.*

**Good thoughts, good words, good deeds.** These three principles are what we were raised and grew up with as Zoroastrians. Zoroastrianism originated in Iran and is one of the world's first monotheistic religions. Zarthushtra is our prophet, and Avesta is our holy book.

Good thoughts, good words, good deeds. Simple yet profound and all-encompassing. Giving the right to every human being to make their own choices in life. The ultimate self-determination and equality with the personal responsibility informed by one's conscience. The focus of our plenary today is about the moral concept of conscience.

In other words, every human being's innate ability to distinguish between right and wrong, choosing good over evil and light over darkness, all of which are the most prominent concepts and major tenets emphasized in the Zoroastrian religion. Each one of us is impacted when wrongs are being done to our fellow human beings.

As the Persian poet Saadi wrote in his famous poem, "Bani Odam," the translation of which hangs in the halls of the United Nations, "*Human beings are members of a whole in creation of one essence and soul. If one member is afflicted with pain, other members uneasy will remain. If you've no sympathy for human pain, the name of human you cannot retain, Saadi.*" We are all one, and as beings on this earth, when one suffers, the ripple effect of that suffering impacts all of us at some point or another. Sadly, in so many places, women are suffering and fighting for their basic rights. In the past year, we have been witnessing courageous women in Iran fighting for their basic human rights and so much more. **Zan. Zendegi Azadi. Woman, life, freedom.**

I was a 13-year-old schoolgirl when the last Iranian revolution came to pass. In an instant, our world changed. Over four decades later, and as a former journalist who covered quite a few revolutions throughout my career, I watched with a mixture of pride, concern, and amazement what is happening in my motherland. As I watched women of all ages, schoolgirls to grandmothers, bravely protesting in the streets,

## Parisa Khosravi Addresses the Conscience Plenary, as invited featured luminary speaker at the 2023 Parliament of World's Religions



*Parisa is a keynote speaker, a strategic adviser and a multi award winning veteran journalist and news executive. Through out 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. CNN lauded Parisa in its farewell to her by stating: "No one has played a greater role in emergence and dominance of CNN international news gathering than Parisa."*

*A member of the CNN team for almost three decades, Parisa served as CNN's senior vice president of international newsgathering, domestic newsgathering with editorial, operational and administrative oversight of CNN's bureaus and assignment desks, which provided the network's global coverage.*

removing their headscarves, and showing their defiance while fighting, and being faced with beatings, maiming, attacks in schools, imprisonment, and even death. Their courage and bravery are beyond anything we have ever seen. It is a revolution being led by women.

The time has come for the free world to get up and walk the walk with the freedom-seeking women, men, and youth of Iran. Iranian women are showing the world what it means to be a *shirzan*, a lioness. Two such women are journalists Niloofar Hamedi and Elahe Mohammadi who have been in prison for reporting on Jina Masha Amini since last September.

In the past year, dozens and dozens of journalists in Iran have been imprisoned, about a third of them women, making it one of the biggest jailers of women journalists in the world. The time has come for the global media to provide full coverage on this unfolding historic event in Iran.

As a former news executive, part of my responsibility was the safety and security of our journalists who I would assign to report from different war zones or hostile environments. It is tragic to see journalists being jailed in their own country for simply doing their job.

Iran is where Cyrus the Great proclaimed the first-ever human rights charter. The first-ever human rights charter came from Iran over two-and-a-half thousand years ago. In its history, Iran has had women as kings, *Tooran Dokht* and *Azarmin Dokht*. They were both kings of Iran. They were not just the wife or daughter of a king. These women ruled and led as kings. By the way, these women kings, as was the case with Cyrus the Great, ruled during the Zoroastrian era in Iran.

The founding fathers of the United States were inspired and influenced by Cyrus the Great as they wrote the U.S. Constitution. The time has come for conservatives, liberals and feminists to act in agreement, together, and in support of this singular nonpartisan issue of freedom. Freedom for Iranian women, freedom for Afghan women, freedom for Middle Eastern women, freedom for all women and girls around the world who are oppressed, freedom to choose our path and freedom to communicate and express ourselves.

I chose my path to become a journalist at a young age. To me, journalism was the ability to shed light on oppression and injustice. My joy and passion as a journalist was the opportunity to give voice to the

voiceless. In my personal life, this has also become my quest as I help to ensure individuals like my son, Payam, who's autistic and non-speaking have their voices heard and most importantly, listened to and not marginalized. For 14 years, Payam had essentially been trapped in his body and unable to reliably communicate. After endless efforts and therapies. We tried a method called RPM, rapid prompting method. With the help of skilled and trained teachers in this method, Payam started pointing to an alphabet board and later a keyboard and spelled out his thoughts one letter at a time into words and sentences. When we finally got a glimpse inside his thoughts, we realized he is wise beyond his years.

I now dedicate my main focus in helping to bring about fundamental change in our perceptions and understandings of non-speaking autistics. Payam is not an exception. They're all capable of learning. I mentioned this as many of you in the audience likely know an autistic individual and you can help to make a huge difference in their lives. Just because they don't speak doesn't mean that they can't think. As Payam wrote for his United Nations address, *"Try to imagine what life would be like living without direct control over words, limbs and motor actions. This way of living is all I know, but nothing is worse than being perceived as less capable than you truly are. My friends and I have dealt with this lack of honest understanding most of our lives, treating individual people as though they not only matter but can make a difference in this world is essential. There must be fundamental changes in our belief in all of humanity."* Payam is a big advocate for the rights of individuals who have any type of label put on them which limits their lives. He has presented at universities, United Nations, keynoted international conferences and will soon publish his first book. You can watch some of Payam's presentations by Googling Payam Autism, P -A -Y -A -M space autism.

I have lived a life full of experiences as an immigrant due to a revolution, as a journalist for three decades directing the international coverage for CNN and as a mother to a non-speaking autistic son. Our thoughts, be it an assumption about a neurodivergent person, our words, be it a comment on social media, or our actions, be it a decision made at work, all have ripple effects.

Remember, human beings are members of a whole, and we can each create our own positive ripple effect with good thoughts, good words, good deeds. Thank you.



Former Justice of the Supreme Court of India, justice

# Rohinton Fali Nariman

Addresses the Community Plenary as a featured luminary speaker at the 2023 Parliament of World's Religions.

*The Plenary on Community Strategies is a dynamic and engaging gathering that explores innovative approaches to building strong, resilient communities. Expert speakers share their experiences, insights, and proven best practices on how to create effective community-driven solutions to pressing social issues. It addresses complex challenges facing communities and nations including loss of freedoms, the degradation of civil society, the back sliding of democratic institutions and gross violations of human rights.*

**Good** morning. I am going to speak to you about an aspect of human rights which is not usually touched upon, namely about how prisoners continue to retain some of their human rights and as to what should be done to rehabilitate them.

Now the story of human rights is really inextricably bound up with the struggle against human wrongs. We have been governed by monarchies for the last thousand years and barring emperors like Cyrus the Great of Persia, who not only went out of his way to liberate peoples who were enslaved but also did the affirmative thing of rebuilding the temple or providing funds to rebuild the second temple that was destroyed in Jerusalem, most monarchs have been absolute rulers. And we as human beings have been subjugated to terrible things.

Now I find that in the last couple of centuries we have had these colonies in both Asia and Africa and they've shed their yoke only in the last century. And with the shedding of their yoke, human rights have come into focus again in constitutional democracies which now follow the rule of law. It took millions of lives and two World Wars, for the United Nations ultimately to come up with a Declaration of Human Rights only in 1948. And three of them are important from my point of view today. One of them is how courts, that is number eight, are instrumental in enforcing these rights because otherwise they are meaningless. The other is number five where you do not have cruel and inhuman punishments imposed. And then most important the presumption of innocence number 11, before you are proven guilty. It took our courts and the courts in this country many years before they recognized that prisoners have human rights even within prison cells. This country stated in 1974 that there is no iron curtain between the constitution and their rights.

We did pretty much the same in India as well, but this was in the 1970s, and it took till 1990 for the U.N. to come out with an important declaration as to prisoners' rights. Now this



***Ervad Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman (Retd.)** was the judge of the Supreme Court of India from July 7, 2014, to August 12, 2021. He was the Solicitor General of India from July 27, 2011, to February 4, 2013. Justice Nariman was recognized as one of five "World Heroes" by Access Now, an International Human Rights Organization, for his concurring judgment in *K. S. Puttuswamy versus Union of India* (2017), recognizing the Rights to Privacy as a Fundamental Right under Art. 21 of the Constitution of India. He is an expert in Comparative Constitutional Law and Civil Law.*

*Justice Nariman has an LL.M. degree from Harvard Law School, with his thesis on *Affirmative Action: A Comparison between Indian and US Constitutional Law*.*

*Justice Nariman is an Ordained Priest (Navar) and author of three books:*

*The Inner Fire: Faith, Choice, and Modern-Day Living in Zoroastrianism; Zoroastrianism in Other Faiths, Discordant Notes: The Voice of Dissent in the Court of Last Resort.*

*Justice Nariman has a passion for and deep knowledge about, western classical music. He has great interest in and is an avid reader of history, philosophy, literature, and science. He enjoys nature walks.*

declaration again has three extremely important articles and it's the last article on which I will build.

The first is that when a prisoner enters a cell he does not shed human rights, he continues to have every other right short of the right of movement for which he is incarcerated. So, the right to practice religion, the right not to be discriminated against, the right to life, liberty, property, all remain with the prisoner. Also, the other two articles make it clear that once a prisoner is out of jail it's important that he be rehabilitated. Now vocational guidance, etc. is good and that is article eight. But it's article 10 that is the focus of today's short talk, which is a general rehabilitation so that he does not continue with criminal activity after he is out of jail.

Now the first important realization is that a prisoner requires a spiritual awakening. If there is no spiritual awakening then he's going to do exactly what he did earlier and maybe worse after he leaves there. And I can't think of a better method of spiritual awakening than to follow the lead given by the father of my great nation India, Mahatma Gandhi. And the lead given by this great leader was the holding of prayer meetings every day. And at those prayer meetings what was read was from different scriptures so that a feeling of fraternity came among everybody and everybody realized that everybody else's faith was as valid as his own.

Now imagine if in jail you were first to read from the Old Testament and let's say from the Psalms of King David and prisoners were to be told that they will lift up their eyes and to the hills from whence come into the hill and that they help commit from God. Or that the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want, very important because he provides everything, he meets his need to lie down before green pastures, he provided me with before the still waters etc. Imagine being told about the sermon on the mountain and that the meek and not the violent shall inherit the Earth. Most important that you turn the other cheek when violence is meted out to you which is nothing but the basic principle of the great giant faith, Ahimsa, which has been taught to mankind for thousands of years, much before Christ lived. Imagine being told for example about the four noble truths of the Buddha, it will strike an immediate bell with any prisoner that suffering is something which exists and in order to get rid of suffering what one must do is to channel desire, not to crave it or lose it completely. And that you do, by following the great eightfold path. Imagine being told about the great Sikh faith and our Sikh brethren, who have been giving us lunch every day in this Parliament. The actual practical demonstration of love for a fellow human being in their two great things, langar and seva, where whether you happen to be the richest and most powerful or the most poor and small person all of you will stand to serve humanity. Imagine also that you would be told about the great truths of the Bhagavad Gita from the Hindu religion, namely that you are all bound in

the coils of action. You cannot get away from action. So, what you must do is to renounce the fruits of it. Imagine them being told about the great truths from the Holy Quran, that God is the God of Justice but he is also merciful, he is also compassionate. Imagine being told about the great truths from my religion, the Zoroastrian religion. The simple but profound Holy Triad: good thoughts, good words, good deeds. And this comes in a verse of the Gathas which Zarathushtra himself said, stating that he was instructed about this after he actually saw God with his Mind's Eye.

Now let us say the wisdom, literature, of the Confucians, we've had them also represented in this Parliament. Confucius would often say that it is important to abandon your frailties and very important to realize that if you see it right and you do not do it for you lack courage. That for example also said then it's important not to be violent in life. It's important to be passive. To accept what nature rolls out to you, so that you may live passively with other human beings.

I have a particular favorite which is from the sayings of one of our very great Chief Priests who lived about 1700 years ago, a man called Adurbad-i Mahraspand. And he said things which will ring in prisoners' ears and indeed in everybody's ears. He said for example that, what is courage unless it is accompanied with wisdom. Very important, because even a terrorist is a courageous person but he's not a wise person because he doesn't realize that he can achieve the same means by non-violent ends. So, to repeat, courage must always be accompanied by wisdom.

Second, intelligence by vision. Now there's no point being intelligent and using it in a perfect perverted fashion for which you have got into jail, you must have the vision to realize that you will be in jail and that you shouldn't do it for that reason. But also that you should do something good because it's intrinsically important to do something good in itself.

Then you also have the beautiful saying, that there isn't much point in having a good thought unless it actually transmutes itself into a good deed. Because the good thought is only one way, it is something that you think of, but it's the good deed that benefits both of you as the doer as well as the giver. And finally how it is extremely important when you are wealthy to be generous.

Now I would only pray that Mahatma Gandhi's vision and Mahatma Gandhi spirit would enter every single prison wall, all over the world, so as to create a spiritual awakening in each prisoner. Because each prisoner is in prison because his spirit has been left untouched and it is in jail that this great spiritual awakening can take place if we follow the Gandhi method. And if we do so we will all look forward to a better tomorrow. Thank you all very much.



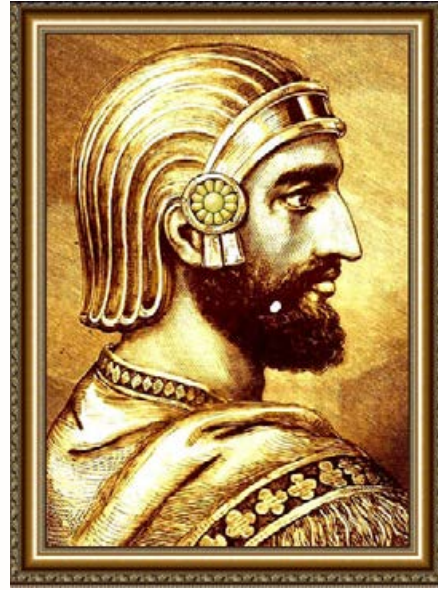
# EVOLUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: FROM CYRUS TO MODERN TIMES

MAHRUKH MOTAFRAM



*Mahrukh Motafram is currently serving as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Parliament of The World's Religions, She was instrumental in reaching out to fellow Zoroastrians around the world to participate at the quadrennial convening in August 2023, "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom & Human Rights" held in Chicago, August 2023. She has been actively engaged with the North American Zoroastrian community, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA), serving on the executive board, as Co-Chair for Strategic Planning and is currently the Co-Chair for North American Zoroastrian Congress committee. She is also actively engaged as a member of the FEZANA Constitution Review committee and is a Trustee of the Zoroastrian Society of Washington State.*

*Mahrukh is a member of the Advisory Council for the Center for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Engagement at Seattle University. In 2022 she launched Simoorg Consulting LLC where she holds the position of Principal Consultant engaging with nonprofit organizations to develop effective organizational development and fundraising strategies.*



**I**t was an extraordinary journey in every sense of the word preparing for this panel discussion. Traveling back in time to learn about our glorious heritage and get inspired by our visionary leaders. Much is written about the Achaemenid dynasty (558 BCE – 330 BCE), greatest of ancient empires and their rulers who were just and fair. Their contributions to humanity are etched in the sands of time that resonate to this day.

Our sincere thanks to each of the esteemed panelists for their research and contribution towards this fascinating discussion.



*From Left Panelists Prof Jamsheed Choksy, Dr Rashna Writer, Mahrukh Motafram, Kersi B Shroff*

**Dr. Jamsheed Choksy, Distinguished Professor** – Life, Liberty, and Happiness in Zoroastrianism.

**Dr. Rashna Writer** – A Historical Perspective on Human Rights.

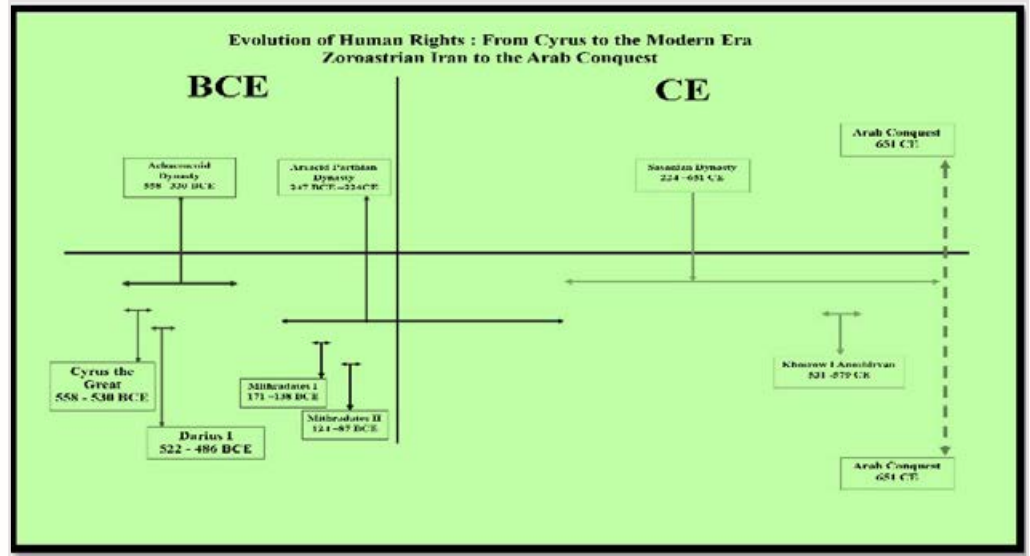
**Kersi B. Shroff** – Zoroastrian and Ancient Persian Influences on Governance and Freedoms.

**Dr. Dolly Dastoor** – Women’s Perspective on Human Rights.

Theme for the 2023 Parliament of World’s Religions Convening, “*A Call to Conscious: Defending Freedom and Human Rights*” is the focal point of our Zoroastrian ethos. Zoroastrianism generally viewed as an ancient faith; it can certainly be said that it has withstood the test of time. As miniscule as we are as a community today, it behooves us as Zoroastrians to acquire knowledge about our history, to be able to understand, learn, and recognize the value of our strong inheritance that once was the center of civilization. Kings and rulers who were righteous in their governance, compassionate towards their people, and who believed that it was their moral and ethical responsibility to respect, protect, and preserve all existence.

A journey through time, dating as far back as the Achaemenid Dynasty 558 BCE - 330 BCE and traveling to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century CE reveals the efforts of great Persian rulers and illustrious individuals. The Persian rulers of the Achaemenid empire were great proponents of human rights. Their words and deeds inscribed on ancient clay tablets echo till today. They were known to believe that it is better to be trustworthy and just human beings, abiding by the fundamental core principle that each individual has the right to make their own choices, and be able to live their lives according to their choosing thereby accepting the consequences of their actions.

In order to contextualize, we can go back in time to about 2500 years to learn, that human suffering due to wars, greed, and hatred existed even then. Our prophet Zarathustra was affected by the pathetic state of human misery where upon he began his dialogue, questions to Ahura Mazda to bring about change to the mindset of man. Zarathustra looked upon the heavens, the incredible beauty of the universe and nature, and was marveled by the synchronous dynamic motion. He was inspired to pursue a similar state of order for life on earth where peace, happiness, and love would reign.



Dr. Rashna Writer

Thus, revealing to all humanity that the choice is ours to make as individuals. The awareness and self-reflection gained through our experiences allows us to discern for ourselves what is good or not so good. This freedom of choice is our responsibility, therefore bears consequences which ultimately determine the path to peace and happiness or a life full of misery and despair. Furthermore, it is through humanity’s collective mindset will our entire existence be preserved for the better.

A revolutionary concept in ancient times when civilization was still in its infancy state. It took tremendous human insight and perseverance to achieve success. History tells us that the notion of doing good for the greater good was in fact the main reason for the Persian empire to be one the largest and most prosperous regions during ancient times. Zarathustra revealed these thought- provoking reflections as early as 2000 BCE, way before Cyrus



. Dr Jamsheed Choksy's discussion starts off our conversation about **"Life, Liberty, & Happiness in Zoroastrianism"**.

*"I entered Babylon as a liberator ... I did not allow anyone to harm the people ... I abolished slave labor ... I rebuilt their dilapidated houses and temples ... we all praise the great god happily."*

– King Cyrus II the Great, Cyrus Inscription, 539 BCE



Cyrus II the Great from Media and Persia had inscribed on a cylinder, the well-known Cyrus Cylinder in 539 BCE.

In fact, these concepts of life, liberty & happiness were prevalent centuries before Cyrus in the Avesta scriptures.

*"These two spirits, who are original twins, revealed their distinction in a vision. They are the better one and the worse one in thought, word, and deed. ... When these two spirits came together, in the beginning, they created life and nonlife so that in the end those who follow falsehood will gain the worst existence while those who follow righteousness will gain the best mind"*.

- Prophet Zarathushtra, Gathas, 30.3-4, second millennium BCE.

According to Dr Jamsheed Choksy several literature and texts were written about the Achaemenid rulers, their strong adherence to Zoroastrian ethics – overcoming evil with good by truthfulness, compassion, and generosity. Considering the multi-cultural nature of their empire, they were sharp in governance, being respectful and celebrating diversity that existed among different people. History notes that *Cyrus II the Great from Media and Persia was a remarkable strategist, a just and a compassionate ruler during the Achaemenid dynasty*, states Dr. Rashna Writer, **A Historical Perspective on Human Rights**. Upon entering Babylon, the inscription written on a cylindrical mud clay tablet with 45 lines of cuneiform writing is an iconic symbol of a great king, a legacy left behind that can be viewed as the first ever "Bill of Human Rights".

Another great Achaemenid dynasty emperor who was hailed as a lawgiver and a brilliant administrator was Darius II. His inscriptions can be found at Naqsh-e Rostam, Persepolis, and other locations in modern day Iran that have stood the test of time, revealing their belief and faith in Ahura Mazda, the one God recognized by Zarathushtra as bestower of good things.

*"Ahura Mazda is the great God, who created this earth, who created that sky, who created humankind, who created happiness for humankind,"* proclaimed King Darius I, 522–486 BCE.

Like Cyrus, Darius II was known as a just, righteous and benevolent ruler. Many inscriptions found on tablets in Persepolis show his acceptance of different religions within his empire, encouraged them to worship their individual Gods, and provided financial support.

*"By the grace of Ahura Mazda, I delight in what is right; I do not delight in what is false. It is not my desire that the weak should be mistreated by the mighty, nor be that the mighty be treated wrongly by the weak. What is right and truthful is my desire."* - Darius II.

Kersi B. Shroff's paper on **Zoroastrian and Ancient Persian Influences on Governance and Freedoms**, reveals that *"Herodotus, considered to be the father of history, a contemporary of Darius II noted that the Persians respected truth above anything else."* They (Persians) governed with truthfulness and integrity. In later texts, historians mention magnanimous Persian rulers as skillful administrators who gave liberty to regions within their empire, made local rulers *satraps* to administer the states, and allowed their subjects to retain their own language, laws, customs, morals, religions, and even at times their native dynasty of kings. This efficient system was copied by the Roman Empire, and the *satrapy* system is also evident in the governmental system of the United States. More recently, in

2013, as further noted by Kersi Shroff, Reza Zarghamee’s work, “*Discovering Cyrus, The Persian Conqueror Astride the Ancient World*” proves Cyrus to be a humanitarian, his policies consistent with the basic tenets driven by his own Iranian faith in which he regarded “*the world as a battleground between the ethical forces of Truth and Lie.*” Cyrus viewed it as his moral obligation to oppose political disorder and social unrest causing conflict to bring unity and harmony for all his peoples.

Subsequent ruler/kings of the vast, long-lasting Persian Empire namely the Arsacid Parthian dynasty with Mithradates I and II, the Sasanian era, Khosrow I were benevolent and strong in governance. Khosrow I was also known as Anoshiravan, the Just. According to Rashna Writer, “*Humane government is a hallmark of astute statecraft. The overall balance sheet of Iran’s Zoroastrian monarchs suggests this to be so. It is, indeed, a precious cultural inheritance.*”

Dr. Dolly Dastoor takes a deep dive into the status of women, providing a **Women’s Perspective on Human Rights**. During these times, starting with Cyrus II and before the fall of the Sasanian empire around 650 BCE, women of every class were respected and enjoyed their social and legal freedom by maintaining their dignity and autonomy. So much so that women were able to take the throne if necessary!! She states that “*Women’s rights such as the freedom to travel, choose their clothing, and choose their partner are aspirations for young women today but women living in Iran more 2500 years ago took them for granted.*”

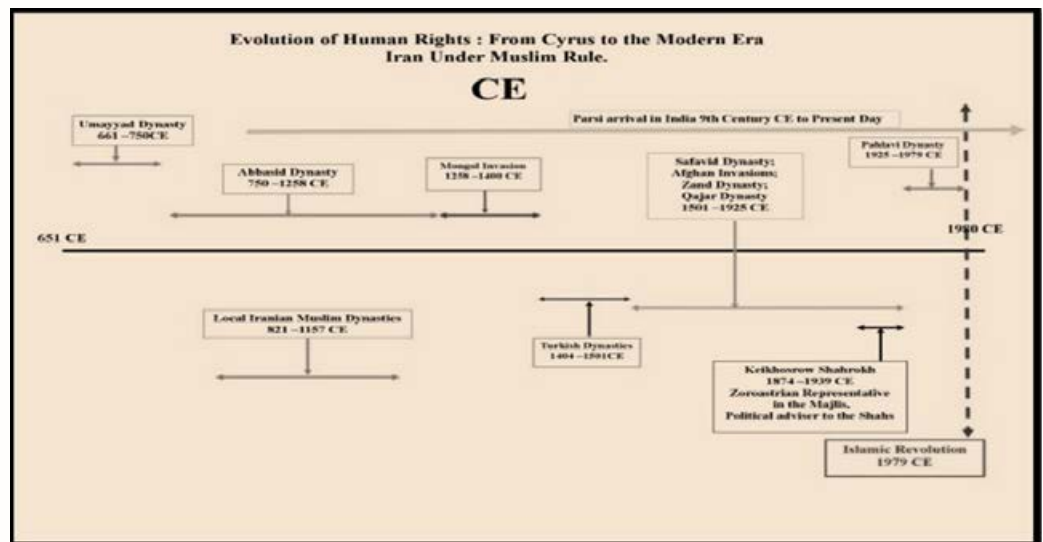
However, the Arab conquest in 650 CE (7<sup>th</sup> century CE) brought the demise of what was once the largest empire during ancient times. Sadly, Zarathushtis in Muslim Iran were a disregarded minority, living in abject poverty under severe religious and socio-economic conditions. Sadly, the women lost their status in society as well, continues Dolly. Women began to oppose the Islamic regimes for their lack of respect towards them. Banu Khoramdin (795 CE – 838 CE), one of the prominent women figures during the Abbasid Dynasty protested against the injustice towards women.

Dr Rashna Writer proceeds to describe that during the aftermath, few Zoroastrians fled to India around the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE where they were given refuge where they came to be known as Parsis, and they started building Parsi communities in India.

