

JOURNAL

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ADDENDUM ADDRESS DEMOGRAPHIC CONCERNS IN NORTH AMERICA

The Zarathushti World — 2012 Demographic Picture: The Numbers Game

Also Inside:



Cyrus Cylinder Celebrated in Chicago



Tanya Bharda's Journey in India



ZOI Camp Kids' "Lookie" Stand



Presentation of FEZANA Strategic Plan

FEZANA Journal

FALL 2013 ADDENDUM

The declining demographics of the Zarathushti world is of major concern to all. Acknowledging the problem and identifying its extent and ramifications was the first step which was articulated in the FALL 2013 issue of the FEZANA Journal. More importantly what do we need to do to reverse the trend or at least to stabilize or stop its rapid decline. A cross section of the North American Zarathushti population was surveyed for their opinion: first generation, next generation, intermarried, intra married, young, old, male, female, Iranian Zarathushtis, Parsi Zarathushtis.

We received a plethora of information, laments as well as creative thoughts. Cognizant of the fact that by adding all this information to the printed issue would increase the printing and mailing costs when our subscriptions are declining we are trying a new hybrid approach. We are placing on the FEZANA website (www.fezana.org) the addendum Part 1 containing the contributions of 34 First generation Zarathushtis and Part 2 containing the contributions of 34 next generation Zarathushtis .

Let us know if you like this method, as it will help us save cost and provide you, our readers with quality thought provoking reading material .

Dolly Dastoor

Editor in chief FEZANA Journal

**ADDRESSING DEMOGRAPHIC CONCERNS IN NORTH AMERICA
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ADDRESSING DEMOGRAPHICS CONCERNS IN NORTH AMERICA

Thoughts from a cross-section of North American 'first generation' and 'next generation' Zarathushtis

Compiled by Roshan Rivetna

In response to a letter sent out to a cross-section of 'first generation' Zarathushtis as well as young men and women of the 'next generation,' requesting their thoughts on addressing demographic concerns in North America, an over-whelming number (over 80) of responses were received. Every respondent had taken the time and trouble from their busy lives, to give thought to these matters, and send in their suggestions – each one well-thought out, articulate, beautifully expressed– a most valuable compilation for securing the future of Zarathushtis on this continent.

Alas! Space limitations precluded us from publishing them in the print version of the Journal. However, as they say “Out of adversity, comes opportunity,” so, we took the opportunity to introduce this new 'online' addendum to the Journal. Only a brief glimpse of the responses was published in the print version (FEZANA Journal, Fall 2013). ***All submitted articles are presented here, and will be archived, alongside the Fall 2013 issue of the Journal, at www.fezana.org.*** The wealth of ideas and suggestions therein will serve as a valuable base for discussion and action by FEZANA leadership.

REQUEST LETTER IDENTIFYING THE BROAD CONCERNS

“ ... While the 2012 FEZANA demographics study showed an impressive 24.3% growth in population in North America in less than a decade, there are some disturbing indications of subtle future decline due to assimilation, that we can expect to be exacerbated in succeeding generations, unless we take pro-active measures now:

- Upward trend in intermarriages over the last two decades (from 24% in 1991 to 60% in 2011).
- Over 25% of the children of intermarriages are not following the Zarathushti religion.
- Gradual assimilation exacerbated by our small numbers, dispersed population, conversions, disinterest, disenchantment, disengagement, apathy

“Please give these matters some thought, and come up with one or two specific actions that you think are most important for us to take in North America -- in our homes, in our Associations or by FEZANA -- to address these concerns, so that we can sustain and grow the impressive increase in our population numbers (Quantity), whilst also meeting our vision of “a caring, compassionate, harmonious, altruistic, observant, esteemed and prosperous community, with respect for all, committed to moving Ahura Mazda’s Creation forward towards Frashokereti. (Quality).”

THOUGHTS FROM 'FIRST GENERATION' ZARATHUSHTIS

“Find a sustainable path to preserve the community and infrastructure in Iran before it is too late.”