Prof Jamsheed notes in the scriptures found in the Persian epic poem, *Qesse-ye Sanjān*, “*Story of Sanjan*”, where Ahura Mazda was praised for having brought the refugee Parsis to Sanjana where they could settle “*with happiness and freedom*”. Grateful to be given sanctuary in India, our forefathers never forgot Persia/Iran. Zarathushtis, like Manekji Limji Hataria who worked tirelessly to relieve pathetic conditions of Zarathushtis left behind who were by now a marginalized group in Persia.



Traditional Persian Zoroastrian Lady



Dr. Rashna Writer



*Keikhosrow Shahrokh*, a great Iranian patriot and *Dadabhai Naoroji*, a great Indian Patriot who fought for India's independence in Britain's legislature. *Jamsetji Tata*, was a world-renowned Indian pioneer industrialist, founder of the Tata Group, India's largest conglomerate company and a philanthropist. The tiny minority in India, given the freedom to practice their faith, flourished. The Parsis were recognized for their charities, philanthropists who built schools, hospitals, residences.

Similar to the above-mentioned philanthropists, there were prominent Zoroastrian women leading the struggle for freedom and human rights like *Madam Bhikaji Cama*. She was a freedom fighter, well known for her contributions towards the early years of Indian freedom struggle, as well as fought for social and economic justice for women.

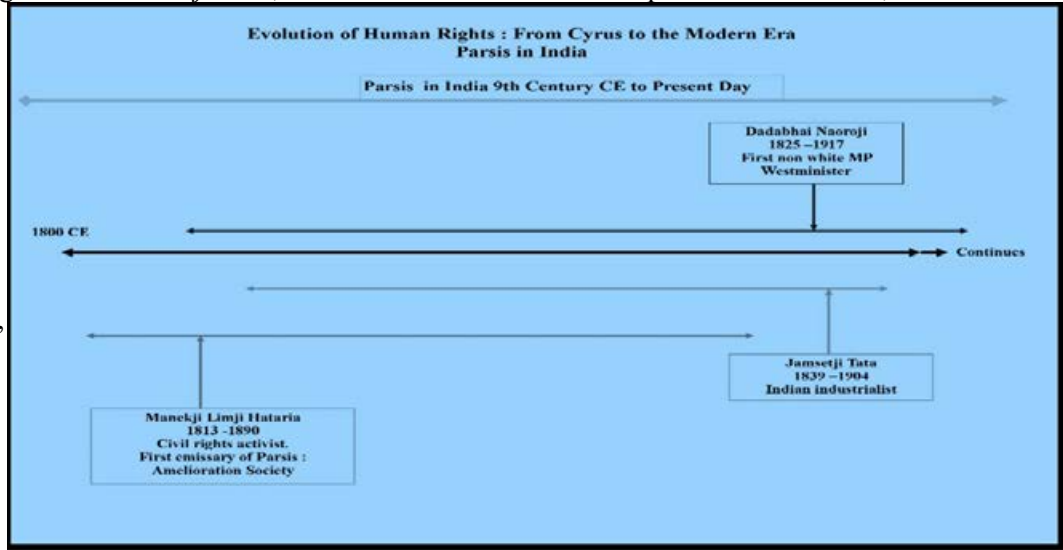
In the early 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, in the book "Denkard", "Acts of Religions", it was summarized by two "leaders of the members of the good religion" that "holiness, knowledge, happiness, good life, and freedoms from want" as characteristics of the faith, noted Dr Jamsheed Choksey. In Iran today, since 1979 revolution the women are being challenged by the Islamic regime. Iranian women, many of whom take their personal and social freedom as obvious rights are fighting for social justice and reform.

Kersi B Shroff's paper shines a light on the importance of human rights embedded in a system of Zoroastrian principles and values. He states, "Zoroastrianism emphasizes the freedom of choice in the acceptance of a faith, recognizes the equality of men and women in all respects, and endorses an individual's choice to exercise free will and to face the consequences of that choice."

Many Islamic scholars and historians like Ibn Khaldun mentioned that all the scholars of the Hadith, a compilation of words of Prophet Mohammed, as well as beliefs and actions that he would have approved of, were of Persian origin. In fact, all the great jurists in early Islam were Persian. In later Arabic literature striking resemblances can be found in the style of governance from the Sasanian period.

Today, we can appreciate the influence Cyrus has had on our American Founding Fathers, and later the US Constitution. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin both owned Xenophon's the "Education of Cyrus", known as the *Cyropaedia* in which Cyrus's successes are described as an "ideal and just ruler". His administrative prowess as well as being a remarkable military strategist made him a "model" king who ruled one of the largest, long-lasting, and diverse empires in the ancient world, the Persian Empire.

Yes, we are grateful to our forefathers for the strong legacy left behind. However, we cannot just rest on the laurels of our glorious past. Our journey continues, the quest for freedom must go on by building upon a strong foundation, leaving our legacy for future generations. It is entirely up to each one of us to make it our responsibility to respect, protect, and preserve our earth, and all existence. Our collective strength will unite us in harmony, enable us to strive towards what we can perceive as life worth living.



Dr. Rashna Writer



Parsi Zoroastrian Lady



## PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS®

The Theme of the 2023 Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago, August 15 -19, was "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights". This issue of the FEZANA Journal has reported on the many substantial contributions made by Zoroastrian organizations and individuals at the Parliament. One of the panel presentations, sponsored by FEZANA, was on the "Evolution of Human Rights from Cyrus to Modern Times". We are pleased to publish the following comprehensive essay written by a panelist, Kersi B. Shroff.

The Journal generally does not publish contributions exceeding a certain word count, but in this instance, we have decided to publish the lengthy article without the extensive number of footnotes that document the sources used. Kersi has kindly agreed to share the footnotes with those who may be interested in seeing them.

The Editor in Chief, thanks Kersi for accepting this arrangement. He may be contacted at [Kersi.Shroff@gmail.com](mailto:Kersi.Shroff@gmail.com).



# ZOROASTRIAN & ANCIENT PERSIAN INFLUENCES ON GOVERNANCE & FREEDOMS<sup>1</sup>

**Kersi B. Shroff\***

### INTRODUCTION

Zoroastrianism preeminently imparts ethical standards and morals for mankind to lead a happy existence. Happiness for mankind, as well as the attainment of dignity, are the hallmarks of the faith. The Zoroastrian conception of existence is essentially joyful and life affirming. It embodies the noblest aspect of human nature, the love of freedom.

Although the modern coinage relating to human rights is anachronistic for the period in which the religion emerged, the concept of human rights as a system of values and concepts is regarded as a natural extension of Zoroastrian

<sup>1</sup> In memoriam to my late brother, Hoshang B. Shroff, King's Counsel, Vancouver, BC, Canada (1933 - 2022), who was a lover of Persian poetry and tales from the *Shahnamah*.

This is an expanded version of the paper delivered at the 2023 Parliament of World's Religion in Chicago, USA, on August 18, 2023. Under the Parliament's theme of "Defending Freedom & Human Rights", a panel presentation was made on "The Evolution of Human Rights: From Cyrus the Great to Modern Times," by Mahrukh Motafram (Moderator), Distinguished Professor Jamsheed Choksy, Dr. Rashna Ryder, Dr. Dolly Dastoor, and me. An accompanying exhibition on "Cyrus, the Great" was organized by Aban Rustomji of the FEZANA Information Research Education Society (FIRES).

I thank Mahrukh Motafram, who serves on the Board of Trustees of the Parliament, for organizing the panel, and the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) for sponsoring it.



doctrines concerning the goodness of God and the function of mankind as God’s co-workers.

Zoroastrianism emphasizes the freedom of choice in the acceptance of a faith, recognizes the equality of men and women in all respects, and endorses an individual’s choice to exercise free will and to face the consequences of that choice. Free will is regarded as an essential part of the theological doctrine of Zoroastrianism and the religion is considered to be one of free will *par excellence*.

The qualities of good government also hold a central position in Zoroastrian ethics. It is stressed that the ideal government is one which exercises good ethics and works for progressive peace, equity, and justice.

An esteemed religious historian has boldly stated: "Zoroastrianism is the first religion that has taken a doctrinal and political stand on the subject of human rights and has condemned the limitation or curtailment of those rights under any pretext."

It is the purpose of this paper to briefly present the practice of these Zoroastrian principles during the major Persian Empires and their influence on methods of governance and the grant of freedoms into modern times. Drawing from reliable sources, I will trace the influence under several headings.

## **PERSIAN EMPIRES, HISTORIC AND MODERN REFERENCES**

Zoroastrianism first gained adherence among the Persians during the middle decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Under the Achaemenian Empire of Persia it spread to large parts of adjacent territories in Central Asia and in what is now Pakistan.

Beginning with Cyrus, the Great (559 – 530 BCE), Zoroastrian ethics contributing to overcoming of good over evil by honesty, truthfulness, generosity, and moderation, were firmly established.

Herodotus, considered to be the father of History, and a contemporary of the later Persian Achaemenian rulers Xerxes I (485 – 465 BCE) and Artaxerxes I (465 – 424 BCE), in his remarkable history described Cyrus’ empire as noble and noted that the Persians esteemed the truth above all things. He also noted that the Persians hold it unlawful to speak of anything that is unlawful to do, and according to their thinking the worst offence is to tell a lie.

Historian Will Durant, in his volume on "Our Oriental Heritage" called Cyrus the Great "the most amiable of conquerors [who] founded his empire upon generosity. The first principle of his policy was that the various peoples of his empire should be left free in their religious worship and beliefs, for he fully understood the first principle of statesmanship – that religion is stronger than the state."

Durant considered the Persian Empire to have been "the most successful experiment in government before the coming of Rome." The kingdom’s taxation and laws were balanced by "such order and peace as made the provinces rich... and by such liberty as only the most enlightened empires have accorded to subject states. Each region retained its own language, laws, customs morals, religion, and coinage, and sometimes its native dynasty of kings. Many of the tributary nations of the Achaemenian Empire, like Babylonia, Phoenicia, and Palestine, were well satisfied with the situation... [making the Persian Empire] an achievement in political organization ...."

Another historian, Arnold Toynbee, has spoken of the "easy going spirit that was characteristic of the Achaemenian regime." It is also known that Cyrus’ policy was revolutionary for people accustomed to the ruthless governing styles of the previous Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires.

A recent work by Reza Zarghamee, "Discovering Cyrus, The Persian Conqueror Astride the Ancient World (2013), describes the mode of government of the Achaemenians, established by Cyrus and solidified by Darius, to be "so well thought out and functional" that even Alexander the Great who brought an inglorious end to the Achaemenians, left it largely intact. In Arabic chronicles it is recorded that after vanquishing the Persians, Alexander went on to ransack Iran, and "in particular 'he devoted himself to hunting down the books of their religion and sciences and burned them after translating the philosophy, astronomy, medicine and agriculture that they contained from Persian into Greek and Coptic, and sent (those translations) to Alexandria'". Alexander is also stated to have "learnt well from the example of the Persian kings. Local customs were respected and local gods revered." The Hellenistic kingdoms that followed after Alexander were thus successors to the government standards created by the Achaemenians. Nor is it a surprise that other ancient kings and generals, from Xenophon to Roman General Scipio Africanus, looked to Cyrus as a role model. He was the dominant personality in one of the most formative periods in ancient history.

Zarghamee also points to Toynbee who reasoned that Achaemenid rule was "accepted by the stricken peoples of

the Near East because it offered them the ‘rest cure’ that they needed from the last and worst bout of Assyrian militarism...”. Toynbee goes on to note that: “The Achaemenian regime met with remarkably little resistance and succeeded in maintaining itself for more than two hundred years at the cost of an impressively slight exertion of force. This success is largely explained by a policy of *laissez faire*, the historian concluded.

All of Cyrus’ policies are also said to have been “consistent with the basic tenets of his own Iranian faith... Cyrus regarded the world as the battle ground between the ethical forces of Truth and the Lie. Political disorder, social unrest, sorrow, and the overall disunity of mankind were the chief manifestations of the Lie, which Cyrus had a moral obligation to oppose.”

As to Cyrus’ “Iranian faith”, Dina McIntyre, a scholar of Zoroastrianism, points to “at least one piece of direct Greek evidence” authored by Plato (or possibly one of his students). In Alcibiades I, the education of an Achaemenian prince, is described in part, to instruct him “in the magianism of Zoroaster” and to “always to speak the truth”.

In 586 BCE the Babylonians had destroyed The Temple in Judea and exiled the Jewish population until “a small proportion of the exiled Jews [estimated to be 40,000] returned seventy years later with the permission of Cyrus, the King of Persia.”

To the Babylonian Jews, Cyrus came “from the east, Whom righteousness meets at every step, Setting nations before him, And subjecting kings.”

Cyrus’ benevolence is acknowledged in several books of the Old Testament, including in the fifteenth, Book of Ezra, in which it is proclaimed:

1. “... [T]he LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying:
2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is Judah.
3. ...
4. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourn-eth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

A French historian and archaeologist, Roman Ghirshman, referring to Cyrus’ decree permitting the Jews to return from captivity in Babylon and to rebuild their temple at Jerusalem, goes so far as to write that “it was to the Persians that the ‘chosen people’ owed their rebirth”.

According to Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, Professor of Ancient History, Cardiff University, Wales, the cultural exchange between Persians and Jews was maintained throughout the Achaemenid period as reflected in the biblical texts. The exchange of ideas that occurred used some important Persian material and the Old Testament provisions parallel the Cyrus Cylinder so closely that both must have had a common source.

The admiration for Cyrus inspired the historian Xenophon to compose the *Cyropaedia* or “The Education of Cyrus” a partly fictional account intended to provide moral instructions. Cyrus’ success in ruling so many peoples, cities, and nation, is said to have been made easy as it was done with knowledge. The *Cyropaedia* also acknowledges Cyrus’ notions of justice, to provide for the common good, and to obey the law and magistrates.

Many later scholars are now returning to an earlier opinion of the Roman statesman Cicero that Xenophon’s semi-fictional account of Cyrus is a rational inquiry into a model prince, as an ideal leader or a model hero.

Niccolo Machiavelli, too, uses Cyrus as a model in his ‘Prince and Discourses’, both as a great founder of an empire and as a republican leader.

As to the administrative achievements of the Persian Empires, other historians speak well of the system governing the vassal states under which both Achaemenid princes and local rulers are made *satraps* to administer the states. According to the World History Encyclopedia “The satrapy system functioned efficiently and would be kept by the empires which succeeded the Achaemenid – the Seleucid Empire (312-63 BCE), Parthia (247 BCE - 224 CE), and the Sassanian Empire (224-651 CE). Satraps are mentioned in the biblical books of Ezra, Esther, and Daniel as essential to the administration of the government and this view is supported by Persian records and ancient historians, including Herodotus and Ctesias. The Achaemenid model of Persian government was so efficient that the Roman Empire would later copy it [as adapted by the Hellenistic states] and succeeding governments in Late

Antiquity would copy Rome's." The satrapy system is also evident in the governmental system of the United States, which modeled itself on Rome just as many other nation-states have done.

I end this section on the influence of the Persian system of ethical government with quotes from Cyrus's later successor, Darius the Great. Similar to Cyrus, Darius too respected the gods of his vassal states even though he declared himself a devotee of Ahura Mazda, the one God proclaimed by Zoroaster. Tablets found at Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenians, show that Darius allowed the followers of different religions in his territory to worship their ancestral gods and even provided them with grants from his treasury. Indeed, the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, decreed by Cyrus, was also finished in the sixth year of the reign of Darius with his financial support. In one of his rock inscriptions, Darius speaks of bringing justice under the law:

"By the grace of Ahura Mazda I delight in what is right; I do not delight in what is false. It is not my desire that the weak should be mistreated by the mighty, nor be that the mighty be treated wrongly by the weak. What is right and truthful is my desire."

Another inscription found on Darius' tomb states that order among the provinces in commotion, was "brought about by the favor of Ahura Mazda, so that the one does not smite the other", and under "my law ... the stronger does not smite nor destroy the weak."

Following the Zoroastrian condemnation of "the lie", another inscription by Darius condemns his ancestor Cambyses who conquered Egypt after having killed his brother. It is because of this "lie" of Cambyses that the Persian people and army became vulnerable to deception and the Lie became great in the land, the inscription recounts. In a recent publication, a scholar describes the inscription to mean that Cambyses' lie spread "a contagious, corrupting evil." Darius made the point "with a sincere belief that inspired confidence in the empire and the rightness of its mission", the scholar concludes.

## ISLAMIC PERIOD

After the battles of al-Qadisiya (637 CE) and Nihavand (642 CE) the Persian Empires passed into history. While there were minor uprisings and local revolts that caused difficulties for Arabs, all organized resistance by the central government of Sasanian Iran ended. Zoroastrianism was "hardly in a position to oppose the 'holy war' of the Muslims." Distinguished Professor Jamsheed K. Choksy of Indiana University describes the relationship between the Arab conquerors and Zoroastrians as being one of "Intermittent Hostility." He notes that while some semblance of harmony is evidenced in the early years of the arrival of Arabs, forcing Zoroastrians to coexist with them, "[d]isplays of ill will towards the newcomers periodically met with violent responses."

Persian notions of governance and justice, however, continued to hold sway. The Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 CE), considered by many to be the father of historiography, writing from Africa noted that all the scholars of the Hadith (the sayings of Prophet Mohammed, as well as beliefs, customs and actions that he would have approved of) were Persian ("or Persian in language and breeding") and all the great jurists in early Islam were Persian. The bureaucracy of the conquered Sasanian Empire "was taken over by the Arabs *in toto*", with modifications, basically in continuation of the pre-Islamic past.

Ibn Qutaiba (828 – 889 CE), an Islamic scholar of Persian descent, in the book "Uyun al-akhbar" providing sources of information on proper governance used many examples of the Sasanians. The book furthers the Persian dictum that state and religion are brothers or twins and that one cannot exist without the other.

In other early works in Arabic on statecraft and government also, there is a striking reliance on Sasanian examples. An enormous amount of Sasanian political beliefs and practices were assimilated into Muslim culture and given an Islamic coloring.

A group of early Islamic thinkers, the Mu'tuzilites, were also indebted to Zoroastrian ideas. Known as the people for Unity and Justice, Mu'tuzilites believed in the doctrines relating to free will, an entirely Zoroastrian concept. It can also be said that Iran contributed to a practical base to early Islamic Sufism. Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi I, the founder of a Sufi order, believed that all ancient wisdom was universal and should be united in a new philosophy. Also of interest is his use of the wisdom of the ancient sages of Iran, including Zoroaster, for the symbolism of light and darkness and good and evil.

Even the later developed concept of a Circle of Justice, also referred to by Ibn Qutaiba, is ascribed by Muslim writers to the Persians, and the Sasanian King Ardashir Anoushervan, the Just, in particular, under whom the Circle



was enumerated fully. This was originally a Mesopotamian governmental concept, which filtered through Persian political and social arrangements that were incorporated into Islamic political thought.

## AMERICAN FOUNDING FATHERS

To the American Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, Cyrus was a role model through their own copies of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Jefferson is said to have owned two copies and was so influenced by it that he advised his grandson to read it. This is considered to indicate the importance of Cyrus' example to the writing of the US Constitution.

Benjamin Franklin (1706 – 1790 CE) while in London came across a recently published copy of Anquetil Hyacinthe Duperron's pioneering 'Zend-Avesta, the writings of Zoroaster, which rendered Zoroastrian scriptures for the first time in the West. Franklin wrote in 1772 that the book "seems to contain a nice Morality mix'd with abundance of Prayers, Ceremonies and Observations." Earlier, in 1745 he had ordered from London a fictional account by "Chevalier" Ramsey of 'Voyages de Cyrus'. Ramsey had crafted a story of the travels of Cyrus for the purpose of "painting religion, customs and politics". Depicted in it is "Zardust or Zoroaster" who surpassed all others in his wisdom. Jenny Rose, a scholar, and author of several works on Zoroastrianism, speculates that it was perhaps this introduction to the wise Zoroaster that had drawn Franklin's attention to Duperron's translations.

Another Founding Father, John Adams, noted that all sober enquiries after truth, pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well his dignity, consists in virtue. Among the so called "pagan" leaders, Adams included Confucious, Socrates, and Zoroaster.

## INFLUENCES ON THE MOVEMENT FOR THE JEWISH HOMELAND<sup>1</sup>

According to historian George Rawlinson, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Oxford, the Zoroastrian belief in Ahura Mazda as the Supreme Being is identical with Jehovah in the Old Testament. Hence the favor of the Persians towards the Jews, and the fidelity of Jews towards the Persians. A sympathetic feeling united the two peoples and the Jews, though generally very impatient of a foreign yoke, never revolted from the Persians.

It is not surprising then that echoes of Persian policies as preserved in later sources, also resounded in the modern struggles for a Jewish homeland. Although Cyrus is supposed to have disappeared from Jewish "active memory" for over 1,500 years, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, proponents of the European Jewish Enlightenment movement, known as *Haskalah*, began drawing comparisons between Cyrus and their Christian rulers. In 1781, an Italian Jewish *maskil* (an advocate) of the *Haskalah*, Ellahu Morpurgo, compared the Hapsburg Emperor Franz Joseph II to Cyrus for issuing a 'Patent of Tolerance' (*Toleranzedikt*). In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte granted Jews full civil and political rights as citizens of France and Napoleonic Europe. Thereupon a Jewish *Sanhedrin* of 111 representatives of 40,000 Jews of France and Northern Italy declared Napoleon to be the modern Cyrus.

As an aside, I note that the French law, Code Napoleon, in an introductory discourse on civil regulations around the world, includes the "Zend Avesta of the Laws of Zerdusht, by the Greeks, called Zoroaster." The section is based on the work of the previously mentioned Anquetil Hyacinthe DuPerron, who traveled to India in 1754 and after seven adventurous years returned to France with a number of Zoroastrian manuscripts that he translated and published in the 'Zend-Avesta'.

In England, too, Laurence Oliphant, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century British author and mystic, took on the lofty title of "Cyrus." Oliphant is called the first Christian Zionist who made considerable effort to advocate a British policy to support a Jewish homeland. He drew up a detailed and practical plan which he actively advocated with the apparent support of Prime Minster Benjamin Disraeli.

In 1882, an Eastern European Zionist, Moshe Leib Lilienblum wrote to Oliphant: "When Israel was in Babylon ... the Lord roused the spirit of his messiah, Cyrus King of Persia, who called for freedom [for the Jews] and allowed them to migrate to the land of their ancestors. God willing you will succeed in returning the redeemed to the land of their ancestors and they will call you the [new] messiah of Israel."

<sup>1</sup> This account is from Marsha B. Cohen, "Lions and Roses: An Interpretive History of Israeli-Iranian Relations", a Ph. D thesis (2007), accessible in academia.edu; and "Cyrus King of Persia and the Return to Zion: A Case of Neglected Memory", authors: Yaacov Shavit and Barbara Harshav. Reviewed work(s), History and Memory, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall, 1990), pp. 51-83, Indiana University Press Stable, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25618590>.

The Bucharest Society for the Settlement of the Holy Land also sent a missive to Oliphant: “Our history teaches us that the highest always chooses the chosen ones. Cyrus King of Persia was the chosen one of God, his messiah. God roused his spirit and he spread the word throughout [the Persian Kingdom].”

The movement for the Jewish homeland also made its way to the U.S. In March 1891, President Benjamin Harrison, and Secretary of State James G. Blaine received a petition from a William Blackstone, to promote an international conference for the purpose of getting Jews back to the homeland from where they had been expelled. Four hundred and thirteen prominent Americans, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Chief Justice of the Supreme court signed the petition. The “Blackstone Memorial”, as it is called, urged President Harrison to further the aims of the Creator by fulfilling a divine blueprint. The Memorial stated: “Not for twenty-four centuries, since the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, has there been offered a privileged opportunity to further the purposes of God concerning his ancient people.”

I should add that after the last Shah of Iran organized an event in 1971 to celebrate 2,500th Anniversary of the Founding of the Persian Empire, David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the new state of Israel authored an essay on Cyrus. Published in the first volume of *Acta Iranica*, Ben Gurion stated: “Cyrus was a great figure, one of the greatest in terms of general history and that he deserved all the eulogies that the Old Testament bestowed on him.”

A recent publication by Alison Assiter, “A New Theory of Human Rights: New Materialism and Zoroastrianism”, bears final mention. The author critiques the postmodern argument that human rights are ‘Western’. Rather than basing them on Greek philosophy, she goes back still further to ancient Persia and the conceptions of rights embodied in the text of the Cyrus Cylinder, inscribed in 539 BCE.

A reviewer of the book states:

This text was influenced by the development of Zoroastrian religious thinking and contains within it a clear conception of human free will and how people should exercise their freedom to bring happiness into the world and bring about the dominance of good over that of evil. Assiter argues that ‘rather than any texts of Locke, Kant or Rousseau or even Aristotle, the Cyrus Cylinder is proclaimed as the world’s first charter of human rights’.

### A MODERN “CYRUS ACCORD”?

As a final note, I mention what to me is a surprising recent call for a “Cyrus Accord”, given current political relations between Iran and the US.

Thanks to the US-brokered accords between Israel and Arab states, called the “Abraham Accords”, two senior advisers to the US government writing in the *Jerusalem Post* stated that the “the Iranian people will ... wonder why Tehran [does not pursue] peace.” They noted that the Islamic Republic “stands in contrast with Iran’s otherwise long, rich tradition of tolerance dating back to Cyrus the Great,” the ancient Persian “proponent of human rights and religious freedom” who “liberated the Jewish people from Babylonia.” The “descendants of Abraham and the descendants of Cyrus” should “reconnect in peace and prosperity” and “Wouldn’t it be poetic if the era of Abraham Accords could be followed by the era of Cyrus Accords, they mused.”

I end on this aspirational though very likely illusory



note, but were such an accord ever to come about, it would be through the inspiration of Cyrus the Great radiating into modern times. Cyrus’ memory has persisted, as mediated, or filtered by different cultures; even so, what comes through in the accounts is the overall and relative ethos of his rule, which in turn was very likely based on Zoroastrian principles.

November 15, 2023.

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## PANEL PRESENTATION

**“Evolution of Human Rights - From Cyrus the Great to Modern Times”**, Parliament of World’s Religions, Chicago, IL, August 18, 2023.

Panelists (l to r, Mahrukh Motafram (**Moderator**, Seattle, WA)

Distinguished Professor Jamsheed Choksy (Indiana), **“Life, Liberty & Happiness in Zoroastrianism”**.

Dr. Rashna Writer (France), **“Historical Perspective: Journey Through Time”**.

Kersi B. Shroff (Rockville, Maryland), **“Zoroastrian & Ancient Persian Influences on Governance and Freedoms.”**

Dr. Dolly Dastoor (Canada) (not in photos), **“Women’s Perspective”**.





# EVOLUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: FROM CYRUS TO MODERN TIMES HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

RASHNA WRITER Ph.D

The historic World Parliament of Religions met in Chicago, in the United States, hence it is appropriate that we begin by quoting from the country's First Amendment:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*

This was the millennial legacy of Cyrus the Persian. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, eulogized the man and is a timeless exposition of leadership. It was studied by Alexander of Macedon all the way to Caesar and Machiavelli. And here in the US, Thomas Jefferson, one of the Founding Fathers, owned two copies of *Cyropaedia*: a Greek and Latin versions. It is acknowledged that Jefferson was influential in inserting the Religion Clauses in the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

So, to Cyrus the empire builder who appears to have had a clear-sighted vision: expansion of territorial boundaries and the maintenance of vast areas of conquered lands, coupled with respect of foreign peoples, their religions and cultures. The seminal event of October 29, 539 BC, marked the entry into Babylon by Cyrus, the triumphalism tempered by an acknowledgement of immense responsibility for the upholding of this ancient city's traditions; the encounter with a multiplicity of inhabitants – natives as well as captives – and the edict, what we today refer to as the 'Cyrus Cylinder', setting out the conquerors' world view.

The Cyrus Cylinder is a foundational document of mankind's acknowledgement of the vital need for human rights to underscore its social and political interactions. Indeed, the Cylinder itself is a modest mud clay tablet with 45 lines of cuneiform writing. But it packs a punch with its revolutionary message.



*Rashna Writer is a political scientist who commenced her career at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London; was Contributing Editor at Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook; Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy; and subsequently Head of Global Risks for a leading strategic risk consultancy in the UK.*

*She has pursued a parallel career in academia and authored Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unstructured Nation; co-authored with Shahrokh Shahrokh The Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh and is the author of The Reshaping of Iran from Zoroastrian to Muslim. In 2021, she produced an Audiobook, The Story of the Zoroastrians: An Historical Perspective. From 2008 to 2019, she was Senior Teaching Fellow in the Department of Study of Religions, SOAS, London University where she lectured on Zoroastrianism in Ancient and Modern Worlds.*

*Rashna Writer holds a doctorate from the London School of Economics in International Relations.*

Cyrus, at the start of his career was a new, untested king who challenged the geopolitical status quo, intent to place his small kingdom at the center of a vast empire. So at the very outset we must acknowledge that this was empire building, or to put it in stark terms, imperialism.

His crowning achievement was the conquest of Babylon ostensibly to oust the capricious ruler Nabonidus and, from a Persian perspective, re-establish stability there. By this, Cyrus was extending his absolute imperial authority, yet it seems, according to extant documents including the Cylinder that his endeavor was both politically effective and societally beneficial. And this is what we discern happened when his troops entered the ancient city. We are told that his forces did so “without much fighting” with Cyrus the self-proclaimed “bringer of peace”, while the king ensured “the safety of the city of Babylon.” Cyrus tended to the religious concerns of the Babylonians as well by restoring “shrines which had previously become dilapidated” and by “increasing the offerings to the divinities.” Particularly aware of strains generated by dislocation and refugee status, Cyrus says he “gathered together all the people and returned them to their original settlements.” Possibly the reason Babylonians did not rebel was that they indeed came to regard Cyrus’s reign as one during which they were “freed from their bonds.”

Arguably, there is a certain degree of textual hyperbole in the Cyrus Cylinder, indeed, it is what Professor Olmsted has described as “persuasive propaganda”, and what we 21<sup>st</sup> century denizens might call a slick PR campaign. Scholars continue to debate this, and it is only right that I point it out at this stage of our assessment. Nevertheless, it appears that Cyrus’s approach succeeded because it removed the danger that Babylonians had previously felt. He rebuilt a failing administration, mitigated internal conflict, ensured welfare, and reintegrated people and resources while respecting and working within the mores of the society which he had occupied.

The same appears to have been the case for other socio religious groups in the former Babylonian Empire, including the Israelites who regained their own freedom and subsequently completed building the Second Temple in the year 515 BC, financed by the Persian exchequer. Like the Babylonians they too probably were encouraged by Cyrus’s officials to regard the Persian king as chosen by their own divinity. So biblical authors such as Second (Pseudo) Isaiah and Ezra proclaimed that Cyrus was king by the will of their God:

*Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him... It is I, Yahweh, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. (Isaiah 45.1)*

Ezra did the math. He confirms that the Persian monarch commanded that the

*...cost [for the rebuilding of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem] be paid from the royal treasury... (6:3-5)*

In the Jewish canon, Cyrus would also be the Lord God of Israel’s “shepherd” presumably chosen to facilitate that community’s liberation.

Not surprisingly, the Cyrus Cylinder continued to resonate down the centuries. The father of Israeli independence, Ben Gurion, openly cited Cyrus as a hero, while President Harry S Truman compared himself to Cyrus when, in 1948, the United States became the first nation to recognize the new state of Israel.

This ancient, mud clay tablet, with its 45 lines of cuneiform writing has passed into posterity as an iconic symbol of a great king. Today, individuals, leaders, states and disparate cultures each see something in the Cylinder which continues to resonate. It is often referred to as the “First Bill of Human Rights”. The UN pinpoints the origin of human rights to 539 BCE, Cyrus’s entry into Babylon, while the declarations on the Cyrus Cylinder inspired the first four Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We must acknowledge that the record of the Achaemenid dynasty, of which Cyrus was the founder, was undoubtedly not blemish free. There were occasional aberrations for tolerance and respect of foreign peoples. But overall, the balance sheet remains a worthy one. And this is in no small part the legacy of Cyrus, the father of his nation who set the tone for Iran on the international stage.

Equally, he was a man of flesh and blood: Herodotus suggests that the monarch could be hot-tempered and irascible. Irascible, hot-tempered he may have been, but there appears to have been an innate modesty to the man. This conqueror of lands prepared his last resting place at Pasargadae. Like the fire temple, it rested on a platform, 48x44 feet at the base, and ascending in six uneven steps to a total of 17 feet. On the seventh step was placed the tomb proper. It bore a brief royal inscription: “*Here I lie, Cyrus, king of kings.*”

Almost 200 years later, when Alexander of Macedon defeated the last Achaemenid king (Darius III), the

Macedonian general Aristobulus, visiting Cyrus's tomb expanded the brief epitaph to fit Greek ideas as to what would be appropriate for a mighty ruler: *"O man, I am Cyrus, who acquired the empire for the Persians and was king of Persia; grudge me not therefore my monument"*. (Olmstead, p. 65, quoting Strabo). How much more modest was Cyrus's initial inscription.

Had Cyrus been the one and only outstanding monarch of Zoroastrian Iran, he may have been overlooked by history. But the Achaemenid dynasty was fortunate when Darius ascended the throne: (522-486 BC) a great administrator and law giver who continued the dynasty's territorial expansion. Remember Cyrus's promise to finance the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem. En route to Egypt (newly conquered by Cambyses, son of Cyrus), when a question arose in this connection, we learn from the Prophet Ezra (5:6-7):

*And now, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the royal archives which are there in Babylon to find out whether a decree was made by King Cyrus to build this house of God in Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure regarding this matter.*

Persian officials made a search in Babylon and Persepolis, and then remembered that Cyrus had returned to Ecbatana (capital of Media). It was here, in Ecbatana, that they found proof of Cyrus's promise to the Jews; and now, Darius honored the promise made long ago. Thus, the Temple in Jerusalem was completed on 12 March 515 BC as recorded in Ezra 6:15.

Despite Darius's defeat at Marathon (490 BC), a talismanic event in Western civilization, history would come to know this monarch as the great law giver, not least for having set out a new law to be enforced upon the whole empire. His insistence on the importance of legal precepts would have far-reaching consequences for what was, after all, a relatively new dynasty. The Iranian term for law – *dat* – was now in common usage. Collectively they made up the Ordinance of Good Regulations: they were collected, revised, and incorporated in the new law book's creation which was supervised by Darius himself. He insisted on the incorruptibility of judges and special weight was given to the rules for evidence. Justice, in Iranian thought, could be expected, indeed demanded, of even the most evil king. Respect for and adherence to the rule of law are vital institutional guardrails.

Herodotus informs us that Persian kings had

*...a praiseworthy law...which suffers not the king himself to slay any man for one offence, nor any other Persian for one offence to do incurable hurt to one of his servants. Not till reckoning shows that the offender's wrongful acts are more and greater than his services, may a man give vent to his anger.*

A collective amnesia has meant that the Arsacid Parthian dynasty, that governed the empire for over four centuries – 247 BC – 224 AD - and continued the Iranian tradition of respect for and leniency towards the several religions within and beyond their borders, are not given their due. Continuing the practice of their Achaemenid forebears, the Arsacid Parthians gave generous support to the Jewish communities in their realm. Professor Ghirshman suggests that the Jewish people would have regarded the Arsacids as true defenders of their faith, given the oppression they suffered under the Hellenist Seleucids as well as the Romans. The Jews came to look upon Parthia as the only great power capable of delivering them from the foreign yoke, which in times of extreme intolerance, would lead some among them to seek shelter in Parthian territory. Parthian assistance to the minority gave rise to the well-known saying:

*When you see a Parthian charger tied up to a tomb-stone in Palestine, the hour of the Messiah will be near.*

The last of the great Zoroastrian dynasties was the Sasanians (224-651 AD) and although it is impossible to mention the several remarkable monarchs, I would like to outline, very briefly, the career of Khosrow I (Anoshiravan). His nickname – Anoshiravan, meaning the Just – tells us all we need to know about this great man. Beyond Iran, his name, like that of Caesar in the history of Rome, came to be a designation of the Sasanian kings. Libraries have been written on Anoshiravan and what has come to be known as Mirror Literature, written after the Arab conquest of Iran, continued to eulogize this great man. Al-Ghazali, the great Muslim theologian, jurist, thinker and mystic (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century), said that no king had left behind so good a name as he, and that Prophet Mohammad was proud to have been born in the reign of Anoshiravan the just. In his *Counsel for Kings*, Al-Ghazali notes:

*God on High sent the Prophet to transform the Abode of Unbelief into the Abode of Islam through his benediction, and to bring development and prosperity to the world through justice and equitable rule. The king of that epoch was Anushirvan, who surpassed the kings who had been before him in justice, equity and ability to enforce discipline...after the birth of Mohammad, Anushirvan continued living two*



years. Our Prophet was proud of his epoch, and said: 'I was born in the time of the Just King.' Such was his information about Anushirvan's justice...It was through justice that Anushirvan made the world prosperous. This is a remarkable observation from a source beyond Iran.

My own favorite story about Anoshiravan is this:

*A Roman ambassador, sent to Ctesiphon with rich presents, when admiring the noble prospect from the windows of the royal palace, noticed an uneven spot of ground, and asked the reason why it was not rendered uniform. 'It is the property of an aged woman', said a Persian noble, 'who has objections to sell it, though often requested to do so by our king; and he is more willing to have his prospect spoiled than to commit violence.' 'That irregular spot', replied the Roman, 'consecrated as it is by justice, appears more beautiful than all the surrounding scenery.'*

Khosrow I's nickname – Anoshiravan – was justly deserved. Humane government is a hallmark of astute statecraft. The overall balance sheet of Iran's Zoroastrian monarchs suggests this to be so. It is indeed, a precious cultural inheritance.

Ancient history can be a persuasive teacher, and so it came to pass in the story of the Zoroastrian peoples in the modern era. The Arab conquest of Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD reshaped Iran. However, we need to acknowledge that Zoroastrians in Muslim Iran were marginalized and labored under severe religious, economic and social restrictions which prohibited them from participating in national life.

A very few Zoroastrians sought refuge in India where they came to be known as the Parsis. The benign environment in their new home in Hindu India, and the later establishment of British rule transformed the future of this tiny minority, as the community flourished to become the mercantile elite of Asia. Their universal philanthropies became a byword at home and abroad. Here in the USA there is particular resonance to Parsi charity, recounted by a certain Alfred Martin in connection with the American Civil War. This is what it says:

*As for the generosity of the Parsees, it is unrivalled, extending far beyond the limits of Bombay. It went to Russia in the time of the Crimean War, when Florence Nightingale described the Parsee community as 'the salt of the Bombay community'. It went to France in 1859, when the terrible inundations necessitated the supplementing of local aid by foreign help, and the Parsees were among the first to respond and among the most liberal of the contributors. It went to the United States at the time of the Civil War, our Sanitary Commission receiving a handsome remembrance from the followers of Zoroaster in India, sent, they said, because of their sympathy with the suffering soldiers and the Cause of Freedom and union. (Alfred W. Martin, *Great Religious Leaders of the East*, p. 101)*

While they never forgot Iran, the Parsis felt an immense gratitude to India. They established the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia in 1854; dispatched the remarkable Parsi, Manekji Limji Hataria to Iran, where he worked tirelessly on behalf of Iran's minuscule Zoroastrian population, who labored under the many institutional restrictions that had confined them to the margins of society.

This work was continued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the great Iranian patriot, Keikhosrow Shahrokh. He was the Zoroastrian representative in the *majlis*; a confidante to the late Qajar shahs and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and worked tirelessly on behalf of his depressed co-religionists, and helped them enter the mainstream. A great Indian patriot was the Parsi Dadabhai Naoroji, who used his platform as the first ever non-white Member of Parliament (1892-1895) to argue for India's independence in Britain's legislature. Not just one of the world's outstanding industrialists, but a pioneering social reformer, the immensely respected Parsi Jamsetji Tata founded his company over 150 years ago. Two things stand out when assessing his career: his far-sightedness and his social conscience. In India he is remembered as the father of the iron and steel industry, but even before this ground-breaking endeavor, Jamsetji understood that under British rule, although India produced and exported cotton, it did not produce cloth. So he established his Empress Mills in Nagpur (central India), and devised a retirement fund and insurance policy to cover medical costs for injuries incurred at work. This was arguably the earliest known example of employee welfare in India. *Cyrus the Great was an exemplar for the ages. I would suggest that his career was underpinned by the Zoroastrian ethos. And while the world at large may have suffered collective amnesia as to the Zoroastrians, those of his tradition who came many millennia after him, demonstrated the longevity of Cyrus's example.*

# CYRUS CYLINDER

## THE ZOROASTRIAN ETHOS

### AN EXHIBIT

ABAN RUSTOMJI  
[WWW.FIRES-FEZANA.ORG](http://WWW.FIRES-FEZANA.ORG)



The Parliament of World Religions captivated attendees with an exhibit dedicated to the legacy of Cyrus the Great and the Zoroastrian Ethos. This exhibit was curated with meticulous detail and historical accuracy by Houston’s Edul Chikliwala and Vehishta Kaikobad. Fine-tuned for digital printing by ArZan Sam Wadia, it offered visitors a unique opportunity to delve into the life and accomplishments of one of the most influential figures in ancient history.



From left Katayun Kapadia; Rohinton Rivetna, Aban Rustomji and Maharukh Motafram





Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, ruled with a vision that transcended mere conquests. His commitment to religious tolerance, cultural diversity, and human rights laid the foundation for an empire that thrived on unity rather than oppression. The exhibit at the Parliament of World's Religions aimed to shed light on Cyrus' remarkable achievements and the enduring principles that have inspired generations.



Attendees had the opportunity to view the profound impact of Cyrus's philosophy on the development of human rights and religious coexistence. The exhibit didn't merely present historical facts but engaged visitors in learning about the relevance of Cyrus's principles in the modern world. An expansive map of the Achaemenid Empire with current-day landmarks brought many visitors to stop and read each history site. Also featured were Cyrus' legacy with Jefferson and the Founding Fathers and a list of Human Rights Museums worldwide.

Cyrus the Great exhibit at the Parliament of World's Religions stood as a testament to the enduring relevance of ancient principles in shaping a more inclusive and harmonious world.

My reflections throughout the week were varied. I arrived with an open mind and curiosity, feeling affirmed and acknowledged.

My favorite part of the Parliament was meeting people of various ages, cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. I truly enjoyed sharing my perspective on religion and global ethics and learning from other presenters. And the joy of meeting FEZANA friends is always a highlight. The local Chicago association's hospitality and member congeniality was unmatched.

I did have mild anxiety. Do I attend my fellow Zarathushti's sessions or learn about new potential topics? I concluded it would be too much if I were here alone without knowing anyone or having no personal connections; I'd feel lost in the crowd.

Part of my mind immediately goes to how the event could have been better organized. For instance, registration or the sound system for make-shift room setup. Then, immediately, I chastised my hubris for thinking that I'd do better at wrangling such a culturally and religiously diverse crowd for such a massive event.



Finally, what grabbed me and brought reality to our current geopolitical turmoil was Dr. Saad Ghosn's woodcut print. *Did you say Terrorism* (photo left). It's stark contrasts of white and black, abstractly depicted human form with Arabic calligraphy and jagged weapons with panicked eyes of the person, flailing arms, and text that leaves me to contemplate.

Is there no end to the senseless inhumanity that continues and accelerates? And how many more Parliaments will we attend to come to a fruitful resolution?

*The exhibit display is available on loan for FEZANA associations. Please get in touch with [www.fires-fezana.org](http://www.fires-fezana.org) for further information.*

# DIGNITY, STATURE, AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE *Zoroastrian Religion*

KATAYUN KAPADIA  
PANEL CHAIR

*Since ancient times, Zoroastrian Women have had a pivotal role in the practice and propagation of Zoroastrian Religion. From the times of Achaemenid empire, Zoroastrian women have found empowerment and equity in what their religion teaches them. In this session, we explore these tenets and find their modern-day interpretations and applications. We also compare parallel structures in other faiths and come up with a game plan for implementation in our modern times.*

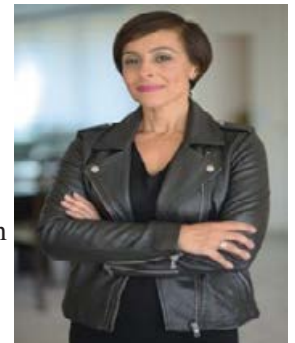
The panel consisted of Dr. Rashna Writer, a political scientist who was Head of Global Risks for a leading strategic risk consultancy in the U.K. She was a Senior Teaching Fellow at London University where she lectured on Zoroastrianism in ancient and modern worlds. Dr. Niaz Kasravi is the Founder and Director of the Avalan Institute for Applied Research, and a leading researcher on criminal justice and racial justice. Arzan Wadia is the President of FEZANA and founding editor of Parsi Khabar, the world’s leading online news aggregator of all things Parsi. Katayun Kapadia is Past President of FEZANA, a Zarathushti who has held many leadership positions in the local, national, and global Zoroastrian Community.

## Dr. Niaz Kasravi spoke about Growing up Zoroastrian in Iran



### Freedoms Pre 1979

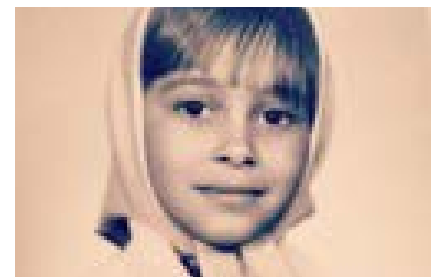
Men and women were seen as partners in doing good in the world, gender equality in Zoroastrianism. Prior to the Revolution there were relative freedoms re: dress, education, social movements; Patriarchy in society was real, as in other places, yet no restrictions, as we see today; Women were allowed in almost all professions, Iran had female judges and cabinet ministers.



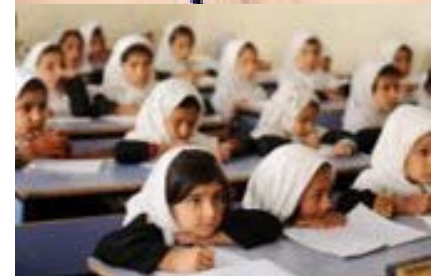
### Revolution & Confusion

At 5 years old, there was war and revolution, fear and confusion. Transition in society, role of men & women was not apparent to Niaz at first. Eventually it became clearer, but a source of frustration:

hijab & cloak, gender segregation impacted all people.



Niaz spoke on being a Double Minority. There were three recognized faiths: Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, permitted to live and interact with others. Rights were dwindled - rendering Zoroastrians as second-class citizens. Property rights, inheritance rights, representation in Parliament, “blood money”, etc. Not allowed to marry outside; no conversion allowed unless to Islam; considered “najes” or dirty. Women of these faiths faced double discrimination: once for gender, once for religion.





**First mentor, My North Star**

Niaz spoke about her mother being her first mentor and her North Star. When Niaz told her mother that in school they were taught that they were going to hell, her mom raised concern and demanded change. Niaz was excused from religious class and required to get Zoroastrian education on Friday. For Niaz this was her first lesson by example in advocacy.

**Turning Anger into Action**

Even after emigrating to the USA, Niaz experienced frustration, anger and confusion. Through various mentors, education in the US, it is possible to change things you don't agree with. Experience as a young Zarathushti girl in Iran is one of the main drivers of Niaz's career in justice advocacy.

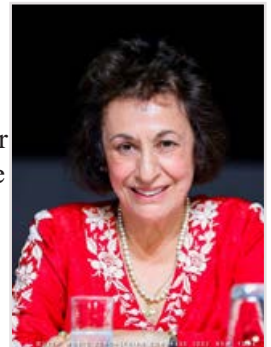


**Katayun Kapadia**

recognized three women who have been trailblazers in UK, Canada and USA championing the Zoroastrian Women globally being role models, mentors and empowering women.



**Zerbanoo Gifford**, President of World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) is a human rights campaigner, author and founder of the ASHA Center, a charity working for the empowerment of young people, sustainable development, and peace & reconciliation worldwide. *“Zerbanoo Gifford's generous life spans the field of human rights, politics, writing and philanthropy. She is global in her vision and achievements - from directing Anti-slavery international to establishing a world-class center for youth empowerment” - Ratan N. Tata, Philanthropist and Chairman Emeritus, Tata Sons.*



**Dolly Dastoor** has represented Zoroastrian Religion as a Trustee and Vice-Chair on the Board of PoWR for six years. Dolly is Past President of FEZANA, Editor-In-Chief of the FEZANA Journal and Chair of FEZANA Academic Awards Committee. Dolly *“I arrived in Canada in 1973, and as I reflect on the 49 years, I see myself not only as a witness to history on the North American scene-but as an active participant, a community leader who has built consensus and dedicated herself to the growth of the Zoroastrian community, who developed the first 10 year Strategic Plan for the North American Zarathushti community to thrive and grow and develop their own identity and navigate their destiny.”*



**Parisa Khosravi** is a multi-award -winning veteran journalist and news executive with over three decades of experience on the global stage dealing with global leaders in order to open doors to difficult and dangerous parts of the world where freedom of speech is in no way guaranteed. Parisa is an advocate for individuals with Autism and has focused her efforts in





helping the “silent champions” like her son. Parisa’s joy and passion both in her career as a journalist with CNN and as a mother to her special needs son is to help give voice to the voiceless. She leads with empathy, compassion and integrity earning her the nickname of “Mother Parisa”. Parisa was a Speaker at the Plenary Sessions at PoWR in Toronto in 2018 and in Chicago in 2023.

**Arzan Wadia.** FEZANA President spoke on the role and status of women in FEZANA. We have active involvement and participation of girls and women at all levels in the FEZANA organization. We have women on the FEZANA Executive Board, Chairs and Co-Chairs of FEZANA Committees, local chapters have women as Presidents, and on their BOT. We continue to have challenges and he considers himself not a passive observer but an active ally.



Although the score sheet over the millennia shows that Zarathushti women were treated with dignity and had a status in their society; we must acknowledge that much remains to be done. If history is any guide, there is no reason why we cannot do any better.

## DIGNITY, STATUS AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION RASHNA WRITER Ph.D

A fundamental premise of the Zoroastrian religion, as taught millennia ago by the Prophet Zarathustra, is the pivotal role of the individual in living and working alongside the good creations of Ahura Mazda (Wisdom Incarnate or the creative force). Thus, humans and the other creations, the physical manifestations of sky, water, earth, animals, plants and fire are to work in harmony. Man’s role in this scheme of things is pivotal. He is given free will, and we are told in the Gathas of Zarathustra (Yasna 30.2)

*Listen with your ears to the best things. Reflect with a clear mind – man by man for himself – upon the two choices of decision, being aware to declare yourselves to him before the great retribution.*

This Zarathustra taught, is the God-given right of man, which is based upon an ethical structure encompassing respect for creation and man’s compassion and care for his fellow men. By the continual exercise of his choice between good and evil man thus becomes – perhaps for the first time in human thinking – responsible for his own destiny.



When we use the term ‘man’/‘men’, this is not confined to the male of the species. And this is set out most clearly by Zarathustra himself in the Gathas (Yasna 53.3) when he singles out his daughter

*Do thou preserve, Pourucista of the lineage of Haecataspa and Spitma, thou young one among Zarathustra’s daughters. To thee shall He grant the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and wisdom. Therefore, come to terms with thy will, and bring to realization the most virtuous and blessed (acts) of piety.*

This establishes the benchmark in Zoroastrian ethos: women’s role in human affairs is not just central but pivotal.

And so it has come to pass: the theological underpinning of Zarathustra’s teachings as set out clearly in the Gathas. Through Iran’s long imperium under three Zoroastrian dynasties: the Achaemenids, Arsacid Parthians and the Sasanians, our records show that dignity and status certainly were an aspect of life for royal and aristocratic women. While twenty-first century women take our economic independence for granted – certainly in the developed world – and think of our ancestral great-grandmothers as dependent on their male relatives, Iran’s royal women enjoyed considerable economic independence.

There are a plethora of examples. One such is the case of Irdabama, a royal entrepreneur at the court of Darius I who employed 500 workers at a place near modern Shiraz. Several women owned immense properties in different parts of the empire, and their financial muscle, freedom of travel and a level of independence belie the misconceptions of Persian women hidden in harems!

The legal text, the *Matikan-i Hazar Datestan* (Book of the Thousand Judgements), compiled between Khosrow II Parviz's reign and the Arab conquest, sheds light not just on Iranian jurisprudence but on society itself. This immense legal compilation addresses several issues that face any society.

As a woman myself, I am heartened to read that in the parental home the daughter had the same rights as the son until she married, even if she was adopted. When sons and daughters had to be assigned things out of kinship, they had to be given them simultaneously: in itself an exemplar of equality.

I think it somewhat revolutionary for the times that a daughter could refuse to marry a husband chosen by her father. Let me quote (Anklesaria Ms. – A14, 12-13)

*There have been women who refrained (from marriage with the man offered to them as a husband) for the sake of a (bridegroom more) suited to them. Thus Xvatāyduxt refrained for the same of Veh-Šāhpuhr (=for the sake of become Veh-Šāhpuhr's wife)*

And who was Veh-Šāhpuhr? He was the *magupatān magupat* (high priest) and the president of the commission that set down the official canon of the Avesta under Khosrow II. This is female choice with bells on!

Interestingly, Sasanian Iran took, what must seem a rather revolutionary view on divorce. Both the husband or the wife had the right to seek the dissolution of their marriage for 'proper reasons'. As soon as divorce was sought by a wife by an action at law, her claim on the husband's guardianship over her ceased, unless her request was rejected by the court. If the divorce was granted, she fell back on her own people, until she married again. Property claims and rights were allowed to continue as before, or were resettled as the need arose.

Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that women in Sasanian Iran had the same opportunities that 21<sup>st</sup> century women have, there is an interesting reference in the *Matikan* to some young ladies discussing a tricky point of law. Whilst thus engaged, they noticed a prominent jurist in the vicinity. The ladies referred their legal dilemma to him and asked for his opinion. The great man answered a couple of points but did not have a ready answer to the more knotty problem under discussion; to which, one of the young ladies responded: 'Leave that alone Master, and say you do not understand it'.

While historical examples abound, nearer to our own era, notices by European travelers who encountered Zoroastrians in both Iran and India, relate their encounters with womenfolk who were not reticent in stating their views.

Pietro Della Valle, an intellectual Italian spent several years in Persia before travelling to Surat and a tour of India (between 1616 and 1622). Like many foreign observers, Della Valle wanted to know more about the significance of fire in Zoroastrianism, and notes the response to his enquiries:

*I was told...that they pray three times a day, at sunrise and sunset and at mid-day; that they believe in one God only, creator of all things invisible and all powerful and because we said we had other ideas about them, the wife of the man with whom we were talking, who was present, mocked openly, it seeming strange to her that one could imagine that they knew nothing of God; to whom she made in our presence...several...prayers...and said 'How, God we not know you? ...and similar things: from which I can infer that the name of idolators which they are given does not perhaps fit them.*

It took a Zoroastrian woman to educate the European; equally, it is proof that Zoroastrian women were not hidden away at home. Indeed, in this instance, they stood right beside the husband.

Besides being forthright, the fact that Zoroastrian women were gaining an education alongside their menfolk may explain many of the global success stories we have come to accept as normal. In India, by 1881, the Parsis, in their stronghold of Bombay were the most literate group; and by 1857, the Parsi Girls' School Association was founded with a subscription of Rs.15,000 by some leading members of the community. Girls' education was considered to be of crucial importance; and similar facilities were extended to their kinsfolk in Gujarat. This emphasis on female education was reiterated by the Englishman Henry George Briggs in his book, *The Parsis or Modern Zerdushtians*, published in 1852 in which he notes:

*...With respect to the education of their females, it ought to be more generally known that most of them can both read and write the Gujarati...A few families among the wealthy have permitted their daughters to acquire a knowledge of English...*

Nor was female education in Iran overlooked. The Parsis in India established the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia (Amelioration Society) and this was to ameliorate, in the truest sense of the word, the living condition of their Iranian co-religionists. Once again, emphasis was placed on female education. A school for 100 girls was started in Yazd, followed by schools in Kerman and Tehran for Zoroastrian girls. That was just the beginning, and demonstrated once again, the pivotal role of young girls and women within the community.

It is a rule of universal application that education is the gateway to opportunities, and it has enabled Zoroastrian women today to participate in diverse fields – the sciences, art, politics and much more. Zoroastrian women – through the ages – have contributed much to society, often against great odds. The great patriot, Madame Cama, the Parsi lady who was the first to unfurl the Indian tricolor in Europe, decades before Indian independence, and was banished from her home by the British as a result.

I recently read the obituary of that great lady, Frene Ginwala, the first Speaker of the South African Parliament post-apartheid, a close confidante of Nelson Mandela who described her in his memoirs as “a beautiful young Parsee woman”. She was a qualified lawyer who was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle; who travelled the country hiding activists who were being hunted by the police in safe houses until she herself had the police on her tail and was forced to take refuge in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and a 30 year exile. When Mandela arrived on her doorstep on his way to address the Pan-African Freedom Movement, Frene Ginwala's startled greeting : *'Oh my God, I have to hide you'*, became a running joke between herself and Mandela. She dedicated her life to the independence struggle in South Africa, remaining true to her principles that all peoples are equal.

These were fearless women, unafraid to challenge the status quo, and who appear to have subliminally digested Zarathustra's advice to his daughter, `...

*the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and wisdom...'*

This brief outline of the place and role of Zoroastrian women in society suggests that over the millennia they have been accorded a status and dignity that is exemplary. However we as Zoroastrians ought to be the first to acknowledge that there is still much more we can and should do for our womenfolk. Not all have the opportunities to shine; not all women live in egalitarian home environments, and there are many who are still left behind. Yet, the picture as a whole – with a backward glance at our history encourages us that there is no reason why we cannot do even better for our women across the diaspora.

***The “Call to Conscience” at the 2023 Parliament convening is our collective response. Together, we send a clear message to the world that faith and spiritual communities are vital and engaged partners in the defence of justice, freedom, human rights and democracy.***

***Rev. HPs Phyllis Currott,  
Chair of Program Committee  
The Parliament of the World's Religions.***



# IRAN'S

## "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement: A Return to Zoroastrian Values Indigenous to Iran

Sousan Abadian, Ph.D.

*On August 15, 2023, during the 2023 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, I spoke on the panel, "Women, Life, Freedom: Women Rising in Revolution" moderated by Niaz Kasravi. In addition to Ms. Kasravi and me, there were two other distinguished panelists, Frozan Rahmani and Jennifer Butler. Here are a few thoughts I shared.*

Dr Sousan Abadian is a Political Economy and Government from Harvard University, former Franklin Fellow at the U.S. State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. She was a featured luminary speaker at the Crisis Plenary on August 15th. The plenary on Crisis highlights the urgent threat of authoritarianism and addresses some of the most pressing threats facing democracy and human rights today



September 16, 2023 commemorated the one-year anniversary of the death of the 22-year-old Iranian woman Jina Mahsa Amini, who died after being arrested by the religious morality police of Iran's Islamic government. The movement her death ignited has been captured by the phrase "Woman, Life, Freedom" ("Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" in Farsi) and its masculine counterpart "Man, Nation, Rebuilding" ("Mard, Mihan, Abadi").

Mr. Khamenei and his lackeys have framed the protests in Iran as an uprising fomented by "outside" forces. The truth may very well be that young Iranians, inspired by the freedoms available to others they see on social media, ask themselves "Well, why not us?" But to frame the uprising as a matter of western influence or fueled only by Gen Z Iranians embracing progressive western values is misleading. Instead, the reason the chant has traction among Iranians of all ages and from all walks of life is because it is an instinctive drive toward healing and cultural restoration that involves reclaiming values indigenous to Iran.

### ***1. What evidence is there that this chant resonates with Iranians across many divides (and not just with a handful of youth under the influence of Western social media)?***

Recently, the Dutch-based GAMAAN has conducted encrypted surveys ensuring anonymity, and these have demonstrated that a vast majority of Iranian people, regardless of age, gender, region, ethnicity, and across rural-urban divide, support the protests and in fact favor a regime change. The study's findings reflect the views of literate Iranian residents aged above 19, who comprise 85% of Iran's adult population. The results can be generalized to the target population with a 95% credibility level and credibility intervals of 5%.

An example of one of the GAMAAN-produced surveys is "Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2022 Nationwide Protests" conducted between December 21–31, 2022, and had over 158,000 respondents from within the country. With respect to the nationwide protests during the fall of 2022, 80% of those inside the country support the protests; 67% believe the protests will succeed, while 14% think they will not succeed. Only around 15% of the population inside the country oppose the protests. Moreover, in response to the question "Islamic Republic: Yes or No?" 81% of respondents inside the country responded "No" to the Islamic Republic, while again, only 15% responded "Yes," and 4% were not sure. In an earlier 2020 survey, even before the murder of Mahsa Amini and the breakout of nationwide

protests, already 72% of those surveyed opposed compulsory hijab (Islamic veil covering the hair), 58% said they do not believe in the hijab at all. Only about 15% insist on the legal obligation to wear the hijab in public.

## 2. In what ways does the chant, “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” – “Woman, Life, Freedom” reflect a return to indigenous Iranian values?

Let’s begin with **Woman-Zan**.

Many scholars of Zoroastrianism describe an earlier time when Iran was rooted in values and traditions that honored women. From the very beginning, both women and men had initiation rites, and both women and men served their communities as priests. Early texts instruct Zoroastrians that whenever it was necessary for a woman priest to travel, duties should be allocated in a balanced manner between married couples so that neither priestly duties nor family responsibilities should suffer. Women also had independent control over property, even after marriage. Evidence from 2,500-year-old records in Iran demonstrate that men and women were paid equal wages based on experience, something the U.S. and many so-called developed nations have yet to accomplish, let alone present-day Iran. Ancient Iranians were far from perfect but, relatively speaking, they valued their womenfolk alongside men, and women enjoyed a measure of freedom they struggle for in our day and age (McIntyre, 2020; Hassani 2007; Brosius, 1996).

The second value in the chant is **Zendegi** or **Life**. Life on our Earth was considered precious to early Iranians and to Zoroastrians alive today. Material existence is not considered a corruption to be endured till we depart to some spiritual heaven. Zoroastrian values teach us to rejoice in the bounty of Nature and seasonal gifts of life on Earth. Nowruz, the exuberant Iranian New Year celebrations during the spring equinox, is an example of Zoroastrian traditions that continue to be commemorated by a number of peoples and nations that were once part of the Persian sphere of influence. Zoroastrian rituals and ceremonies tend to be celebratory of life on Earth—no ritual values suffering or is meant to elicit sorrow. Traditionally, Zoroastrians cover themselves in vivid colors, not mournful black. Life, material existence, the arts, and sensuality are to be delighted in and relished in a balanced way.

The third value in the chant is **Azadi** or **Freedom**. Iran’s Zoroastrian worldview considers human beings as having an honored role as collaborators with the Divine in safeguarding the Earth. Humans are not seen as inferior, sinful creatures or pitiful servants of God, needing to be controlled, coerced, and manipulated so that we don’t misbehave. We develop our divine capabilities only through making free will choices. The value of freedom is core to the Iranian culture.

In sum, to those ignorant of Iran’s pre-Islamic heritage, the slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom” may seem as though it reflects Western influence, however, it might be more accurate to say that Iranians are drawing upon and reawakening to their own ancient cultural heritage. Even though it has been, at times, forced underground, this worldview continues to survive, for example, in our stories, poetry, as well as ancient rituals and traditions that are continuing to be practiced by all Iranians, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation. It is not surprising, then, that the chant “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” is able to unify Iranians regardless of age and gender, and across regional, ethnic, and even economic and political lines.

It is also why I am not the least bit surprised that, in the face of daunting brutality, Iranian women and their menfolk will continue to courageously stand up, demanding justice, the freedom to choose, and to be treated with dignity. Deep within us, woven into our Iranian cultural DNA, we have always known that this is our birthright.

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## Let's cancel the word ALLOW

“He didn’t allow me to go to the funeral”  
I overheard, on the bus,  
From a sixty-year-old, her gray hair  
bundled into a ponytail. Later she said,  
“He didn’t let me buy it--it was too much.”  
“Allow” I thought, “Let me.”

Allow is for children who must ask  
permission to be out late  
or wheedle money for the rides.

You don’t “allow” your mother  
to marry the guy. She marries him  
and if you’re nice to her, she may  
invite you to her wedding.

You don’t “allow” your wife  
to attend a funeral; she goes.  
And if you’re nice to her  
she may ask if you want to come along.

We are adults; let’s not allow  
Anyone to disallow  
What we want to do.

Let’s cancel the word allow.  
Go to the funeral, confer, buy what we want.  
Isn’t it time to stop being ‘allowed’?

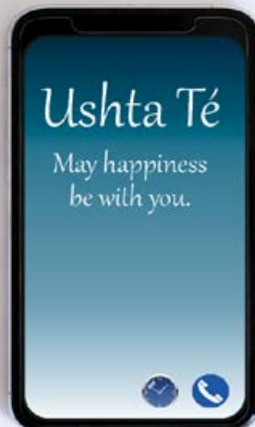
*Nawaz Merchant*

*Nev March, author of award winning  
Mystery “Murder in Old Bombay”*

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# TOWARDS A GLOBAL ETHIC: ADVOCATE, PRACTICE, DEFEND FREEDOM & HUMAN RIGHTS

BAKHTAVAR DESAI

## ‘WHAT IS THE GLOBAL ETHIC?’

The *Global Ethic* is a landmark declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions stating the universal values and principles shared by the world’s religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions. Though it emerged from consultations with scholars and religious leaders from many of the world’s religions and regions, the *Global Ethic* is a statement of basic ethical commitments shared by people throughout the globe, religious or not. It responds to an urgent practical need as well as a deep spiritual hunger for clear moral guidance on the most fundamental issues of human life and conduct. It expresses a minimal set of principles for committed action in a world torn by violence, religious and racial hatred, oppression of women and minority groups, extremes of wealth and poverty, and the growing threat of climate change and destruction of the natural world. A major achievement of this document is to demonstrate that there is agreement on these issues. It recognizes that beyond legislated laws and conventions there must be changes in people’s minds, hearts, and ways of life. You can read the *Global Ethic* document here: <https://parliamentofreligions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Global-Ethic-PDF-2020-Update.pdf>

Our program, ‘Towards a Global Ethic: Advocate, Practice, & Defend Freedom & Human Rights’, related with the principles mentioned in the *Global Ethic* document, by connecting the concepts of social justice promoted

in this document, with the practical steps each one of us can take, to achieve social justice in our world.

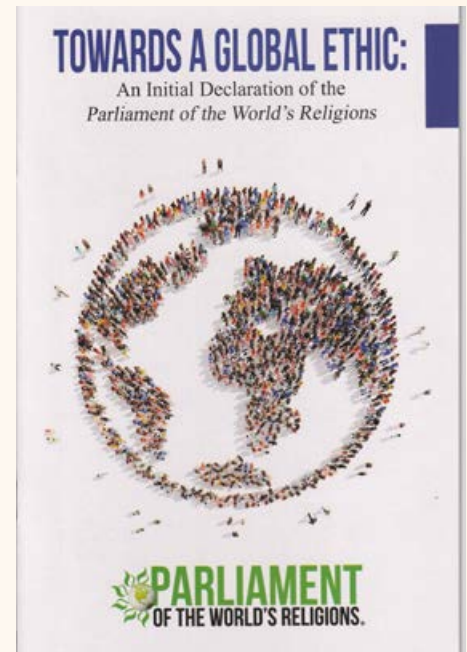
An Artist, a Justice Advocate, and an Attorney, were invited to join our panel for this program. They were:

**Dr. Saad Ghosn**, a retired physician and an artist who spoke on the role of the arts; especially the voice of the artist for peace and justice.

**Dr. Niaz Kasravi, Ph.D.** in Criminology, the Founder and Director of the Avalan Institute for Applied Research, a national expert and advocate on criminal justice and social justice, who has done extensive work, including leading campaigns on police accountability, racial profiling, death penalty abolition, and sentencing reform. Niaz shared with the audience how her work on ending police violence can help identify policies that create accountability, help end police misconduct, and increase public safety for all communities in the U.S.

**Mr. Raio Krishnayya**, an Attorney, and Executive and Legal Director for the Center for Victim and Human Rights, shared with the audience, the practical application of human rights norms at the local level, in the courtroom.

All three panelists, have devoted their lives to work that upholds and promotes the sacred principles of human rights, safety, and dignity for all. In our program, we wanted to **assert the need** for all of humanity to **collectively and courageously push back** against the devastating issues faced by humanity in order to bring about lasting changes. **That no person must feel that they are too insignificant to make any difference in the world.**



The thrust of our program was:

- 1) to focus on the intersections of peace and justice, specifically, examining a concept embedded in the Parliament of the World’s Religions’ *Global Ethic* document that calls on each of us to resolve conflict **without violence within a framework of justice**; and,
- 2) that **‘everybody can do something to contribute to making our world more equitable, humane, and peaceful for all’**. That no matter what our craft or expertise, **WE ALL CAN PLAY A ROLE** in building and strengthening a global set of ethics, especially on a local or regional level. To be sustainable, all global transformation **requires a range of shifts on a multitude of local, national, and regional levels.**

We sought to inspire our audience

with this *key message* that in order to succeed in our fight for a better world, communities of various faith backgrounds, genders, nationalities, and ethnicities must work together with solidarity and as partners for the common cause. We hoped to create this awareness and enthusiasm among our audience, so they could go back to their communities feeling inspired to begin the groundwork every common person in the community needs to get involved with, which leads to building the bridges necessary to *making our*

*world more equitable, humane, and peaceful for all!*

Our program “**How can we the people**” “**Reclaim our Freedom**” is on pages 57 and 58. Recording available at <https://www.youtube.com/@TheFEZANA/playlists>

*I sincerely thank all our panalists and my co-moderator, Cyrus Rivetna for giving me this opportunity, and honor, of working with them to successfully present both these programs at this convening.*

*This program emphasized greatly on collective good actions of humanity! If we all truly believe in **Humata** (good thoughts) **Hukhata** (good words) and **Huvarashta** (good actions) then it is most imporant for us to be aware that it is our “actions” our “**Huvarashta**” of becoming enganged within our community and helping our fellow humans build “Beloved Communities” so that our communities become safe and peaceful for every one living in them.*

From left Mr. Raio Krishnayya, Bakhtavar Desai, Dr Niaz Khasravi and Dr Saad Ghosn



# WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ETHIC

## Summary

*The Global Ethic (An Initial Declaration), also called the Global Ethic is the Parliament's signature document since 1993. At the 2023 Chicago convention four female Trustees of the Parliament of the World's Religions share their perspectives on this signature document. Each Trustee hails from a different religion. The Trustee-panelists are Mary Doak (Roman Catholic), Sahar Alsahlani (Muslim), Debra Boudreaux (Buddhist), and Mahrukh Motafram (Zoroastrian), all of whom serve on the Parliament's Global Ethic Committee. The panel is moderated by Trustee, Sharan Singh (Sikh).*

The Global Ethic document gives us a roadmap, a direction, a journey we can embark upon together, a way of life where we live in peace and harmony for the preservation of our surroundings on Earth, respectful and grateful for our existence and all living beings. It begins with a Declaration, stating the reasons “why” such a document is necessary, bringing our attention to our world/earth, which is in agony, suffering impacting humanity, and all existence. We see our world/earth in pain with lies, hatred, abuse, aggression giving rise to economic and social inequalities, poverty, and above all, an existential threat to our earth's ecosystem.

The document has principles and directives by which we can live better lives and secure a bright future for ourselves and our earth. It shines light on our positive attributes giving us the confidence, that we are capable of respecting our diversity, embracing our traditions, celebrating our cultures, and doing it with gratitude.

Every religion and tradition have fundamental core values built in their sacred texts. Our collective efforts towards these guiding principles will move us in unison, and enable us to transform the world where, “we affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families, communities, for races, nations, and religions”. - Global Ethic Document.

The Parliament with its signature document, “Towards the Global Ethic” takes responsibility in declaring the importance of collective action between common set of core values embedded in teachings and practices of the world's religions and traditions.



## INTERFAITH ENVIRONMENTAL & GENDER JUSTICE FOR THE HUMAN RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

### Summary

Environmental degradation is deeply intertwined with gender injustice, working as an inequality multiplier to oppress women and girls. A common aspect that we, at Green Hope Foundation, have noticed in our ground-level work is that almost every environmental disaster and climate-change affected community that we work with, whether religious, indigenous, or spiritual, views nature as the primordial maternal deity of giving and sustenance, but continues to exploit the environment & consequently, oppress women and girls, ignoring their human right to a healthy environment.

This session brings together an intergenerational panel of women from across different faiths and traditions to share case studies of positive actions undertaken by women and girls in all their diversity in climate-vulnerable communities that utilize the teachings of their faiths and traditions to highlight the importance of adopting a values-based approach toward ensuring the human right to a healthy environment.

How can a faith and interfaith perspective be used to create a value-based approach toward ensuring the human right to a healthy environment? What actions can we take to ensure long-term gender and environmental justice, utilizing faith and interfaith approach?



Panelists: **Kehkashan Basu (Moderator)** Atiuta Mataiti, Erin Isabel, Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, Mahrukh Motafram.

The concept for this program was conceived initially by Keki Dadachanji, to whom I am grateful, and who for several personal reasons, could not continue to be a part of the planning process for this program. Being a fascinating and valuable subject for discussion, I undertook the responsibility for preparing the proposal for this program. I invited panelists from six different faith traditions, leaders in their faith communities, to address this topic from their faith’s perspective. Except for *Dr. Gary Zola, from the Reform Judaism community in Cincinnati, Ohio, the rest were all from Chicago, Zenobia Tantra and Rohinton Rivetna from the ZAMC community, Asayo Koyo Horibe from the Buddhist faith community, E. Garnet Fay from the Society of Friends (the Quaker community), Sharan Kaur Singh from the Sikh community, and Shayda Safapour, from the Bahá’i community.*

## ‘HOW CAN WE “THE PEOPLE” RECLAIM OUR FREEDOM?’



**BAKHTAVAR DESAI**

*Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, invited by the Parliament as one of their Luminary speakers was invited as a guest speaker in our program to address this topic, from the global Human Family’s perspective, and not from a faith perspective. Since he was available on that day and time he graciously agreed to speak in this program on “Freedom for all Humanity.”*

As many faith perspectives, and speakers, had to be covered this program was broken up into two parts moderated by Cyrus Rivetna and myself.

SINCE THE THEME OF THE PARLIAMENT WAS ‘A CALL TO CONSCIENCE: DEFENDING FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS’, OUR PROGRAM TOPIC WAS APTLY ALIGNED TO THE THEME. WE CHOSE TO FOCUS ON TWO PRIMARY QUESTIONS

- 1) *WHAT DOES “FREEDOM” REALLY MEAN FROM EACH FAITH’S PERSPECTIVE?*
- 2) *WHAT CAN ORDINARY PEOPLE LIKE US DO TO RECLAIM OUR LOST FREEDOM?*

In this two-part program, our interfaith panelists presented an understanding of what freedom means based on the teachings of their various faith traditions, prophets and philosophers. They reflected on how each of our faith’s teachings helps to shape us as individuals and inspires us to stand for Freedom! Not only for our own freedom, but also for the freedom of all the peoples in the world!

Our various speakers challenged the despairing attitude of the common man, who thinks that there is nothing, or very little, that one can do to reclaim our freedom in so many aspects of life, when enormous forces in the world are arraying against us. Our speakers inspired the audience to remember that **COLLECTIVELY**, we, the people of all faiths, can do **anything** it takes to bring our world to that ideal state of existence, in which **EVERYONE can be TRULY free**. We were reminded by our speakers that as **children of One God, and members of The One Big Human Family**, we all need to realize that none of us can be free, or happy, or peaceful, UNTIL our entire human family can live with freedom, and in peace. In fact, until each and every **CREATION** is free, none of us is truly free!

Our program inspired everyone that each faith community cannot live or function in a silo. It is **NECESSARY** to join our hands with one another to address the problems facing humanity, **together**, collectively, because our strength will be **unbreakable** when we are **together and united in our efforts**.

Through all my interfaith experiences, I was once again beautifully reinforced and took away from this program that before I identify myself as a member of my Zoroastrian family, I must, and I do, identify myself first and foremost, as a member of the Human Family. Humanity is my religion above and beyond any other religion, and I cannot help but be reassured in my heart that my prophet Zarthushtira would have agreed with this as well.

This program is recorded and available to watch at <https://www.youtube.com/@The FEZANA/playlists>

PART 1 PANEL

*(L to R) Justice Nariman (Humanistic perspective), Zenobia Tantra (Zoroastrianism), Gary Zola, (Judaism), and Asayo Horibe (Buddhism). At the podium Bakhtavar Desai*



PART 2 PANEL

*(L to R) Sharan Kaur Singh (Sikh faith), E. Garnet Fay (Society of Friends of Quakers), Shayda Safapour (Bahai faith), and Rohinton Rivetna (Zoroastrianism) at the podium Cyrus Rivetna.*





## — United for Peace — Action Based Interfaith Efforts



United for Peace participated at the Parliament of World's Religions 2023 in a session on Action based Interfaith efforts. United for Peace is a grassroots movement of citizens who promote respect and unity in their communities across all differences and are a voice for nonviolence and peace in the world.

Our goal is to create robust, healthy communities, with inclusion and respect for all people. We believe in nonviolence and promote peaceful resolution to conflicts. Our programs and activities are designed to further these goals. At the event, we discussed the concepts of diversity, ethnocentrism, confirmation bias and the different methods used for polarization in our communities. Our organization's activities are focused towards overcoming these challenges by creating understanding, dialogue, controlling channels of communication, fact checking, training, seeking opportunities for collaboration and finding common ground. We shared examples of our various interfaith activities and solidarity events such as :

- Interfaith City Councils
- Interfaith Tours
- Interfaith Community Gatherings
- Interfaith Celebration of Religious and Ethnic Customs
- Participation at multicultural picnics, potlucks and community fairs
- Interfaith Solidarity Vigils for victims of discriminations and hate crimes.
- Interfaith Solidarity for Gun Control
- Celebrations for Gandhi and MLK Birthdays
- Interfaith Annual Peace Day Celebrations
- Interfaith Community Help
- Interfaith Action Planning Panel and Discussion
- Webinars and workshops that educate and change mindsets
- Dialogue sessions with polarized groups

Brainstorming sessions with key stakeholders to create positive action plans to reduce, hate and violence.



*Porus Dadabhoy, M.S. Chemical Engineering, MM Management, Quality manager and Auditor , Currently: President of United for Peace, Vice President of Citizens Advocacy Center, Democracy Building*

*Article prepared by  
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# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: HOW OUR FAITHS INSPIRE US TO ADOPT ECO-FRIENDLY SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

(A FEZANA-sponsored, interfaith session at the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago, August 2023)



From L to R Rosleny Ubinas (Baha'i youth), Jim Engineer (Zoroastrian), Kiran Kaur Gill (Sikh youth), Rabbi Allyson Zacharoff (Jewish youth) Fred Desai (program organizer and) **Moderator:**

Combating climate change is one of the most pressing problems of our time. Also, care for creation is integral to virtually every faith. Since a vast majority of the people in the world (~84%) are affiliated with a faith or religious organization, faith leaders have a huge opportunity not only to make their places of worship more sustainable, but to also inspire their congregants to lead a more sustainable and greener lifestyle. In this session, leaders from 4 religions—Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha'i—shared their perspectives on the following 2 questions:

- 1) *How does your faith inspire you to lead a more sustainable lifestyle as it relates to the environment?*
- 2) *What has been done at your place of worship to make it more environmentally friendly?*

**Allyson Zacharoff, a Rabbi in a synagogue in New Jersey,** mentioned “in the Jewish tradition, we are not just stewards of the earth, but we are partners with God to help move our world to a better place. Taking care of the environment is very much a part of *tikkun olam*, which in Hebrew means repairing the world. In the creation story in the Tora, God created the earth in six days, and on the seventh day he rested. Just as we humans need to take rest on sabbath, so also does the field need to rest for a year after every six years. This is called the *shmita* year. Allowing the field to stay fallow for a year helps regenerate the soil and makes it more productive and sustainable. In short, regenerative farming, which is one of the approaches that environmentalists recommend combatting climate change, was preached in the Tora about three thousand years ago and is practiced even today. Another concept in Judaism that is relevant to sustainability is called *l'dor v'dor*, which means bond between generations. We have to focus on the generations that came before us and also on those that will come after us. In other words, it is our moral responsibility to leave our world in as good, or even better, state for the future generations”.

**Kiran Kaur Gill, the Executive Director of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF),** mentioned that “oneness is a major concept in Sikhi (a.k.a. Sikhism), which means that there is connectedness between everyone and everything, including the environment. In the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, air is the guru, water is father, and earth is the great mother of all. This is a beautiful concept where the religion teaches its followers to treat nature like you would treat the dearest and most respected people in your lives—your parents and your teachers. Social justice and activism, which includes environmental justice, are integral part of the Sikh faith”.

**Jim Engineer, the Chief Communications Officer for FEZANA**, shared how his Zoroastrian faith has inspired him to work in the environmental field and to bring his knowledge to help the Chicago Darbe Mehr become more sustainable. Environmentalism is embedded deeply in Zoroastrianism. First, the amesha spentas in Zoroastrianism have a dual role—they are the attributes of God that each one of us should try and imbibe in us, and they are also elements of nature, which we need to show respect to, and take care of. Second, when Zarathushtra left his home to find answers to the world’s problems, he immersed himself in nature for several years. He was awe-struck by order in nature, which he called “asha.” Asha also means righteousness. Zarathushtra observed that everything lives in harmony in nature, and we, being the most intelligent creatures on earth, have the obligation to ensure that this harmony in nature is preserved. Third, in the Zoroastrian calendar, each month of the year, and also each day of the month, has either a quality of God or an element of nature associated with it, reminding us again every day to be God-like and to take care of creation.

**Rosleny Ubinas, a Baha’i youth representative at the UN**, mentioned that “Baha’u’llah gave a lot of importance to nature in his teachings with quotes like “Nature is God’s will and it is an expression in and through the contingent world” and “Nature in essence is the embodiment of my name”. Roselyn gave a youth perspective on this topic, since young folks are creative, bold, and passionate about key issues of our time. Since the Baha’i faith has no clergy or priests, individuals connect with one another and take the lead. The following quote in the Bahai faith inspires folks to take positive actions in their areas of influence, like their neighborhoods: *“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age you live in and center your deliberations on its requirements.”* Rosleny shared a story of how some high school youth in Southern California, who had formed a Math Club, decided to use their math knowledge to do something concrete for their drought-stricken community. They used their math skills to come up with a device that can be used to measure water level in the soil, and then guide the farmers on how much to water their fields. With this device, farmers are now able to use just the right amount of water in their fields, thus preserving a scarce and valuable resource.

**On the second question of what has been done at their places of worship to make them more environmentally friendly, the panelists shared the following.**

- 1) Almost all the panelists mentioned that they have done away with single-use plastic plates and cutlery by investing in reusable ceramic plates and silverware.
- 2) A couple of panelists mentioned that they compost, either by having their own composting or by participating in city composting. Rosleny mentioned that in New York city, friends and family coordinate with one another so that one person collects compost from several homes and takes it to the composting facility.
- 3) Allyson mentioned that her synagogue tries to partner with churches and other religious organizations to try and share resources that are used infrequently. Creating a sharing economy will reduce consumption. Today, one of the critical issues in our world is over-consumption, especially amongst the affluent.
- 4) Even though none of the panelists mentioned having renewable energy in their places of worship, there is huge opportunity to leverage the subsidies that the federal government gives to install renewable power like solar and geothermal.
- 5) Rosleny mentioned how they cut back on buying items that have a lot of plastic packaging by buying items like produce or snacks in bulk, and, if possible, without any packaging.
- 6) Allyson mentioned that Jews celebrate 4 New Years, one of them being the New Year of the tree, which falls in late January/early February. Over the last few decades, this New Year has become like an ecological celebration, to raise awareness about the environment.
- 7) An organization called EcoSikh, which is based in Ludhiana, India, has planted about 167,000 trees.
- 8) Jim is leading the effort to try and make the Chicago Darbe Mehr more sustainable by coming up with a sustainability plan that includes eliminating single use plastics, solar panels, composting, charging stations,



planting trees, and increasing biodiversity.

There are many more.

Here, I offer some food for thought.

- 1) In her book “*Saving Us—A Climate Scientist’s Case for Hope & Healing in a Divided World*,” Katherine Hayhoe says that one of the most important things we can do about climate change is talk about it. The more we talk about it, the more we think about it, would result in us coming up with alternate, and more green actions.
- 2) How can we change our behavior to lead a greener lifestyle? One approach is to be mindful of how we use our earth’s resources, especially energy and water, every day of our lives, in every action we take. When we do that, we will be surprised by how easily we can come up with alternatives that are less stressful to the environment. Here’s an example. In Cincinnati, almost everyone uses single-use plastic grocery bags instead of reusable bags. When a young cashier at Walgreens asked her customers if they wanted the plastic bag or not for the few items they bought, about half of them refused these bags! This example might seem trivial, saving a few SUP bags, but the main point is the mindset that we need to have, which will rub on to other actions we take during the day as well.
- 3) To get a feel for where we are with respect to our carbon footprint and where we need to be, we should keep the numbers 2-4-16 in our minds. For long term sustainability, the global average per capita carbon footprint needs to be at 2 tons/year. Today the global average is 4 tons/year. In the US, like in many other developed countries, that average footprint is 16 tons/year. If everyone lived like the average American, we would need 5 earths! That is the definition of unsustainable.
- 4) One argument I hear often from folks about why they do not want to, install solar panels in their homes or in their places of worship, is because “the financial benefit is not big enough.” I would challenge folks to change their thinking and do the right thing for our environment, especially if they can afford it. When we donate money to a cause or to help people in need, we do not ask whether that is a good financial decision. We should put fighting climate change in the same bucket as we put donations.
- 5) Finally, if we do not feel motivated to act, we should just look in the eyes of our young children and grandchildren and remind ourselves that no green action step is too small to take!

***Ervad Fred Desai*** is the lead Zoroastrian priest for the Zoroastrian Association of KY, OH, & IN. He works as a Senior Engineer in R&D at Procter & Gamble, Cincinnati.

*Fred is passionate about sustainability, specifically as it relates to climate change. He is a member of the “Education/Lifestyles Working Group” of Cincinnati Faith Communities Go Green (FCGG.org), whose mission is to inspire religious organizations and their congregations to go green and become sustainable. He leads the community in participating in several Eco Challenges throughout the year, and has also contributed to the FCGG toolkit for the community. Fred is also a Sustainability Champion at his workplace, at the Winton Hill P&G Research Center in Cincinnati, inspiring colleagues to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Fred teaches a class on Zoroastrianism in some private Christian High Schools, as part of the World Religion Class curriculum.*



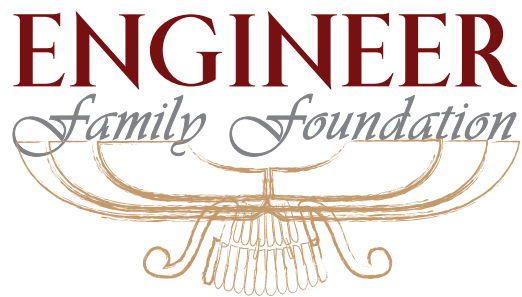
# ENGINEER FAMILY FOUNDATION

## *Impacting Lives Positively One at a Time*

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Our charity invites applications from students aspiring for education, pursuing work related technical diploma's and seeking excellence in the fields of sports and fine arts.

We also accept applications from individuals in need of assistance to access basic needs like food, clothing and shelter.



[www.engineerfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.engineerfamilyfoundation.org)

GOOD THOUGHTS | GOOD WORDS | GOOD DEEDS

# SDG17

## POWER OF SCIENCE WITH FAITH



### PANEL DISCUSSION AT PARLIAMENT OF WORLD’S RELIGIONS (POWR) – 2023

A panel discussion was initiated at the PoWR by [Zoroastrians](#) to spotlight the relevance of the world’s religions to the [United Nation’s](#) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG17).

**SDG17 (Global Goal 17)** calls for a global partnership for sustainable development. It refers to the need for nonhegemonic and fair cross-sector and cross-country collaborations in pursuit of achieving all the SDG17 goals by the year 2030. It calls for countries to align policies, strengthen the means of implementation, and revitalize the global partnership of sustainable development.

Interfaith representatives presented their respective religions’ teachings and practices to achieve these goals. **Moderator Ervad Tehemton Mirza (Zoroastrian)** set the stage by pointing out the World’s Religions’ responsibility towards SDG17. He stressed that since 84% of the world’s population is religiously affiliated (Pew Research), and religions have a significant influence on the moral behaviour of their followers, and since the world’s religions have established extensive networks to reach and guide their followers, it is the responsibility of the world’s religions to take leadership role to support United Nations in achieving its goals. Religious leaders have issued an appeal in 2021 (see below) but the world is waiting for their action.

*“We come together united to raise awareness of the unprecedented challenges that threaten our beautiful common home. Our faiths and our spiritualities teach a duty to care for human family and for the environment in which it lives.”* (Join appeal from 40 leaders from different faiths, before COP26 in Glasgow in 2021).

**Representing Zoroastrianism, Ervad Tehemton Mirza** stated that Zoroastrianism reveres and teaches respect for the elements of nature, holds them sacred and recognizes their importance and interdependence. With the gift of good mind (Vohu Mana), humans are expected to respect the innate wisdom in nature. Those who work for





*Lto R Swami Shajananda; Sr. Dawn M. Nothwehr; Dr. Rahul Deepankar; Ervad Tehemton Mirza.*

the betterment of the creations of Ahura Mazda (Lord of Wisdom) are rewarded with the ultimate bliss and reward of happiness. He spoke on the Zoroastrian concepts of “Frashokereti” (continuous refreshing) and “Shyothanam” (Action) and challenged the world’s religions to act for SDG17 for the betterment of humanity.

**Swamiji Shajananda**, representing Hinduism, reminded the audience that humanity is indebted to the elements of nature. Hinduism promotes the worship of the existence of everything in nature. Even a tiny creature like a mouse is given importance by depicting it as a vehicle of Lord Ganesha. The Rig Veda offers the concept that “God is one and is everywhere present” and that the Hindu religion is pantheistic in nature. Put differently, God resides in all things, including living and non-living things; therefore, everything in nature deserves respect and reverence.

**Sr. Dawn M. Nothwehr, Phd**, expanded on the Catholic perspective of SDG17 through the lens of Franciscan theology and its emphasis on the importance of nature. Citing para 76 of *Laudato si’* (Praise Be to You) with the subtitle “on the care of our common home” by Holy Father Pope Francis, Sr. Nothwehr informed the audience that the Catholic Church has clarified its interpretation of Genesis (1:28) as mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Recognizing its potential to impact the broader community significantly, various Catholic Dioceses have implemented sustainability plans of SDG17 in their actions, goals and teachings.

**Dr. Rahul Deepankar** brought to light the Buddhist teaching that humans are a product of everything else and are connected to everything else. With examples and allegory, he concluded that the abuse in our societies would cease if we considered all of us as a part of each other. He propounded the virtue of non-violence and vegetarianism for good moral living and for the environment’s benefit. He encouraged the audience to change their way of thinking for the improvement of humanity and to help achieve the SDG17 goals.

Quoting Qur’anic verses, **Imam Hassan Aly of Islam** clarified that humans are created to care for the earth, and our lifestyle (over-consumption) has significantly impacted our planet. He encouraged all present to change their lifestyle and bring moderation in their living habits. He stated that the change must come from within, from one’s soul; therefore, humans should re-invent their inner self in their treatment of the environment.

A lively Q&A session followed the panel discussion.

# INTERFAITH DIALOGUE MEETS HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN



**Shirin Mehri (She/Her)** is a first-year graduate student in the Student Development Administration program at Seattle University, working for the Office of Integrity Formation and Student Conduct. At Habib University, Shirin taught a course on Human-Centered Design for first-year students as well as worked closely with faculty on the common core curriculum review as part of the Office of Undergraduate Education and Accreditation. In this work, Shirin has witnessed first-hand the impact strong support systems can have for students transitioning into their undergraduate experience. Beyond her professional pursuits, Shirin nurtures a keen interest in mental health wellness, sustainability, and community-building practices.

SHIRIN MEHRI

**H**uman-centered design prioritizes talking to and collaborating with the people who are most likely to be affected by a new program or service improvement. In this workshop, participants had the opportunity to apply design thinking principles to challenges they face when it comes to “Interfaith Peace and Harmony” within and amongst their communities.

As disengagement and marginalization continue to rise in democracies globally, there’s a simultaneous surge in political campaigns funded by religiously biased or anti-democratic entities alongside corporate interests. The Faith and Democracy track at the Parliament of World Religions (PoWR) 2023 brought attention to the perspectives of officials and organizers operating at the convergence of faith and democracy. This track delved into exploring and providing actionable guidance for individuals of faith and those with positive intentions to safeguard freedom, uphold human rights, and promote fairness within the political landscape.

Participants comprised of members of various faith-based traditions from across the country, as well as mental-health practitioners in the field and student affairs practitioners looking to apply practices embedded in human-centered design within their communities. Before we go into the design thinking process, let us review the definition of the word “design” and its objective. Simply put, design can be seen as a way to plan tasks to accomplish something in the most logical and efficient way possible.

## What is Design Thinking and Human-Centered Design?

To familiarize participants with the methodology, we spent some time on the principles and mindset behind human-centered design and its application in the world of interfaith dialogue. Design thinking and human-centered design are closely interlinked. Design thinking represents

a creative approach to solving problems, integrating an understanding of user needs, or in this case community needs, to enhance services or experiences. It follows a structured five-step process:

- 1.) *empathizing with the end user;*
- 2.) *defining the problem;*
- 3.) *generating ideas;*
- 4.) *creating prototypes; and*
- 5.) *testing preferred solutions.*

The objective is to enhance the overall experience by integrating the user’s viewpoint, gathered through diverse methods such as user data, surveys, interviews, and direct observations. For the duration of this workshop, we focused on stage 1 of empathizing with the end-user to better design initiatives in our local communities. Human-centered design expands upon design-thinking by actively engaging the end-user in the stages. It surpasses the mere collection of survey responses, user data, or customer observations to shape the thinking of a ‘design team’ throughout the process. Instead, it involves both the design team and end-users collaborating in a shared space to co-create a service or experience. At the level of community organizing, this means all relevant stakeholders are intricately involved in every phase of the design-thinking process.

### **Application to Interfaith Dialogue:**

Research indicates that engaging in interreligious dialogue serves as a means to foster connections between diverse cultural and religious groups that might otherwise find themselves in conflict. Certain literature delves into the normative perspective, highlighting the importance of ensuring that interreligious dialogue is both genuine and significant.

Designers strongly advocate for ‘zero-based thinking.’ This approach encourages us to shed all preconceived ideas, biases and assumptions, essentially starting from a clean slate. Assuming we have no prior knowledge, what inquiries could we pose? It is only through this method that we can enhance our empathy and stay receptive to fresh concepts and different modes of thought and existence.

Here are some questions to guide us to better understand the community we are working in and practice empathy with all members. What does the community value? Where was visible evidence of these values? Where was evidence of community resilience? How did the community develop this resilience? To further deepen this understanding, community organizers can tackle the following questions to create spaces for interfaith dialogue. How might you uncover issues and needs in your community? Who are prominent members that you might partner with to discover these needs and connect to key stakeholders? Who usually gets left out of those conversations, and how you might partner with them as well?

The viewpoint, intentions, limitations, and biases of designers profoundly shape our surroundings. This underscores the significance of prioritizing learning, varied perspectives, and grasping the lived experiences of others. Designers embrace their responsibility as creators of these experiences, bringing forth something from nothing. What captivates me most is this meticulous process—how perspectives and influences shape design. It is the profound and continuous effort inherent in design that excites me, regardless of the object of design. Design embodies both action and outcome and this process represents the essence of design.

These viewpoints drive my exploration into the forces steering design choices, their role in the broader ecosystem, and a designer’s potential to transcend mere directives and instead craft what is essential. When our objective is social impact—designing for change and a better world—our commitment extends to providing the world with what it truly needs, whenever that moment arises.



# OUR ZOROASTRIAN Faith Room

BAKHTAVAR DESAI

FEZANA hosted the Zoroastrian Faith Room at the 2023 PoWR, where we displayed tables of our cultural and religious art and artifacts to spread further awareness about our rich and ancient heritage. These exhibits included:

1) the display of a beautiful red and white Gara Saree, and a purple and white Jhabla, both lent most graciously to us by the renowned Designer Ashdeen Lilaowala, from India, with a writeup from him, on the history and the relevance of the Gara in Indian Zoroastrian culture.

2) Six prints of art created by a renowned Indian Zoroastrian artist, Zarin Amrolia, who creates a repertoire of watercolor paintings, with the hope, she says, “to capture, appreciate and celebrate the quintessential essence of our illustrious and eclectic Zarthoshti community which has been thriving in India for centuries”. This collection of six prints of her paintings, lent so generously to us by Zarin, was titled ‘Soul of Fire’. These six individual prints were titled ‘Iranshah Atash Behram’, ‘Jashan’, ‘Divo’, ‘Memories’, ‘Navjote’, and ‘Khordeh Avesta’.

3) A display of the ceremonial ses, ‘patlo’, etc. that Zoroastrians use in their homes on auspicious days.

4) A lovely Haft Sheen Table displayed by Farida Shahriari

And finally, we had a general display of information on our religion including a picture of the Magi, a Farohar artifact, with informational write-ups and posters.

Our sincere thanks to Ashdeen Lilaowala and Zarin Amrolia, and our amazing volunteers, Zenobia Damania, Khursheed Ichhaporia, Farida Shahriari,



Roshan Rivetna, Tehemton Mirza, and many others who helped in creating these exhibits in our Faith Room.

Besides the exhibits, we also hosted a session each day on a Zoroastrian ceremony Tuesday to Friday, in the PoWR week. These were led by our priests, *Er. Tehmton Mirza, Er. Kobad Zarolia, and Mobed Bomi Damkewala*. These ceremonies which were explained to the audience each day, included: Navjote/Sudreh Pushi (Initiation) Ceremony, Water Ceremony, Boi ceremony (Fire ceremony), and the Jashan ceremony.

Our most sincere thanks to our priests for leading these informative sessions daily. (photo above *Ervad Tehmton Mirza demonstrating the water ceremony*)

Some photos from the faith room illustrated here.



Explore

# Zoroastrianism

## Demonstration of Zoroastrian Ceremonies

Location: Zoroastrian Faith Room E272d - Level 2

**8:00 A.M. | Tuesday, August 15th, 2023**

Navjote / Sudreh Pushi (Initiation) Ceremony

Learn from this demonstration how an individual is inducted into the Zoroastrian religion. Observe how an inductee is purified by the Naahan (sacred bath) and welcomed by an elder by the Achu Michu ceremony. Hear the ancient oath of allegiance to Zoroastrianism. Witness how a Mobed (Zoroastrian Priest) invests the Sudreh (sacred shirt) and Kusti (sacred thread) and blesses the inductee. Learn the symbolism of sacred shirt and thread.

**6:30 P.M. | Tuesday, August 15th, 2023**

Ecology in Zoroastrianism

Marvel at the modernity of one of the world's oldest religions. Discover the Zoroastrian prescription for our environmental and ecological ailments. Understand the Zoroastrian teachings and practices as they relate to the reverence and worship of nature's elements: Let Zoroastrianism lead us to an environmentally conscious and eco-friendly world citizenry.

**8:00 A.M. | Wednesday, August 16th, 2023**

Water Ceremony

Ecological consciousness is at the vanguard of Zoroastrian religious philosophy and practices. Learn how libation is prepared and offered to the divine through this ceremony. The Water ceremony you will be a part of will offer reverence to water, recognize its importance to all aspects of nature, and seeks its blessings.

**8:00 A.M. | Thursday, August 17th, 2023**

Boi Ceremony (Fire Ceremony)

Fire is seen as the supreme symbol of purity in Zoroastrianism. This demonstration will show how the holy fire is revered, respected, and offered ritual offerings. Learn what the holy fire seeks from its friend (devotee) and what the holy fire grants in exchange. Join in seeking its blessings for defending Freedom & Human Rights.

**8:00 A.M. | Friday, August 18th, 2023**

Jashan Ceremony

Witness this unique ancient thanksgiving ceremony that celebrates the elements of nature and serves a social and religious function. Observe how all of the Almighty's creations are represented and the archangels and angels are invited during the ceremony. Souls of one's ancestors are commemorated, praised, and sought blessing from. Understand the significance of the flower ritual and the symbolism of gestures during the ceremony. Experience peace and tranquillity through ancient Avesta chants.





# **OUR FEZANA EXHIBIT PROJECT OF:**

## **MESSAGES ON HUMAN RIGHTS FROM ZOROASTRIANS FROM AROUND THE WORLD COLLAGED IN THE SHAPE OF THE FAROHAR, WRITE-UPS FROM A STUDENT, A TEACHER, AND THE PROJECT CREATOR, ALL FROM ZAMC**

### **WRITE-UP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CREATOR OF THIS PROJECT: KHURSHEED ICHHAPORIA:**

In August 2023, the welcoming city of Chicago hosted the Parliament of World’s Religions which included a vast array of people of all faiths. The Zoroastrian community participated whole heartedly and community members took part of multiple programs: performances, art, presentations, parade, panels discussions. The participants ranged from toddlers to octogenarians.

The farohar project was conceived as an interactive exhibit where people, from Zoroastrian communities all over the world, were invited to submit a postcard with their personal message on the theme of the Parliament **“Defending freedom and human rights.”** These postcard messages from Zoroastrian communities around the world, were arranged and displayed in a Farohar-shaped collage, in the Exhibits section at the Parliament, from 14th to 18th, August at the McCormick Place Lakeside Center in Chicago, USA. An overwhelming number of postcards were sent by the children of our communities. The postcards were lush and abundant in their messages of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, The wings of the Farohar were used to showcase the wonderful hopes and dreams of these sentient beings. We shared these postcards as a gift to the world and with the hope that everyone would enjoy reading them. We also wanted visitors to contribute to this organic, growing exhibit.

We invited the audience to write their own message on the theme of the Parliament of World Religions 2023 and attach it to the collage. In this manner we hoped to celebrate the exchange of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, as exemplified within Zoroastrianism. The project was about togetherness and the generosity of the human spirit. Everything was done with **Vohu Mana** (the good mind/thought/purpose): the conception of the project, the collaborative spirit in which it was designed and shared, the receiving and assembling of the postcards, the set-up, the display, and even the wrapping-up.

*Khursheed Ichhaporia would like to thank everyone who helped make this exhibit a reality and showcased the beautiful sentiment of **Ushta Te** (happiness unto you) to the world.*

*Some audience messages back to the world, were **“Peace is our life-breath”** and **“Imagine peace here and now.”***



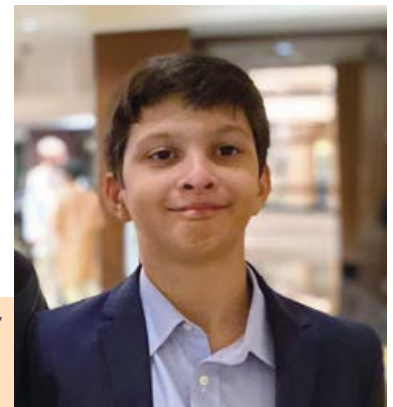


**A write up from the perspective of Daraius Sabawala (a student from ZAMC):**

A small religion like Zoroastrianism has to work hard to be additionally noticed. That is why with the help of Mrs. Khursheed, and a few volunteers the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago (ZAMC) we put together a banner and a booth at the 2023 Parliament of World’s Religions. In the start of the process I helped Khursheed aunty to stick the postcards made by all the kids from ZAMC onto the poster featuring the farohar. After a few failed tries of tape, glue, and safety pins, we finally came to the conclusion of using thumbtacks. It took a while, but we finally got it and once we stepped back to judge our work I noticed that most of the postcards had lots of pictures and/or coloring on it, while only a few of them had lots of words, so we had a decent variety of layouts. As we brought it to the McCormick Lakeside center, I started to wonder how this massive range of cultures, and artifacts can actually become so accessible.

The Parliament was incorporated in 1988 to carry out a tradition and legacy that dates back to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where the historic first convening of the Parliament of World’s Religions created a global platform for engagement of religions of the east and west as mentioned on the parliament website itself. At the 2023 convening most of the booths had something symbolic to their religion, belief, or culture, and in ours we had the farohar. The farohar itself is a complicated shape with many meanings in it. The part in the middle is the adherent; the three rows of wings represent good thoughts, good words, and good deeds; the two ‘legs’ with the loops represent

**Daraius’ Bio:** *Daraius Subawalla is a middle schooler in the Midwest who enjoys watching car races, studying aircraft, and travel. He looks forward to community service events with fellow Zoroastrians.*





Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu; the circle the in the middle symbolizes the immortality of the soul; one hand of the farohar points up – showing the direction you should strive for in following goodness (taking the high road) – while the other holds a ring which represents your commitment to Ahura Mazda, a promise in which you will not break in pursuing goodness and take the ways of evil. Put it this way, our religion is something that all the world needs. Not the actual prayers and sudreh and kushti, but the moral values of constantly looking out for others and being a good person, because it’s impossible that being a good person is harmful. So in conclusion, be a good person. That’s the oath you took at your navjote when YOU became a Zarathushti (Zoroastrian).



Anahita Shahabadi and Behram Pastakia with the poster

### **Write-up from a teacher’s perspective - Shara Godiwalla**

As a Zoroastrian middle school teacher in the Chicago area, I incorporated the postcard project into our human rights class, given its serendipitous timing. First, the middle school children discussed what they thought human rights actually meant and then watched a 9-minute video on its history. The video surprised them as it started with the Cyrus Cylinder, a replica of which sits next to them in the Chicago class. It then explained the 30 basic human rights including those of children and traced the history through present day identifying human rights issues that still exist.

The children thought about human rights and captured reflections on a postcard in the form of a poem, a few written lines or a drawing. Each child contributed to the mosaic of cards presented at PoWR. They all agreed that everyone has human rights regardless of race, social status, or occupation and seemed more baffled as to why people believe otherwise. These postcards were ultimately incorporated with many others submitted from around the world, ultimately to be displayed at PoWR.





Mahtab Ardavan, khursheed Khorsheed and Khursheed



Parisa Khosravi, Mahtab Dastur and Kouroush Khosravi

### ZEDF - Partners with FEZANA member Associations

The Zarathushti Enterpreunership Development Fund, **ZEDF**, a partnership between **WZCC** and **FEZANA**, was established as a non-profit 501-C (3) organization to provide financial support to Zoroastrian entrepreneurs in North America.

ZEDF collaborates with FEZANA member organizations, promoting ideas of common interest, particularly those that strengthen the Zoroastrian identity lifting up the key principles of *integrity* and *industry*. ZEDF partnered with **ZAC-Chicago** in the installation of a Television set at the FEZANA Booth, during the Parliament of the World's Religions held at McCormick Place from 14th to 18th August 2023.

The television set was chosen by the ZAC-Chicago to suit their local needs and is now installed at the Dar-e-Mehr in Chicago as a tool to promote Zoroastrian Religious Education for children and adults.

FEZANA Member Associations interested in partnering with ZEDF are requested to communicate with Behram Pastakia, [Behram@fezana.org](mailto:Behram@fezana.org)





# THE YOUTH PRESENCE AT PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLDS RELIGIONS, 2023

MAHTAB B. DASTUR

*In a world where stolen liberties and limited freedoms are in the news too often, an event took place where thousands of people came together to share ideas, collaborate, and work towards a better future. Where were the youth? We were right here.*





Over 8,000 people – each one with an idea, a thought, each one a beacon of the light we call “Hope”. Each one on a mission, walking a path no one has walked before, changing the world, so no one must walk it again. 8,000 people, and I was one of them. We were a contingent of over 50 Zarathushtis at the Parliament of World’s Religions 2023.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Parliament of World’s Religions, with the theme *A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom &*



*Mahtab B. Dastur is a 17 year-old student in 12th grade from Spring, Texas. Mahtab is immensely involved in her community, both locally and at-large. She is passionate about caring for the environment, empowering youth, and fostering open communications between all people, and has spoken on these topics at several global platform sessions including recently at the Parliament of World’s Religions held in Chicago in August 2023. She serves on the board of several non-profit organizations, including the one she and her brother founded, Books2Smiles, which sends books across the world to children who do not have access to them. Mahtab hopes to pursue medicine and public policy once she graduates from high school. In her free time, Mahtab enjoys reading and dancing. Mahtab’s lifelong goal is to make a lasting difference in the world.*



*Human Rights*, was held in Chicago, Illinois, USA from August 14 – 18, 2023. The Parliament has been, and continues to be, the largest interfaith gathering in the world. Starting 130 years ago in 1893, it is recognized as the “birthplace of the worldwide interfaith movement”. This year, FEZANA had nearly 50 people attend the Parliament of World’s Religions with several Zarathushti youth amongst them. The names of the youth attendees were, *Ava Daruwala, Rayhan Driver, Zynah Kharoliwalla, Mehernaz Kharoliwalla Anahita Driver, Zinnia Saher, Katy Daruwala, Darius Sabawalla, Anahita Shahabadi, Zara Engineer, Alea Engineer, and myself, Mahtab B. Dastur.*

The youth ran the beautiful FEZANA kids’ booth, performed on multiple stages, and even spoke at several sessions! The FEZANA kids’ booth, was organized, planned, and set up by Vehishta Kaikobad, Bakhtavar Desai, Persis Driver, and Edul Chickhliwala. It was filled with activities relating to the Amesha Spentas, the Cyrus Cylinder, and the Farohar. The booth was manned, for the majority of the time, by youth volunteers, who helped participating kids complete activities, explained the religion to all those who walked by, and answered the questions of many attending adults.

The youth also gave multiple performances. The first performance was a beautiful Bharatnatyam dance by *Zynah and Mehernaz Kharoliwalla*, as part of a Music and Dance session aimed to exemplify Joy, Hope, and Healing. The second performance was an interpretative Persian dance explaining the Haftseen table, performed by *Mahtab B. Dastur*.

Finally, the youth spoke at two sessions,

1, *Empowering Youth to Preserve Intergenerational*

*Knowledge of the Zoroastrian Faith, and 2, Youth Perspective on Intra-faith Dialogue and Peace-Building Work in the World.*

Along with 2 other youth from Chicago - *Rayhan Driver and Ava Daruwala* – I was part of the first session. (photo below) We were on a panel with Ketayun Kapadia and Dr. Persis Driver, in which we discussed the differing diasporic memories of adults who emigrated to the US from their motherlands, and of those of us, the youth, who were raised in the US. Furthermore, we considered how the youth of today can work with the youth of yesterday to move forward in today’s society. We, as youth, narrowed it down to 3 steps - **engage, educate, and empower**. Beginning with **engagement** Ava Daruwalla spoke about intergenerational connections which can be fostered



through summer camps, organizing events, and youth mentoring. Next Rayhan Driver spoke about **education**, emphasizing the importance of service and preserving history through community service, written word, and projects such as the Oral History Project. Lastly, I spoke about **empowering** the youth, outlining a 3-step process

summed up by the acronym **I AM**, which stands for **Input, Autonomy, and Merge**. **Input** refers to ideas/suggestions being brought to the table by both adults and youth. **Autonomy** refers to the youth acting on their own (in terms of organizing and leading activities, events, etc.). The final step, **Merge**, refers to the joint partnership and collaboration between the youth and adults, taking the lessons all the generations have learned and applying it to current-day.

The second session was an interfaith panel aiming to discuss how to utilize intrafaith discussion to make interfaith discussion more productive to achieve world peace. This session had two parts, both moderated by Jamshed Rivetna. There were representatives of many different faiths including the Baha’i, Islamic, Jewish, Sikh, and of course the Zoroastrian faith. Benafsha Shroff was the Zoroastrian representative during the first part of the session, and I was the Zoroastrian representative during the second part of the session. (photo on pg 77) The sessions included discussion on several topics such as the lessons each religions taught, religious perspectives of what world peace means, and how each of our religions tells us to achieve it. Quite early on, we all agreed that world peace was not an elusive destination which was impossible to reach, but was rather the journey to a world not without conflict, but rather a world in which we are able to resolve conflict without resorting to violence, bullying, etc. Subsequently, we discussed how we can set up environments in which people feel comfortable stating their opinions and thoughts and are unafraid

to ask controversial questions. We touched on several extremely relevant topics, some of which are relevant not only to the youth but to the entire world such as ‘cancel culture’.

**Cancel Culture** is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and



*exerting social pressure*” - closing the channels of discussion exactly where they should open. This specific topic of discussion held such importance, that several members of the audience too engaged in the discussion. We determined that “Cancel Culture” was incredibly damaging to the world of progress and was a major roadblock in the path to “world peace”. As a panel and audience alike, we concluded the session with an understanding and silent agreement to create safe spaces of discussion within our own communities and faiths, where people can freely share their viewpoints, and thus lessen the damaging impact of Cancel Culture. Following this session, much of the audience stayed behind (for so long that we had to move into the hallway so that the next session could begin in our room!) and connected with each other and with us (the panelists) to discuss this topic further. I truly hope that one day, Cancel Culture will be something which is taught in history class as an oppressive means of limiting voices and discussion, and that world peace will be achieved with the ability to have open, safe conversations to resolve conflict.

The Parliament of World’s Religions taught me that we, as humans, all have a common goal, regardless of what or who we believe in. That goal is to make the world a better place, and whether it be achieved through empowering women and girls in Afghanistan or taking care of the environment, each path taken to achieve this common goal has the same good thoughts, good words, and good deeds fueling them. I’m not sure what the



future holds, where I’ll be in 50, or even 10 years from now, but I do know that there is a community which stretches far beyond my own city, state, or even country, which is fighting with me, for me, and for those who have yet to come after me. They are fighting to create a world in which liberties are not taken away, freedoms are not limited, and the pursuit of happiness is a concept experienced by every human being.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to FEZANA and ArZan Sam Wadia for this incredible opportunity for the Zarathushti Youth to participate, to Bakhtavar Desai for encouraging me (and my parents) to attend, to Persis Driver for her support, to Roshan (aunty) and Rohinton Rivetna for their hospitality and to Aban Rustomji, Vehishta Kaikobad, and Katayun Kapadia for being my chaperones and looking out for me throughout the duration of the Parliament.

“The parliament meant a lot to me and I’m so glad I got to go and meet so many new people! It was also so interesting to learn about all of the cultures and traditions that people have. Hope I get to go again someday!”  
- **Alea Engineer**

“To me the parliament meant that I had a chance to voice my thoughts and communicate all that we are doing as a community, not only to other Zoroastrians, but people from many other cultures and religions. It was a way to express how important the different projects we do are and the commitment that we have to both now and the future.”  
- **Ava Daruwala**

“The experience at the the Parliament of the World’s religions was something unforgettable and extremely informative. I got to meet many amazing people from all over the world and learn more about them and their beliefs.”  
- **Zynah Kharoliwalla**

“To me, the Parliament was like a window into a whole new world of religions and cultures, making me eager to learn more about the people and beliefs that shape our world.”  
- **Anahita Driver**

“I really liked performing at the Parliament and showing my religion to everyone. It made me feel proud to be a Zoroastrian.”  
- **Mehrnaz Kharoliwalla**

# SACRED MUSIC & DANCE AT THE 2023 PARLIAMENT



MAHTAB DASTUR

Several Zoroastrian music and dance performers of all ages from the US and Canada, performed in music and dance programs at the Parliament. Three amazing Zoroastrian star performers, Tara Jamshidian, Tina Siganporia, and Ardavan Tarapore performed in the Sacred Music Concert Night. The concert recording can be viewed here:

<https://app.powr.org/e/2023powr/portal/stage/290375>

## HAFTSEEN TABLE DANCE

*A Haftseen Table dance was performed by me at the Parliament on the main stage in the Kids PoWR Area. This dance was originally choreographed by Vehishta Kaikobad, Natasha Dungor, and myself.*

*Using the traditional sense of what the Haftseen table is (a table with at least 7 items starting with the sound s- or sh-), the interpretive dance is choreographed to exemplify what each of the items represented. For example, when performing around the item of garlic, or seer, I used movements which emphasized the body, as garlic has medicinal value. When focusing on wheat, or sabzeh, I used my limbs to display development and growth, as wheat is for growth and springtime. One of the themes for our Zoroastrian Super PoWR Kids' booth at this Parliament was **Care for Creation**. The Haftseen table display at our Kids' Booth as well as my Haft Seen Dance tied in very well with this theme.*

*Thank you to Ms. Vehishta Kaikobad and Ms. Bakhtavar Desai for thinking of me and supporting the dance! I am very grateful to have been invited and given the opportunity to perform!*

*Many of our Zoroastrian artists performed in a special Music and Dance program at the Parliament. Among those who sang were Tara Jamshidian, Tina Siganporia, Ardavan Tarapore, Mani Rao, and the ZAMC Choir. Havovi Desai and Ben Crowder performed a couple of instrumental pieces on flute and trombone, and Zynah and Mehernaz Kharoliwalla performed an Indian classical dance.*

*Our talented artists were greatly appreciated at the Parliament! Many thanks to all of them!*

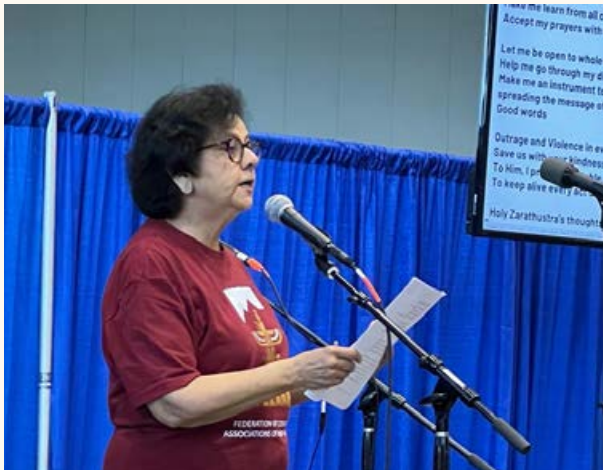




**Ardavan Taraporewalla.**



**Tara Jamshedian**



**Mani Rao**



**Havovi Desai and Ben Crowder**



**Tina Siganporia**

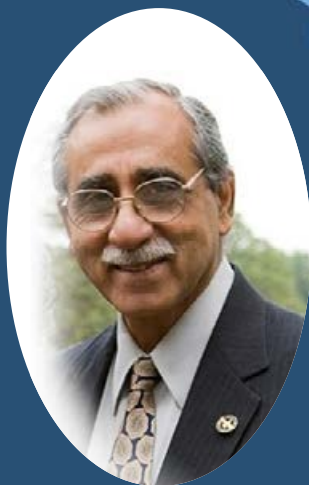


**Zynah and Mehernaz Kharoliwalla**



Reflections

THOUGHTS ON THE 2023 POWR



Rohinton Rivetna

The 2023 Parliament was a good gathering place where we met old friends, renewed friendships and met other like-minded persons. Presentations were numerous which made selection difficult, nevertheless those which we were able to attend were substantive and opened horizons. It provided a good platform to showcase our religion, our beliefs, our history, and advocate for various issues that we believe in.

This Parliament marked the 30th anniversary, of the centennial of the first Parliament held in 1893. Over the years the Parliament has picked up advocacy for many issues besides the original intent, which was to work for peace among the religions, and hence peace in the world; for as Hans Kung, author of “*The Global Ethics*” said: “*There shall be no peace among Nations without peace among the Religions.*”

Stress on this original intent will make the Parliament unique, and fill a need our world sorely needs.

At the 1893 Parliament, where for the first time, religions of the West met religions of the East, Swami Vivekananda said “*I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention will be the death knell to all fanaticism, to all persecutions with the sword or the pen, and to all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.*”

Following the centennial of the 1893 Parliament, also held in Chicago, in 1993, Interfaith organizations have mushroomed all over the world. These interfaith gatherings engender **dialogue** among the faiths, which bring **understanding** of each other, which in turn generate **respect** for each other, and that, it is hoped will bring **peace** among the religions, and in the world.

But today, a century and a quarter later, Peace eludes us. Religiously based strife abounds throughout the world. Out of fear and hatred for other religions, people still destroy innocent lives, stripping away the basic freedom and human rights from those they fear and hate!

At this 2023 Parliament, as also at other Interfaith gatherings, we made great strides – with dialogue, understanding and respect among the delegates. BUT we have not been able to engage a wider circle and reach the masses. How do we boost the work of interfaith organizations, so they become more effective in gathering the support of the masses as they make the call for peace and brotherhood of mankind?

For interfaith organizations to be more effective, it is time for a paradigm shift. As a step forward, it is proposed that **Interfaith organizations serve as incubators for ‘Intrafaith’ dialogue**. Through ‘intrafaith’ dialogue religious leaders may take the message of ‘interfaith’ gatherings, down to the masses within their respective faiths, re-interpreting the scriptures, if needs be. It is my hope that this will cultivate learning, understanding and respect for other faiths – and lead to peace within each individual, peace within each religion, peace among the religions, and peace in the world.

**Rohinton M. Rivetna**

Trustee Emeritus of the Parliament of the World’s Religions, founding Vice-President of CPWR (1987 – 1991) and signatory on the “*Towards a Global Ethic*” document in 1993.

## GOD REVEALED THROUGH OTHERS

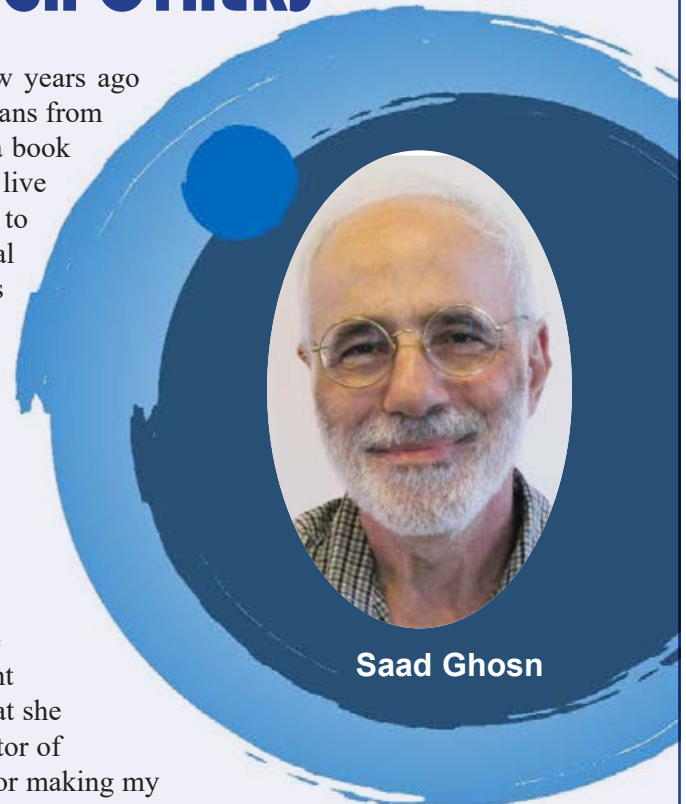
We discover God through others... My encounter few years ago with Becca (Bakhtavar) and Fred Desai, Zoroastrians from Cincinnati, Ohio, was such an opportunity. I was writing a book on *Religious Peacemakers of the area*, individuals who live daily their faith toward peace and justice, and was lucky to meet them, interview them\*, discover their moral, ethical and religious values, and learn about all they do for others and for a better world.

Moving forward and a couple of years later, I receive an e mail from Becca inviting me to take part in the 2023 Parliament of World Religions (PoWR) to be held in Chicago, August 2023. Becca had seen my woodcut prints on peace and social justice and was encouraging me to apply to share them in an exhibit during the PoWR convention. She also knew of SOS ART\*\*, the non-profit organization I had founded, whose mission was to promote all arts for peace and justice and was asking me to represent SOS ART and serve on a panel “Toward Global Ethics” that she was organizing. She connected me with Emma Carr, Director of Development for the convention, to whom I am indebted for making my application and acceptance smooth and easy. A few months later I was an active participant at the PoWR. The PoWR was a wonderful experience, the ideal platform to meet and mingle with individuals genuinely interested in religion, ethics, peace and justice, coming from all over the world and representing so many religions, denominations and spiritual movements. It was an empowerment of our humanity and for me the chance to be inspired and uplifted by all the positive and good I encountered in so many friendly individuals and presentations. I had 2 exhibits at the PoWR, “Scream” of my own woodcut prints on peace and social justice, and “Human Rights,” a portfolio of woodcut prints by Cincinnati and Oaxaca/Mexico artists, each artist addressing, through a cultural collaboration, a given human right. Both exhibits were well received, and viewed throughout the convention by many visitors, eliciting exchanges and discussions. They also served as the venue for 2 presentations and Q&A sessions during which the history, meaning and messages behind the works were explained, shared, and a dialogue with the viewers established.

The timely panel on “Global Ethics” that Becca presided over was well received. It benefited from her organization and leadership and from the insightful interventions of the 2 other panelists, Niaz Kasravi, Founder & Director of Avalan Institute, and Raio G. Krishnaya, Founder and Executive Director of Center for Victim and Human Rights, both Zoroastrians.

I had one more presentation during the PoWR. It was titled “Art as the Voice of the Artist for Peace and Justice” and took place in the open lobby on the children stage. I hope it reached many of the present, also some of the passer by’s, stressing not only the importance but also our responsibility to use our artistic voice, whatever it is, at the service of social justice.

Being immersed for 5 full days in the PoWR and participating in many of its activities and communing in harmony with so many of its voices, all seeking truth and understanding, all aiming for a better world, was such an amazing, enriching and memorable experience, one I would never forget, and one that has since become part of who I am.



Saad Ghosn

## Post parliament impressions

I am leaving, for the end, the best and most impacting part of this journey, my homestay at the residence of my most kind and generous hosts Roshan and Rohinton Rivetna. Becca had connected me with them, and they invited me right away to stay at their place for the duration of the convention. They opened wide their doors to me and made me feel from the start as part of their family. Roshan and Rohinton are both Zoroastrians and the pillars of the Zoroastrian community and Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago (ZAMC). Rohinton is also one of the leaders who brought the PoWR to Chicago in 1993. They introduced me to the Zoroastrian faith, engaged me in conversations about its history and teachings, invited me to the temple Dar-e-Mehr for prayer and dinner in celebration of Noroze, the Parsi New Year. At their residence, I also met two other wonderful Zoroastrians who were as well their homestay guests: Ardeshir Irani, a gentle, personable, well-read, with a good sense of humor, a physician from Detroit; and Ardavan Taraporewalla, a well known singer and performer from Toronto who, on more than one occasion, entertained, with his beautiful voice and acting, during the convention. We all connected immediately, bonded and formed a community.

The last day of my stay at their home, the Rivetna's organized a big invitation directed to the many Zoroastrian delegates and volunteers at PoWR; they wanted to celebrate their presence in Chicago, and their contribution to a successful convening. More than 100 invitees attended the gathering, and it was a wonderful opportunity to meet so many warm, friendly and gentle Zoroastrians and to share in their culture. I can think of course of Cyrus, Jamshed, and Zenobia Damania, children of Roshan and Rohinton; but also of Farobag Homi Cooper, renowned musician and music teacher; Kersi Shroff, retired lawyer passionate of archeology, author of the seminal book *Central Asian Arts & Archeology: Selected Zoroastrian Themes and Sites*; Fali Nariman, former judge of the Supreme Court of India, author of *The Inner Fire*, a book on the Zoroastrian religion; and so many others.

When it was time to leave Chicago, I was indeed sad to see the end of my stay at Roshan and Rohinton's. They made me feel at home, and blessed me with their warmth, kindness, generosity and humility; and I knew I would be missing their daily presence and friendship. I can say, however, and with no hesitation, that during my visit, God was also revealed to me through them. So many thanks to you Roshan and Rohinton!!! Thank you also Becca for opening the road to me, not only to the PoWR, but also to wonderful friends, and to a living experience of the Zoroastrian faith through all those I encountered.

\*<https://sosartcincinnati.files.wordpress.com/2021/09/religious-peacemakers-book2021.pdf>

\*\*[sosartcincinnati.com](https://sosartcincinnati.com)



FEZANA Group at the Opening of the Parliament of World's Religions

From left Mobedyar Boman Damkevala, Rohinton Rivetna, Roshan Rivetna, Arzan Sam Wadia, President FEZANA, Justice Rohinton Nariman, Mobed Tehmtan Mirza, President NAMC; Mobed Kobad Zarolia

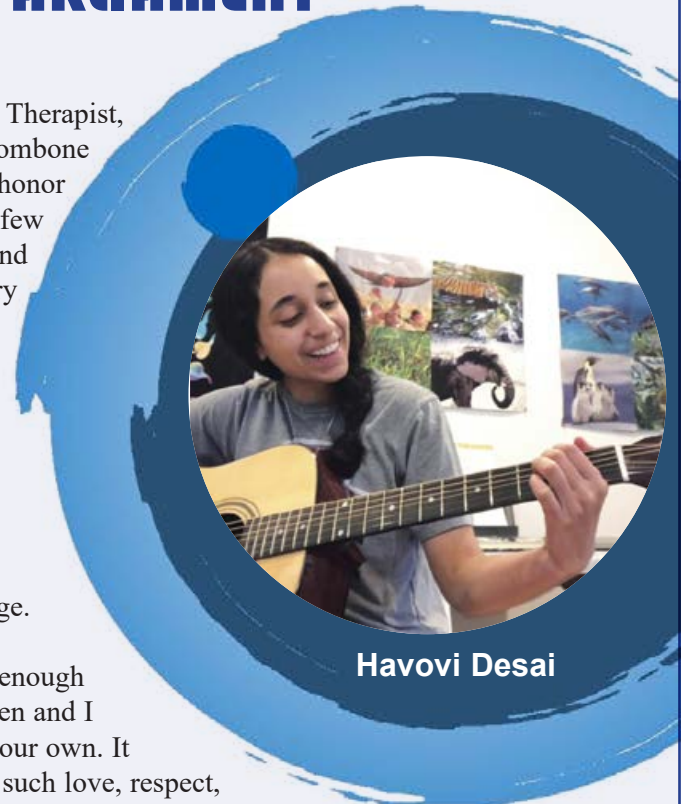


## REFLECTIONS ON THE PARLIAMENT

**Hello!** My name is Havovi and I am a Music Therapist, while my partner Ben is a professional Trombone player. We are both based in Brooklyn, NY, but we had the honor of attending 2023 PoWR in Chicago. We performed a few instrumental songs during the Zoroastrian Music Concert, and we had a wonderful time! We also led a music and poetry reading on the main stage during one of the days.

Ben and I truly had a meaningful and memorable time at PoWR. We were so proud to represent the Zoroastrian faith and to engage with the audience musically. We were grateful to meet other Zoroastrian musicians as well, as it made us feel even closer to our community. We felt inspired by the performances and the feeling of peace, joy, and unity each one brought to the stage.

During our free time at the PoWR, we were lucky enough to be able to explore many different booths and lectures. Ben and I learned about different faiths while solidifying our love of our own. It was great to see so many communities come together with such love, respect, support, and gratitude for one another.



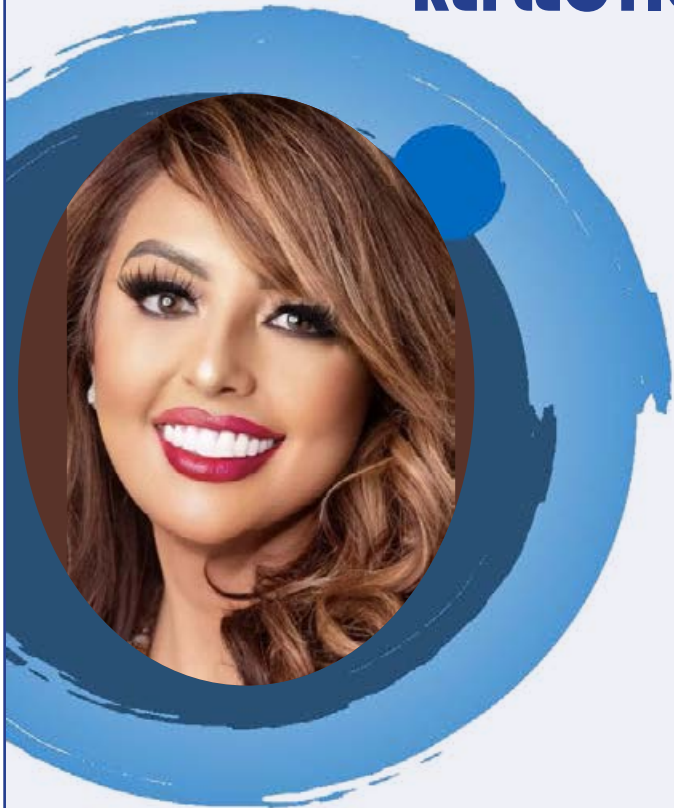
**Havovi Desai**



One event that really stood out to us was the melting of guns and weapons to create different tools that could be used in agriculture and farming. We were touched and inspired by this message and demonstration. Ben and I are firm believers in gun control and anti-war / non-violence. We appreciated the peaceful and practical message that came from this session. Transforming weapons of destruction and hate into tools and resources to help create and sustain life - what could be better?

Ben and I are eternally grateful for this experience and to be able to share our music with so many. We believe music can bring together communities of all backgrounds, and through this universal language we can find a shared sense of peace, joy, and understanding.

## REFLECTIONS BY ZENOBIA TANTRA



Dr. Zenobia Tantra, is a Doctor of Physical Therapy with a specialty in male and female pelvic floor healing from conception to menopause and beyond. She was trained and educated at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Rosalind Franklin University and did her rotations at the University of Chicago, Copley in Aurora which is affiliated with Rush and at the Chicago Institute of Neurosurgery and Neuroresearch.

She is past Director of the ZAC board and has been the co-chair of the Welfare Committee for over a decade. She is also involved in Rotary, Rotaract, PEO and SheForce, which is a part of Allen Force, that serves our nation's veterans. She has volunteered for PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) and has worked with local churches for providing food and resources for the homeless. Humanity, education and wellness are very dear to her heart and she volunteers her services to organizations that serve humanity.

**(one of the speakers in the program, 'How can 'we' the People Reclaim our Freedom')**

**What** a humbling experience and an honor to be seated with a panel of brilliant speakers and to be led by Mrs. Bakhtavar Desai. This is the first thought that came to my mind when I was asked to submit a write up for the PoWR. I came into the arena late in the game and have to thank Mrs. Roshan Rivetna for providing me with the opportunity.

I was there only for a few hours due to my work schedule and commitments but in those few hours I confirmed what I already knew. The more I live, the more I realize that I don't know anything.

The PoWR is a kaleidoscope of colors and a symphony of music while shedding light on what binds us together. Luminaries from all over the world shared their wisdom and their generosity. Our own Zarathushti community was a shining beacon and reiterated the message that Quality not Quantity matters. We may be small in numbers, but we are mighty in our message and in our service and outreach. I met a lot of beautiful, brilliant souls and they all drove home the message that we are all in this together and that we are all connected.

My topic was, *Let Freedom be Free*. Sitting next to the Wise and Brilliant orator, Justice Rohinton Nariman, the knowledgeable and zealous, Dr. Gary Zola and the serene and beautiful Ms. Asaya Horibe and being moderated by the soft, yet powerful Mrs. Bakhtavar Desai, I realized that I said yes in the first place because it was a topic that I am very passionate about but sitting there it dawned on me that it was also a topic that I had a lot more to truly

learn and understand.

We all talk about Freedom, Coexisting and tolerating each other's viewpoints. With everything going on in our world today, the PoWR reminded me that it is not just tolerance and co-existence that is needed but true Equality. We can tolerate each other and coexist but that does not mean that we are truly respectful and treat each other with the same rights, respect and dignity that is accorded to all of us.

As I mentioned in my talk, Freedom and choice are ingrained in us from the time that we are born and from time immemorial, we are taught about "Asha" or "Truth" in our daily prayers and rituals/practices.

I truly feel that there is no them or us. We are all on this journey together and even though we have different experiences and backgrounds, we are all connected to each other and to the Divine. We therefore need to work collectively to help ensure that the state of free will prevails for all of us.

I have always said that I am a humble Indian and a grateful American along with being a responsible Zarathushti/Zoroastrian. But underneath all those amazing societal layers, I am energy in a human form. There is no race box to be checked as there is only one race, the Human Race.

Which means, that the same rights, dignity and freedom are accorded to all that follow the path of Asha. That is what Freedom really means. Thank You!! Namaste!! Yatha!!

## ROSHNI KHAROLIWALLA: (A VOLUNTEER)

Attending the Parliament of World's Religions 2023, Chicago was an enlightening and spiritually enriching experience. The event brought together people from diverse backgrounds and faiths fostering a sense of unity and understanding among attendees. Amongst the many talented Zoroastrian performers were my daughters Zynah and Mehrnaz, they performed the Indian classical Bharatnatyam dance on Vande Mataram showcasing a unique cultural fusion.

We attended many informative sessions covering spirituality, social justice and environmental sustainability, all emphasizing the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Witnessing the open-minded discussions and exchange of ideas among diverse speakers reinforced the idea that despite our cultural and religious differences we share a common humanity.

At lunch time, the langar was a very welcoming gesture by the Sikh community. There were various cultural and religious booths set up for kids as well and our young Zoroastrians were very proud to be a part of the set up and volunteer at the FEZANA and kid's booth. The Zoroastrian community of North America led by Bakhtavar Desai came together giving the perfect representation of our heritage culture and traditions.

I made many lasting friendships during this Parliament. The workshops and sessions embraced the values of tolerance, empathy and dialogue, reinforcing the spirit of working together to create a more peaceful and harmonious world.



# VEEDA VICTORIA SHROFF

Appointed King's Counsel, (KC) One Of Canada's First Animal Lawyer, The Second In Her Family After Her Late Father Hoshang B. Shroff.

The Attorney General of British Columbia's [announcement](#) for the KC appointment notes that V. Victoria "is widely considered to be a pioneer in animal law in B.C. and one of Canada's first animal lawyers". And a retired judge speculated that Victoria may be the first animal lawyer in the world to be so honoured."

She has been ranked one of the Top 25 Most Influential Lawyers in Canada by Canadian Lawyer Magazine for her longstanding work in the field. She has been an animal law lawyer since 2000 making her a pioneer in the field. She is currently an adjunct professor of animal law at UBC Allard School of Law, a faculty member and the creator of an animal law course for paralegals at Capilano University, BC, and in 2023 she was appointed associate Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. She also volunteers at Canada's first pro bono animal law clinic at the Law Students' Legal Advice Program. Shroff is the author of a textbook *Canadian Animal Law* (Lexis-Nexis, 2021) and lectures worldwide on animal law.



Veeda says "Being an animal law lawyer marries my love of animals with my love of law. Animal law can simply be described as any time an animal and the law intersect. I sometimes call it black letter law with a furry face. Municipal, provincial and federal laws can all be engaged. For a deeper dive on animal law, please see her 2023 TEDx talk on "Why Animals Need law" <https://youtu.be/Atb0SyUN3HA?si=bQx2P0YQgNaWHU74>

Being recognized with the KC designation is a tremendous honour and milestone for Veeda Shroff personally and for the practice of animal law. Only 7% of practicing BC lawyers can be awarded the King's Counsel at any time. She is the second person in her family to be appointed KC following her father's appointment 25 years ago. She is the niece of Kersi B. Shroff of ZAMWI (see his article pages 31-37)

Congratulations Veeda, the community is very proud of you, Editor, FEZANA JOURNAL

[www.shroffanimallaw.com](http://www.shroffanimallaw.com)

## PERSIS AHRESTANI NAMED IN BUSINESS IN VANCOUVER'S 2024 "40 UNDER 40" LIST

### A STORY OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP AT THE NEXUS OF INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

Persis Ahrestani has been named in Business in Vancouver's 2024 in the "40 under 40" list for business leaders for 2024. She is the Chief Financial Officer at Habitat for Humanity Greater Vancouver, this prestigious award recognizes outstanding individuals under the age of 40 who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, innovation, and impact in their respective fields. In an interview with Persis about

this award and her experience at Habitat for Humanity Greater Vancouver she said that "Selecting a role at Habitat was a deliberate decision driven by my belief in the importance of meaningful contributions to society. Where I spend my time and energy has always been important to me. The organization's commitment to providing affordable housing aligns closely with my values. I find myself lucky to be able to dedicate my time and energy to a cause that directly impacts young families in need within my community."

Persis was born and brought up in Bombay, India and has always been an extremely hard worker from her school days at Queen Mary High School, Mumbai. She attended University of British Columbia (UBC) and completed her education in Vancouver. In addition to working at Habitat for Humanity (non-profit) she also teaches as Adjunct Professor at Sauder School of Business, UBC, and Langara College.

She adeptly navigates financial intricacies and spearheads strategic planning. An immigrant and only child, Persis has triumphed over diverse challenges. Beyond professional achievements, including the Governor General's Academic Medal and numerous scholarships, she shares knowledge as an Adjunct Professor.

She is the daughter of Delnavaz and Faredoon Ahrestani of Vancouver and the sister of Shahrodkht (Jimmy) Dholoo of Maryland. Persis says that she is what she is today is thanks to her Indian/Parsee upbringing and education.

Persis is married to Areez Elavia, and has two sons, Rayan and Yohan Elavia and a fur baby Zody Areez Elavia (adopted/rescue). In her spare time, she enjoys reading, gardening, skiing, swimming, camping, teaching, volunteering and travelling.





**Ronny Sadri** was the first president of ZAKOI, when it was formed as an informal Zoroastrian Association. Since then his wife Kashmira, and their children Zubin ( Emily) and Meher ( Darian), have been part of the ZAKOI community since the early 90s.

Ronny started his career with the Federal government in 1989. And worked for 10+ years in Louisville, Kentucky in the Regulatory Branch of the Army Corps of Engineers. In 2003, Ronny joined the Great Lakes and OH River Division (LRD) of the Army Corps of Engineers' headquarters in Cincinnati OH where he has lived with his family ever since . He retired after 34 years of service as their Planner and then as the Senior Formulator.

On Dec 5, 2023, at his retirement/farewell, Ronny was honored for his impressive services, by the Deputy Commander of the Army Corps in a beautiful ceremony attended by his colleagues and Planning Chiefs from various districts of the Army Corps of Engineers around the country. He was presented with a Civilian Service Commendation Medal from the Department of the Army for his "outstanding service and dedication as the Regional Senior Formulator". His division, the Great Lakes and OH River Division (LRD), headquartered in Cincinnati, which he served for the last 20+ years, presented him with the flag

of the Commonwealth of Kentucky which was flown in the State's Capital in his honor on July 2023 to commemorate his 10+ years of services to the Regulatory Branch in Louisville, Kentucky.

This was a very proud moment for his family who were in attendance to witness this beautiful ceremony.

Congratulations Ronny Sadri, for a well deserved retirement The ZAKOI community is very proud of you.

*Submitted by Bakhtavar Desai, President, ZAKOI*

## Ahura Mazda's Kids ? Dispelling Myths.

DINA G. MCINTYRE

**Did** God create Man in His image and likeness? (In which case God's form would be human-like).

Or did man create God in Man's image and likeness? (In which case God's form would be human-like).

Ancient deities known to history, like those of Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, etc., were human like in form, but more powerful, and were a mix of beneficial and harmful qualities (like humans). Their chief deities often were male, Zeus, Jupiter, Odin, etc. And many had multiple children, a number of which had human mothers. It gave elevated status to a person who could say they had a God for a parent.

I was requested to do this article because postings have been circulating on the internet that *Spenta- Armaiti-*, as well as "Ashishwang", are Ahura Mazda's daughters.

So what's going on here? Did Zarathushtra himself say so? Or are all such stories based on later myths? I will

show you the evidence and you can decide for yourself. References (and additional information) will be furnished on request.

Like other ancient Indo-European cultures, the deities of the culture into which Zarathushtra was born, were also human-like in form, and a mix of beneficial and harmful qualities. Zarathushtra rejected this conception of the Divine.

In his good envisionment (*vanguhi daena-*) the Divine is a Being who is wholly beneficial (without any harmful qualities); and in and of itself, has no physical body -- human or otherwise (and therefore no gender).

Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE) writing during Achaemenian times, states that the ancient Persians "have no images of the gods, no temples, no altars, and consider the use of them a sign of folly...". Rawlinson translation, 1942.

Professor Thieme (Insler's teacher) stated that in a religion such as Zarathushtra's, which knows no images or idols,



the name given to a deity is of decisive importance. It is the means of revealing the personality, the nature, of the deity. A profound insight. He also said that *mazda* is a noun 'wisdom', not an adjective 'wise'. Professor Moulton (Oxford) stated that "Genuine Parsiism was, indeed, without images to the last."

This envisionment of the Divine was so new, so different, that it captured the thought of ancient Greeks, like Pythagoras (570 BCE to 495 BCE), who lived during Achaemenian times. In the Old Persian Achaemenian inscriptions, the name of the Divine is '*auramazdah*' (written as one word) which more than one Greek writer turned into 'Oromazes'.

Porphyry in his *Life of Pythagoras* said,

"These are the things he taught; but above all, to observe the truth; for this was the only thing in which humans could come close to God. For, as he learned from the Magi, God himself, whom they call Oromazes, resembles **light** with regard to his body and truth with regard to his soul." Vasunia 2007 translation.

Why '**light**'? Well, we humans are hardwired for the visual. We remember pictures and stories long after we might forget abstract words. Saying Wisdom's body resembles '**light**' is simply a word picture (a metaphor) to evoke the idea of an **enlightened** Being who of itself has no physical, human like body.

Although in later Avestan texts '*Ahura Mazda*' became the standard name for the Divine, Zarathushtra himself most often calls the Divine 'Wisdom' (*mazda*-) -- an enlightened being -- personifying the truths of mind/heart/spirit -- all that is true (correct) good, right (*asha*- 'truth' for short). And throughout the Gathas and later texts, various forms of light, (sunlight, fire, glory) are used as word pictures (metaphors) for truth (*asha*-), its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah*-), and Wisdom, (who personifies these qualities).

There are no creation stories in the Gathas. But Zarathushtra has certain ideas, and he uses word pictures (metaphors) to express them.

In Y44:3 he asks Wisdom (rhetorically) about who "... was the father of truth [*asha*-] during the creation [*zatha*- 'birthing'] ...?" Y44.3, Insler 1975. Insler's translation of *zatha*- as "creation" is interpretive (revealing a Biblical mind-set of one original act of creation). And there is no Avestan word 'the'. Professional linguists including Insler agree that *zatha*- literally means 'birthing'.

But **fathers** do not give **birth**. So we know that both '**father**' and '**birthing**' are word pictures (metaphors), which are used to evoke an idea -- Wisdom generates truth (continuously).

Similarly, Zarathushtra says "I know [*mazda*- 'Wisdom']..

to be the Father of effective good thinking (*vohu-manah*-). And His daughter is [*armaiti*- 'embodied truth'] of good actions..." Y45:4, Insler 1975.

If the Divine is a being with no physical body (as Zarathushtra envisioned), It could not father literal, physical children. Nor can qualities (truth, comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action) be physical, literal children. So we know that in both these verses, Zarathushtra uses "**Father**" as a word picture (a metaphor) to express the idea that Wisdom generates truth (Y44:3) as well as an understanding of truth *vohu-manah*-, and its embodiment in action *armaiti*- (Y45:4) -- Divine qualities which mortals also have, (but imperfectly, incompletely).

Centuries after Zarathushtra, the composers of many Younger Avestan texts, worshipped pre- and post-Zarathushtrian deities who were human-like in form, alongside Ahura Mazda. (In the Gathas, Wisdom alone is worshipped). The composers of such later texts, with their envisionment of the Divine as human like, focused on the word pictures of truth, good thinking and *armaiti*- as the children of Wisdom, and forgot the idea which these word pictures represented, generating the myth that these Divine qualities were the physical sons and daughter of *Ahura Mazda*. A myth that reverted to a pre-Zarathushtrian notion of the Divine as humanlike. In so doing, such people abandoned one of the things Zarathushtra was famous for in ancient times -- his new conception of the Divine as a being without physical, human-like form.

In the Gathas, these three qualities truth (*asha*-), good thinking (*vohu-manah*-), and embodied truth (*armaiti*-) are described numerous times as concepts, and as qualities which Wisdom possesses completely, and mortals possess (incompletely). And it is easy to see that when (a few times) Zarathushtra addresses these three qualities as people, they are not living beings, but allegories -- images that stand for concepts, qualities.

The Statue of Liberty is an allegory -- the image of a lady with a torch standing for the idea of liberty. The statue of Justice is an allegory -- the image of a blindfolded woman holding a perfectly balanced pair of scales, standing for Justice, which is impartial (the balanced scales), and does not give special favors to anyone (the blindfold). Ancient stories and poetry are full of such word pictures (allegories), and the Gathas are ancient poems. Here is an example of truth and *armaiti*- being addressed as people (with good thinking as a quality).

"Give, o truth, this reward, namely, the attainments of good thinking. Give thou o [*armaiti*- 'embodied truth'], power to Vishtaspa and to me..." Y28:7, Insler 1975.

If we look past the image of truth and *armaiti*- as

persons, what does this quotation tell us? What ideas do these images stand for?

Well, for truth, the idea is that we have to search for truth, in order to understand it (which is good thinking, the reward).

Similarly, for *armaiti*- ‘embodied truth’, the idea is that embodying (or personifying) truth in thought, word and action, gives a person power in both existences -- material (represented by King Vishtaspa) and spiritual (represented by Zarathushtra). In the Gathas, real power is not physical, coercive, dominating. Real power comes from attaining the qualities of the Divine, one of which is *armaiti*- ‘truth embodied (or personified) in thought, word and action’.

But centuries after Zarathushtra, in later Avestan texts, all the qualities of the Divine (even those that are not described as allegories in the Gathas) were thought of as living (human like) beings. And various ideas of Zarathushtra (none of which are allegories in the Gathas), also became human like images that were worshipped.

One of Zarathushtra’s core ideas is that the reward for truth is truth itself -- a wholly ‘good reward’.

In later Avestan texts, this ‘good reward’ became a living being (*Ashi Vanguhi*), -- more beautiful than any movie star, and much more powerful. The original idea (the reward for truth is truth itself) was forgotten -- at least it is not mentioned in such texts, which portray *Ashi Vanguhi* as attending with many good rewards the man who “worships her with offerings of libations.” These good rewards included a few abstract qualities -- “intelligence”, “foremost in Asha” -- but the vast majority were material rewards -- horses, camels, “stores of food”, houses, perfumes, beautiful wives loaded with jewels, “hordes of silver and gold brought together from far distant regions”, etc.

And in such later Avestan texts, *Ashi Vanguhi* is called the daughter of *Ahura Mazda*, giving her a high status (worthy of expensive rituals).

One can see how the idea of *Ashi Vanguhi* (Good Reward) as a living being may have originated, because in the Gathas, the end result of spiritual evolution is to personify completely, truth and its component

parts -- its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, (all qualities of the Divine). So, each of us, when our spiritual evolution is complete, will personify (as living being) the good reward, which is truth -- the true, wholly good order of existence (*asha*-) which is the wholly beneficial way of being (*spenta-mainyu*-).

But if the translations (by Darmesteter) of these later Avestan texts are accurate, their composers had lost their way. There is very little that reflects Zarathushtra’s teachings or is spiritual about *Ashi Vanguhi* -- a human-like object of worship, dispensing material rewards.

When I was asked to write this article, I was given the following quotation which I was told appeared on the internet.

“Mino Ashishwangh is the daughter of Pak Dadar Ahura Mazda and the sister of Vakshure Vakshuran Zarathustra Paigambar such is the high stature of this Yazad.”

If indeed (as this posting states) “Ashishwangh” was the daughter of *Ahura Mazda* and the sister of Zarathushtra, that would make Zarathushtra the son of Ahura Mazda. There is nothing even remotely like *any* of this in the Gathas.

I think the *Ashi Vanguhi* ‘Good Reward’ of the later Avestan texts may have been the “Ashishwangh” of such internet postings, which elevate her status to a daughter of Ahura Mazda. A myth that arose centuries after Zarathushtra’s time period and had nothing to do with his teachings.

But we should be aware of one thing. In later Avestan and Pahlavi texts, the religion was not one monolithic belief system. True, many of these later texts express ideas and belief systems that are far removed from the Gathas, and indeed often contrary to them, (and sometimes quite awful). But hidden within these later texts are little gems which could only have been expressed by those who loved and knew well, various parts of Zarathushtra’s teachings, and cared enough about them to want to pass them on to others. These little gems (though few and far between) indicate that down through the millennia, at least some of Zarathushtra’s beautiful thoughts were understood, remembered, loved, practiced, and kept alive by dear, good souls. I value, and am grateful to, everyone of them.



*Dina G. McIntyre, a retired lawyer, has studied Zarathushtra’s teachings since the early 1980s, and has written and lectured on the Gathas in the US, Europe, India, Australia, New Zealand and South America. She has created a website <https://gathasofzarathushtra.com> in which she lays out Zarathushtra’s teachings at both basic and in-depth levels. Additional details, references are on my website <https://gathasofzarathushtra.com>.*

# THE GATHAS: FROM ANTIQUITY TO ETERNITY

## An Exposition

Meheryar N. Rivetna

The Gathas are the most important literary work coming out of ancient Iran. These poetic verses, composed by Zarathustra, have influenced the religious and philosophical teachings in all human history with little credit given to the original sage. The exceptional value of these hymns arises from their importance in the annals of human thought and sentiment (1). Composed in antiquity, the Gathas are a force that will have an impact on human wisdom for eternity.

What are the Gathas? Why do some Zoroastrians and western scholars bestow so much importance to scarcely known compositions by the founder of a religion, with both, the religion and its founder, barely known in the civilized world? What is their significance?

The Gathas are generally misconceived as prayers. There is very little in these verses that qualifies as prayer. The Gathas are, in some ways, an autobiographical sketch of Zarathustra's revelation of natural order (*Asha*). The revelation arising from his own observations and experiences of nature's decrees. They highlight his struggle to establish the doctrines for a good life for humankind based on cosmic laws. Woven in these songs, as the Gathas are sometimes known, are Zarathustra's enlightening directives for humans to overcome all that is detrimental to humankind and bring the world to a perfect state.

The Gathas were orally transmitted and thus, are rich in figurative language. Idiomatic expressions are easy to memorize and retain, hence the wealth of metaphors, allegories, personifications and similes in these poems.

Zarathustra was born in a society plagued with wrath, fury, injustice, terror and priestly autocracy (Ys 29). Power was in the hands of the priests, the Gathas call Kavis and Karapans, who kept the populace in the dark instilling fear of the many gods worshipped at the time. Meaningless rituals such as imbibing intoxicating drinks as the "haōma" among many others was part of the religious practice of the day that Zarathustra vehemently disavowed (Ys 32.5,9; Ys 48.10; Ys 49.4; Ys 51.14).

Zarathustra witnessed the excessive power of the priests and ruling class irresponsibly using deceit, injustice, witchcraft, thereby bringing stagnation to the common people (2). Zarathustra seeks ways to help the masses against the unjust, oppressive tribal religious practices and the false gods the people were compelled to worship. He delves deep into his mind to get answers. He conceives Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Wisdom underlying nature's laws, in his "mind's eye" (Ys 31.8), i.e., Ahura Mazda is not anthropomorphic. This is the genesis of the Gathas.

Using his immense intellect and wisdom, Zarathustra recognizes that Ahura Mazda (Supreme Wisdom in Nature) is invisible (Ys 28.1). One of the attributes of Ahura Mazda, as recited in the 101 names of Ahura Mazda in the Zoroastrian prayers, is *An-Ayanah* meaning: "without shape or form". No Ahura Mazda "spoke" to Zarathustra. Invisible, shapeless, formless, non-anthropomorphic forces cannot "speak" to anybody. The Zoroastrian religion is not a fairy tale.

Zarathustra teaches humans "to dive deep into their own inner nature to greet the divine" (3) which is exactly what he does. The concepts and characteristics of Ahura Mazda that Zarathustra offers to humankind come from his own profound thoughts. He calls it *Vohu Manah*—the Good Mind which comprises of wisdom, intellect and rational thinking. A Good Mind, as Zarathustra eloquently proclaims, is a mind free of emotion and that does not cling to authoritarian priestly dictates.

An avid Gatha student faces an avalanche of Gatha translations. Translations range from the sublime to the mundane. Which one is correct? The astute student arrives at an understanding of these profound verses by extracting a common thread that emerges from the translations of universally recognized Gatha scholars; translations that are free of reliance on other religions—Vedic or Semitic—for an exegesis.



*Meheryar Rivetna is an active member of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH) Library Committee since 2001 as well as currently serves on the FIRES (FEZANA Information, Education & Research System) Committee. Meheryar is the author of the book **Zarathustra: The Man and the Message** which he self-published in March 2021. He has published articles in the FEZANA Journal, Chehrehnama and Parsiana. He has been an instructor on several courses designed by the NAMC. Meheryar lives in Houston with his wife Zubeen M. Mehta.*



Layers of interpretation of the Gathas have affected popular and scholarly outlooks; traditions associated with these interpretations must be expunged to uncover the pristine thoughts expressed by Zarathustra himself (2). The Gathas enunciate *fixed laws* of Ahura Mazda (Nature) that Zarathustra grasped and gave to humankind.

The crux of the Gathic verses is wisdom and knowledge of natural law. Knowledge of these laws is critical, Zarathustra teaches, but has no value if it is not put into action. In the Gathas, Zarathustra proposes to be an ‘educator’ to humankind to reorient their lives through a taught set of principles (2). They are not open to interpretation (forming a personal opinion) by all and sundry. Zarathustra makes no allowance for anyone to second-guess his teachings.

Zarathustra aims to show humans through his compositions how to vanquish evil and live a long, blissful, virtuous life (*Ameratat*) for their own and society’s well-being (*Haurvatat*). The Gathas emphasize the importance of devotion (*Armaiditi*) to natural law (*Ahura Mazda*) through righteous actions (*Asha*) and, with strength, humans must defeat evil creating a perfect dominion on earth (*Kshathra Vairya*) using their Good Mind (*Vohu Manah*).

The deeply insightful teachings in the Gathas are free of illusions, magic, miracles, dogmatism and fear of God. They carry a message that is dynamic, ethical and moral. They provide direction and a practical way of life towards progress, peace and harmony for self, society and every aspect of life on earth (2).

The Zoroastrian religion, as propounded in the Gathas, is simple and clear. It is not cluttered with mystical or theological baggage. Its pantheon is not littered with characters from an obscure pre-historic mythology, but has clearly defined identities and properties [the attributes of Ahura Mazda]. It is not concerned with irrational rules and taboos, but with easily understood moral and intellectual values (4).

A distinction must be made between the Gathas and the rest of the Avesta corpus. The Avesta texts are composed in two slightly diverging dialects: Old Avestan and Young Avestan. The Gathas fall under the Old Avestan vernacular while the rest of the Avesta is ascribed Young Avestan. The two dialects differ in a few phonological details part of which cannot be of merely chronological nature, which suggests that the Young Avestan language is not a direct descendant of Old Avestan, but an offshoot of it (5).

The Gathas are the only authentic compositions Zarathustra left for humankind. The Younger Avesta, being the works of later priests, is replete with mythology, geography of fabled lands, hygiene, stories of fantasy, none of which Zarathustra advocates in his Gathic principles. Over centuries Zarathustra’s vision is tarnished and diluted by priestly groups who contaminated his message in the Younger Avesta (2).

The Gathic verses are called Manthras. Manthra, undoubtedly derives from the root ‘*man*’—‘to think’—literally meaning “that which is to be thought about, thus leading us to those things, viz., precepts or doctrines contained in the religion, which are to be thought about and practiced.” They are not “statements only to be recited in order to have its effect produced, but is a precept of life, which after being studied is to be put in practice, in one’s actions” (6). Zarathustra expects humankind to live by the principles in the Gathas for its well-being. He did not compose them for idle chanting.

Throughout the Gathas, Zarathustra poses questions to Ahura Mazda, i.e., he probes his own mind, to understand the wisdom in nature using his own intellect and rational thought. The answers he gives are embedded within the questions. It is a unique style to get humans to think for themselves, choose between what is right and wrong, and accordingly conduct themselves in the affairs of life.

The Gathas are not laws formulated by Zarathustra. They are the laws of Ahura Mazda (laws of nature) that Zarathustra fully comprehended and gave them to humankind for their harmonious and peaceful existence with fellow humans and with nature. In the Gathas, there is no expectation or requirement for humans to reach Ahura Mazda through Zarathustra; nor are the priests designated as custodians of Zarathustra’s tenets. Human beings can reach the divine by their own exemplary thought, word and action.

Humans must act in accordance with the phenomenal Gathic teachings Zarathustra articulated in antiquity for humankind to realize a perfect world. The Gathas are enduring, and humans must resolve to practice them for eternity for their own and the world’s betterment.

## **REFERENCES:**

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2. Kaboli (Marzbani), Mehravar Soroush; *The Gathas Revisited: A Re-appraisal of Zarathustra’s Vision*; Ph. D. thesis; University of Sydney (2005).
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## Kurosh Aryana reports

A group Sedreh Pooshi took place in Berlin on Saturday 9, December .2023. Ceremony was organized by Bozorg Bazgasht organization.

The group made up of two Polish citizens, three Azerbaijan citizens and two Iranian- German citizens. Congratulations to the group.







## DR MANECK KOTWAL

98 YEARS, JANUARY 14, 2024,

GYNECOLOGIST, MEDICAL MISSIONARY,  
A LITTLE KNOWN HERO OF ONEIDA  
COUNTY, NEW YORK

**Dr.** Maneck J. Kotwal passed away peacefully on Sunday, January 14, 2024, two weeks after celebrating her 98th birthday, surrounded by her loving family and friends.

She lived a full life, well lived, ever faithful to the tenets of her Zoroastrian religion, which emphasized good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Maneck leaves behind Jehangir, her loving husband of 58 years, and her beloved younger brother, Navroz Chenoy, a resident of Toronto, On, Canada.

Maneck was born in Secundrabad, India, received her medical degree from Grant Medical College in Mumbai, India, and later relocated to Edinburgh, Scotland, where she was awarded the FRCS (Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons) degree in OB-GYN. After practicing medicine for eight years in England, she returned to India and worked in a missionary hospital in Ratlam with her mentor, Dr. Robert McClure, a former medical missionary in China. Maneck greatly loved and admired him and often reminisced about the invaluable lessons he taught her about medical as well as compassionate care. At Dr. McClure's suggestion, Maneck went to work at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, where she met Dr. Jehangir Kotwal, the love of her life. Maneck and Jehangir immigrated to Vancouver, BC, Canada, in 1970. A year later, they moved to Marcy, New York, USA where Maneck served as the medical director of the Marcy Psychiatric Center and later at the Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center after the two centers merged. During that period, Maneck mentored six nurses, who became nurse practitioners and were extremely grateful to Maneck for her help and encouragement. After diligently serving both centers for 25 years, Maneck retired in 1993.

Post-retirement, Maneck channeled her unwavering commitment to improving the lives of the less fortunate by establishing the Barbara Ginter Clinic in the Cornhill area of Utica. The center provided free health care for uninsured adults and children for six years. In recognition of this outstanding contribution, Maneck was awarded the prestigious American Institute for Public Service Jefferson Award. She was a founding member of the Mohawk Valley Institute for Learning in Retirement (MVILR) and served on its board for 15 years. She was also a board member of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for



Refugees for more than 12 years. For these and other accomplishments, Maneck was presented with the North Utica Senior Citizens' Community Center's "Community Service Award" in 2013, and on October 26 of that year was proclaimed Dr. Maneck Kotwal Day in Oneida County. In addition, Maneck received the CNY Academy of Medicine Scroll Award, the YWCA Outstanding Woman Award, and the New York State Senior Citizen's Award. The New York Legislature's resolution stated, "Rare, indeed, is the impressive dedication shown by an individual for the benefit of others, as Dr. Maneck Kotwal has displayed throughout her life."

An avid reader and enthusiastic world traveler, Maneck enjoyed participating in a book club and Planet surfers (a travel club). She often regaled her friends with inspiring as well as humorous anecdotes about her travels. She was also passionate about classical music and opera. Maneck had a generous spirit and donated to many worthy causes. Maneck also treasured her relationship with her many nieces and nephews. Throughout her long life, she staunchly believed in Zoroaster's principle that "happiness comes to those who bring happiness to others". Maneck certainly brought happiness to everyone she met.

*May her noble soul rest in eternal peace.  
Zoroastrian Society of Ontario*



### BIRTHS

**Arzaan Gandhi**, a boy, to Perinaaz and Navroz Gandhi, happy grandparents Pervin and Rohinton Wadia and the late Villy and Homi Gandhi, on November 22, 2023.

**Cyrus Gambhir**, a boy to Vida Fereydoonzad & Tushar Gambhir, brother to Aria Gambhir, grandson to Farhad Fereydoonzad & Wanda Bedard and Vikas & Babindra Gambhir, in Toronto, Ontario December 30th 2023.

### WEDDINGS

**Kaivan Dadachanji**, son of Christy and Kavasji Dadachanji to **Natasha Bala**, daughter of Kashmira and Sarosh Bala on September 4, 2023. (CZC-LA)

**Viraf Nariman**, son of Manek and Khushru Nariman to **Catrina Falabella**, daughter of Ava and William Falabella in Brooklyn, NY on October 7, 2023.

### DEATHS

**Tehmasp Kelawala**, 90, husband of Katy, father of Abad, Adil, father-in-law of Meenu, Pauline, grandfather of Arianna, Priyanka, Cyrus in Columbus, OH on May 11, 2023. (CZC-LA)

**Nazanin Barkhordar**, 39, daughter of Mitra Zartoshty and late Farbod Barkhodar, granddaughter of late Paridokht and Mehraban Zartoshty on May 14, 2023.

**Roshan Hadulla**, 84, wife of late Klaus Joachim Martin Hadulla, mother of Anna Maria, Craig Girnby, Anita Hadulla, grandmother of Nicklaus, Drew, and Brooke Dunn, sister of late Keki Mistry and Zarin Shroff, in Los Angeles, CA on June 7, 2023.;

**Zerin Homi Khambatta**, wife of Homi Khambatta, mother of Zubin (Lily), Anita (Mark Isola), grandmother of Mira, Julian, Jasper on August 9, 2023. (CZC-LA)

**Daisy Homi Shroff**, 79, wife of late Dr. Homi Shroff, mother of Jasmine Shroff Frost, Marzban Homi Shroff, grandmother of Ava, Henry in Mumbai, India on August 10, 2023. (CZC-LA)

**Gool Noshir Jesung**, 74, wife of Noshir Framroze Jesung, mother of Kaiva, Tanaz, mother-in-law of Pam, Chris, daughter of Minoo and Baimai Pochkhanavala, sister-in-law of Nariman Jesung on August 15, 2023. (CZC-LA)

**Farida Khushroo Lakdawala**, wife of Khushroo Lakdawala, mother of Jamshir, Malcolm, Kanesh, mother-in-law of Pooja, Zenia, Zara, grandmother of

Samaya, Viaan, sister of Shernaz Lakdawala, Merzi Chinoy on September 2, 2023. (CZC-LA)

**Mahindokht Farahmand**, 91, mother of Nooshin, Nasrin, Nariman, grandmother of Kourosh, Arash, Kiarash, Sepandar, Sepand, Navid, Omid, great grandmother of Arvin, Ariana in North Vancouver, BC on October 12, 2023.

**Jal Phiroze Boga**, husband of Ava Boga, father of Meher, Rustom, father-in-law of Dilshad in Karachi, Pakistan on October 22, 2023. (ZSO)

**Mani Pacy Divecha**, wife of late Pacy Divecha, mother of Darayus, Xerxes, Nerijs, mother-in-law of Kemul and Musarrat, grandmother of Zain, Andrea, Zal, Yasna, Armaan, Caylee, Farhad, Shahyan, great grandmother of Olivia, Chloe, Darius, sister of Nari Nargolwalla, Dinaz Rustomji, late Feroze Nargolwalla and late Sam Nargolwal in Markham, ONT on October 25, 2023.

**Hutoshi Irani**, wife of late Cyrus Irani, mother of Arius, Charlene, mother-in-law of Megan, Rick, grandmother to Frankie, sister of Armaiti and Cyrus Aga in Costa Rica on November 11, 2023.

**Kamron Sohrabian**, 26, son of Mojgan and Babak Sohrabian, brother of Montreh Sohrabian, grandson of Shirin Homaie, Shirin Amighi, nephew of Afshin Homai in Irvine, CA on November 19, 2023.

**Naadir Behramji Mehta**, 26, son of Ouvnere and Behramji Mehta, brother of Mitra Mehta, grandson of Sam and Gooloo Polad and late Roshan and Jehangir Mehta on November 19, 2023. (ZAH-Manashni)

**Homi Kaikhushroo Patel**, 95, father of Pervez, father-in-law of Jeroo, grandfather of Gulnar, Rukhshana (Percy), great grandfather of Rachel, Philip in North Vancouver, BC on November 27, 2023.

**Khodayar Aidun** 93, husband of late Farangis, father of Rashid (Gita Mehrabani) Sarvar, Sima, grandfather of Mahsa, Anita, Negeen and Ariana, great grandfather of Cohen, in Montreal on Thursday, November 30, 2023. All the prayers were done in Iran.

**Rouyentan Farhadieh**, husband of Tira Farhadieh, father of Piran and Jennifer Farhadieh, Paymon and Brittany Farhadieh, Ashkan and Johara Farhadieh, Ardeshir Farhadieh, grandfather of Eleanor, Emile, Rafi, Genevieve, Yara, brother of Bahram (Mahnaz) Farhadieh on December 5, 2023. (ZAMC)

**Roshan Noshir Mana**, wife of late Noshir Mana, mother of Zarine Dadachanji, Naila Valliani, Behram Mana (Mississauga, ONT), mother-in-law of Sohrab Dadachanji, Salman Valliani, Anila Mana on December 6, 2023. (OCZF)

# MILESTONES

**Banoo Dadnam**, wife of late Homan Dadnam, mother of Shahzad Dadnam, grandmother of Nadia and Auriana Irani on December 8, 2023. (ZSO)

**Banoo Phiroze Dordi**, wife of late Phiroze Fakerji Dordi, mother of Burjis (Zarine) Dordi, Hoshang (Pervin) Dordi, Jasmine (Bomi) Tamboli, grandmother of Burzin (Krystle), Huzan (Awit), Truzaar, Tanya, great grandmother of Karina in Toronto, ONT on December 9, 2023.

**Alloo Sapurgi**, 88, wife of late Minoo Sapurgi, mother of Daisy and late Darius Sapurgi, sister of late Rhoda Watkins, late Keki Dudhmal, Katie Adhia, Nergish Madon in Georgetown, ONT on December 8, 2023.

**Dhunjishaw Bhaya**, 93, husband of Yasmin Bhaya, father-in-law of Rohinton Chothia, grandfather of Firuza (Robert) Ayoup, Rayomand (Sandra) Sattaa, great grandfather of Ethan, Lukas, Kalen, Aiden, Nathan, Jacob on December 14, 2023. (ZSO)

**Rati Mistry, 92** wife of the late Eruch Burjorji Mistry, mother to Sherin Khapoliwala, (Yazdi) and grandmother of Kazmin Khapoliwala of Coquitlam, B.C. Canada. on Wednesday, December 13, 2023

**Nargis Shahrukh Kermani** Wife of Shahrukh Kermani, mother of Benaifer (John Devine) and .Grandmother

to Sarah, Jessica, Stephanie & Nicholas , in Maryland, on December 23, 2023

**Manoochehr Oshidari**, husband of Homa, father of Anahia, brother of Kiandokht and late Bahram in North Vancouver, B.C. on January 4, 2024.

**Jerro F Sidhva, 92**, mother of Fali and Farhad , daughter in law Zarine, grandchildren Farzeen and Farzad, in New Orleans, Louisiana, on January 16, 2024.

## **Rohinton Cavas Fatakia**

It is with heavy hearts that we share this news with you. Our dearest Rohinton Cavas Fatakia (age 83yrs), passed away peacefully in the early morning hours of November 29th, 2023, in Riverside, California. Rohinton (Roy), son of the late Cavas and Pilloo Fatakia, is survived by his wife Erna, his son Darius, his daughter-in-law Triesha, his sister Yasmin and brother-in-law Xerxis Patel (Bangalore), his Sisters-in-law Khorshed Mehta, and Homai/Alex McPhearson (Montreal), and his brother-in-law Adi Unwala, sister-in-law Sherry Unwala (Atlanta, Georgia). Roy was a loving husband and caring father to his two sons Darius and the late Cyrus Fatakia. He was a kind and caring friend to all the lives that he touched. He will be dearly missed by his family and friends. May his soul rest in eternal Peace.

## Matrimonials

Male 36, 6ft. BE --Mechanical Engineer with MBA. Currently employed in one of the Big4 accounting firms in Pune, India. Divorced after 2 months of marriage due to unavoidable unfortunate circumstances and has no kids. Looking for a new beginning with an honest and simple life partner. Currently well-settled in India but willing to relocate if necessary. Contact: bunyaviral@ gmail.com for further communication. [M21.15].

Male, 26, 5' 10", BE (Computer. Science) from Pune University, Software Quality Engineer at a multi-national company in Indore, India. Earning well. Well-mannered, family man, enjoys quality time with family and friends. Enjoys playing cricket, traveling, exploring new places and watching web series. Looking for a well-educated, family oriented and self-reliant life partner. Contact: wadiakaizan@outlook.com or WhatsApp +91 9111933423. [M23.24].

Female, 42, good looking, MBA (Finance), assistant manager at bank in Mumbai, from well-placed Parsi family. Enjoys music, traveling and reading. Interested in meeting a life partner with similar interests, with whom to share happiness. Willing to relocate. Contact delper24@yahoo.co.in [F17.33].

PLEASE SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS FOR MILESTONES TO  
MAHRUKH MOTAFRAM TEL 425-961-0298  
MAHRUKHM83@GMAIL.COM

### Zoroastrian Singles Virtual Meetups Calling all Zoroastrian Singles!

If you are interested in meeting Zoroastrian singles, please sign up on the Zoroastrian Singles database and indicate your age and regional/global preference. You will be notified when there is a virtual meetup where you can meet other single people around your age. These Virtual Meetups happen on a monthly basis, regionally and globally. To sign up, fill in this form:  
<https://forms.gle/wERUTFm6JLnH3NS96>  
Questions? Email: Zoroastriansingles@gmail.com  
Regards, Zoroastrian Singles Team

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.





3762 z  
2024-2025

Image Sources: persopolis.ru

**MAZDAYASNI CALENDAR  
3762 Z (2024-2025)  
THE ANCIENT ZARATHUSHTI CALENDAR**

**THE ONLY CALENDAR THAT NEEDS NO ADJUSTMENT FOR 110,000 YEARS**

**“I learn about and work with the solar year, the righteous period”.**

Yasna Ha1.9, Ha 3.11, Ha 4.14

The ‘vehizaki’ month Farvardin, the month Ardawahisht, and Khordad compose the season of Spring.

The month Tir, the month Amرداد, and the month Shahrewar are of Summer.

The month Mehr, the month Aban, and the month Adar are of Autumn;

and the month Day, the month Vohuman, and the month Spandarmad are of Winter.

AVESTA - Bundahishn 25:25:

**THE ANCIENT MAZDAYASNI CALENDAR** was the most accurate calendar that has ever existed in the civilized world to this day. It is a blueprint of the activities in Nature. It highlights the significant occurrences in Nature and celebrates them as festivals. In comparison, the universally used Gregorian calendar is a political patchwork created over the millennium which is obvious from the 12th month being called December which means 10th and the 9th month September (7th). The 10th month October which means 8th. This also proves that the Gregorian year originally started in Spring.

In the Mazdayasni calendar, the year always starts on the Vernal Equinox whereby the leap year is automatically taken care of. Its accuracy is further enhanced by dividing the actual number of days of each individual season, into months. Thereby each season starts on the first of every fourth month and they are celebrated as festivals. Seasons are marked by the position of the Earth in its orbit around the Sun, so the accuracy of the calendar is guaranteed by nature. The four seasons are celebrated as and on.



1- Vernal Equinox the beginning of Spring as New Year	Now Rooz	1 Farvardin
2- Summer Solstice the beginning of Summer as	Tirgan	1 Tir
3- Autumnal Equinox the beginning of Fall as	Mehregan	1 Mehr
4- Winter Solstice the beginning of winter as	Deygán (Yalda)	1 Dey

**THIS SHOWS THE IRANIANS KNEW OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE EARTH AROUND THE SUN OVER 2000 YEARS BEFORE GALILEO**

The four positions of the sun and the four seasons although they may seem to be of equal length, in reality they are not equal. The path of the Earth around the Sun is such that it DOES NOT divide the time taken to travel, from one position to another, into four equal parts, as one would ordinarily believe. In fact, none of the 4 parts are equal. Spring has 92.8 days, Summer 93.6 days Autumn 89.9 days and winter is the shortest with 88.9 days. Each season individually divided works out to 31 days each for the first six months, the next 5 months of 30 days each and the last month of the balance of the days before the Vernal Equinox which is 29 or 30 determined by the Vernal Equinox. Based on this premise and by incorporating other traditions the following calendar has been designed. The traditional 30 names of the days of the Sasanian era

are used and the 31st day of the first 6 months has been named “Avardad” the Pahlavi word meaning “extra day”. See Philosophy of naming days. **The Seven days of the week have been named after the Haft Amesha Spentas The Seven Eternal Laws, to constantly remind us of the path to Progress.** **SOME FACTS:** The Gathas were discovered by Professor Martin Haug from among the Yasnas in 1859. So obviously the 5 Gatha days were named thereafter. Which means the Zoroastrian Shehanshahi and Kadmi calendars are of recent origin, while the Fasli calendar was introduced in 1906 for detail information please visit

Fariborz Rahnamoon : <http://gathas.ca/> ; <http://zarathushticalendar.com/> ; <http://ancientiran.com/>





# Between the Covers

## BEHIND THE FACE,

BY TORANJ IRANI

Behind the face is a very poignant life story of the author, a story of incredible strength, resilience and selflessness, a thought provoking and deeply moving book written in a very easy to read style. The reader can relate to all the emotions that Toranj experiences, which is the very essence of our existence. The author was born and brought up in a loving Zarthushti family in Karachi, Pakistan. She gives glimpses of living in the, Baug, explains the Zoroastrian customs and the life there,.She falls in love at age 18 with a young man 10 years her senior, little realizing that he is from a very dysfunctional family who will make her life miserable after her marriage. Her main support are her parents and the extended maternal family, Masi (aunts) and cousins. She becomes a mother of 2 children, her son Roushad, apple of her eye, followed by a daughter Rowena, who is her father’s darling. Being strapped for money she gives tuitions does all the housework and becomes responsible for the care of her father in law wh has an amputated leg, for which she gets no gratitude or recognition. The family finally gets an opportunity to immigrate to the US. They live with her cousin and family in Wichita, till they can afford to rent a small apartment. Life seems to be good, this is the period in her life when she goes from “bitter to joyful”. Both her husband and she get a job, the children are well settled in school, though the boy faces bullying and abuse of being called Paki and ” go back home”. During this time she keeps going back to visit her parents in Karachi , her mother develops cancer and dies. Toranj is heart broken and questions God as to why she has to suffer. The children grow up, graduate and fall in love. The son loves a girl for whom Toranj does not have good vibes and tells her son, who does not listen and goes ahead and marries her. Tension between the two families is palpable. The daughter also has a boyfriend who she realizes does not love her as much as she thought he did. . She breaks up with him with very tragic consequences.

The grief, the mother experiences is heart wrenching, her world comes crashing down. At that time she says “God I hate you” but somehow with the support of her family and her own inner strength she finds courage to rise up and put her faith back in divinity. Somehow she finds solace in “connection” with her daughter in the other world. She transformed her grief into finding inner peace by helping others in need, with a smile or with a warm cup or coffee, she even started a scholarship in her daughter’s name at Wichita State Univer-

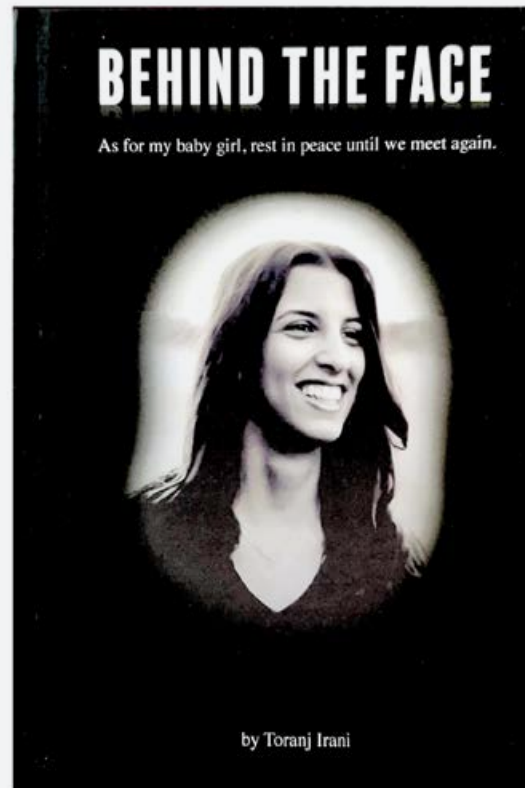
PAGES 250; PUBLISHED SIMON MILLS. E & R publications NY. 2023

Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Hard Cover \$ US 24.49 , Paper Back \$ US 19.99

Also available on kindle and audio book.

Reviewed by Dolly Dastoor Ph.D



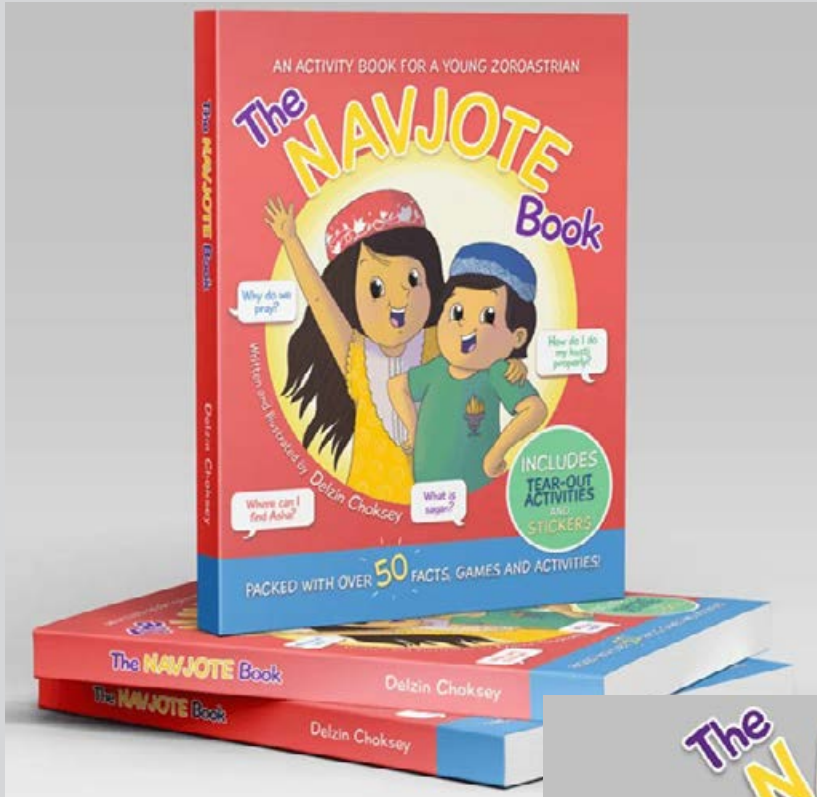
sity. She met with the families who were recipients of organs from her daughter. Writing this book was cathartic.

She is on her path to healing. She has moved away from Wichita to start a new life, but as she says “memories will always exist, the pain will always be fought, but fresh start helps us find the tenacity to go another day”. Toranj has worked hard to find and live another day, “the smiles on our face disguise the immense trauma from which our healing continues”.

Those who have experienced trauma will relate to each line in this book.

Our friend and brilliant illustrator and author Delzin Choksey of Crispy Doodles fame has come out with a new title called “The Navjote Book”

An activity book for young Zoroastrians. Interactive learning, games, stickers, templates for crafts and recipes! An excellent activity book for young Zoroastrian children to use BEFORE DURING and AFTER their Navjote.



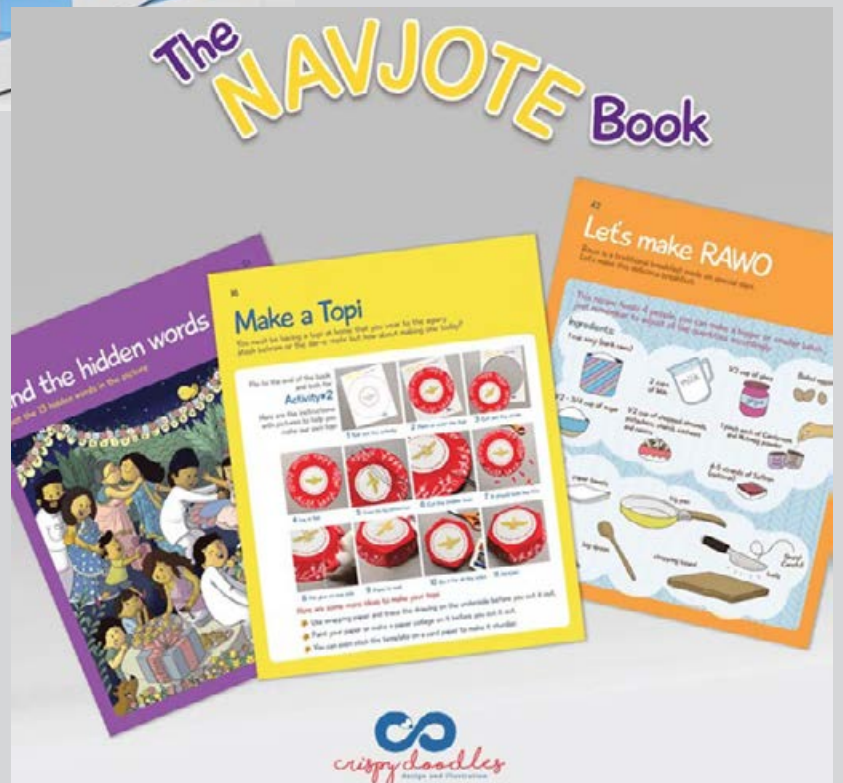
### FEZANA and WZCC Collaboration

*The Publication Committee of FEZANA sponsored the shipping of the Navjote Book to Pune for free distribution to the attendees of the WZCC conclave .*

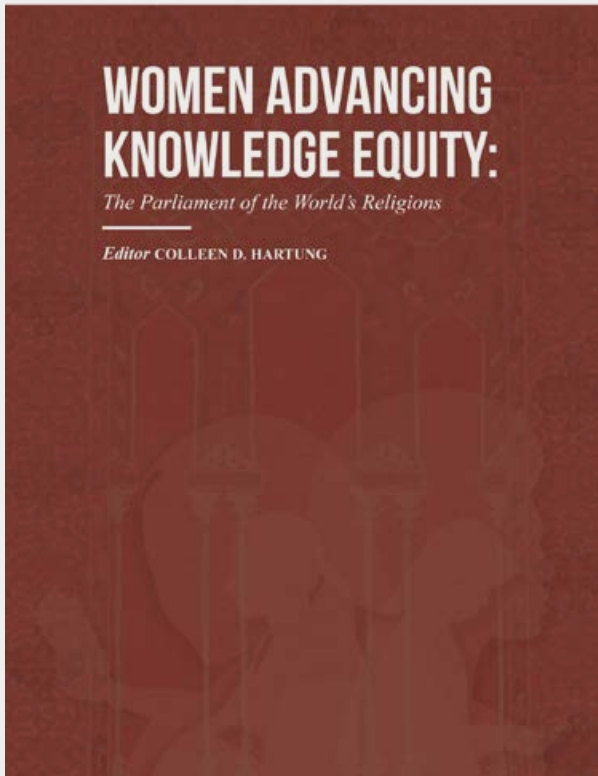
The book is available in.

India: <https://shopping.on-lyne.com/product/the-navjote-book/>

U.S. <https://www.etsy.com/.../161119.../the-navjote-activity-book>



# Women Advancing Knowledge Equity: The Parliament of the World's Religions



**Women Advancing Knowledge Equity:** a collection of biographies about women who are noteworthy leaders and participants in The Parliament of the World's Religions® but whose geographical location, economic status and occupational attentions obscure the significant influence and impact of their lives and work. This lack of coverage, fueled, at least in part, by an 18th-century definition of knowledge that privileges the scientific method, technological development, and masculine achievement even as it discounts knowledge and histories that are oral, embodied, and unpublished, leads to tremendous gaps in our knowledge about these women. These gendered gaps in knowledge create issues of gender parity on print and digital platforms where women, particularly women marginalized by race, economics, and geography are poorly represented. This volume challenges the norms and practices that create this lack of parity, with analytical biographies that create knowledge about these women and give us a sense of the women themselves, as knowledge creators.

*Women Advancing Knowledge Equity: The Parliament of the World's Religions* is the third volume in the series *Women in Religion*, edited by Colleen Hartung.



The [ATLA Women in Religion](#) series was an outgrowth of the “Women in Religion Wiki Project,” an initiative to create, update, and improve Wikimedia

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