Dr. Cyrus Aidun [cyrus.aidun@me.gatech.edu, www.me.gatech.edu/faculty/aidun] Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Bioengineering at Georgia Institute of Technology was born in Tehran. He has two sons Kevin and Armin, and a wonderful wife from a Swedish Christian family, Dr. Ulrika Egertsdotter who agrees with Zarathushti principles.

If the alarming trend of population decline in Iran continues, there will not be a critical mass required to sustain a viable Zarathushti community in Iran, the birthplace of our religion. Historical buildings, monuments and memorials that form the infrastructure at the root of our religion and culture will be neglected. Our language, culture and heritage will fade away.

Understanding and reversing this trend in Iran should be given the highest priority by FEZANA and the Zarathushti community in North America. The rapidly diminishing population and the economic difficulties would no doubt impose severe strain on resources available to the remaining Zarathushtis in Iran. Despite the heroic effort of this community, it will be more and more difficult to maintain the infrastructure. It would be tragic for our children who have never been in Iran to only know this country from what they read and hear in the *mainstream* news.

FEZANA can establish and organize a committee to investigate how this trend can be reversed, and to find a sustainable path to preserve the Zarathushti community and infrastructure in Iran before it is too late. Several universities in North America, such as Georgia Tech, have established Farsi language studies - FEZANA can have an active role in facilitating and encouraging expansion of this effort to Persian studies.

FEZANA can also lead the effort in encouraging and facilitating a program for our youth to travel to Iran and to learn and experience our magnificent culture and history. Curiosity and interest in Persian history inevitably leads to understanding the root of this civilization, which is based on Zarathushti principles – Dualism, *Asha*, good thoughts, good words and good deeds are embedded in this civilization. [See Xenophon; *Cyropaedia*, 4th century BC and *The Arts of Leadership and War* by Larry Hedrick, Truman Talley Books, 2006]. ■



“Religious education begins at home.”

Bucky Amaria (bnamaria@aol.com) has resided in the metropolitan Denver area for over 20 years, and is very involved in the local Zarathushti community.

The upward trend in intermarriages has been an ongoing issue everywhere. Unfortunately the Congresses and other initiatives have not yielded much change in this area – leaving me rather confused and sad. It is also disturbing that children of intermarriages do not follow our religion. However, what saddens me even more is when children born to Zarathushti parents also do not follow the religion – because the parents do not! This is the case here in Denver, and possibly elsewhere in North America as well. How do we change that is a big challenge!

Just as education begins at home, so should religious education. Following the traditions taught to us by our parents and grandparents is very important -- dinnertime prayers as a family, visiting India and taking the children to Agiaris and Atash Behrams. More Sunday Schools are also important; we should contribute generously to develop religious education classes where children are taught Gujarati and Farsi reading and writing and Zarathushti prayers and traditions.

We also need to learn to live harmoniously (without egos) with togetherness and bond well with Zarathushtis in other areas. Indeed, the small numbers of Zarathushtis living in outlying areas also contribute to our decline, so we should develop a head leadership body where Zarathushtis across North America could exchange and discuss ideas. ■

“It seems that modernity is accomplishing what the Arabs could not.”



Dastur Dr. Kersey H. Antia [KerseyAntia@yahoo.com] a psychologist by profession, is High Priest of the Zarathushti community in Chicago, and has served as honorary priest for over half a century.

It is sad to think about the impending disintegration among our future generations, so soon after establishing ourselves rather well in North America since the 1960s. It seems modernity is accomplishing what the Arabs could not. Even in India, the same scenario is progressively on the rise, mitigated somewhat by the establishment of colonies, trusts, libraries, fire-temples, etc., if not by still surviving caste system and our concentration mainly in certain areas around Mumbai. The link between race and religion, though not originally the Prophet's doing, is fast dwindling. But we can learn to adapt to our new circumstances as long as we can maintain adherence to our Prophet's main tenets which are eternal and universal.

Maybe our generation was too busy planting its roots in the new continent, or too busy reaping and enjoying its secular, materialistic harvest, to impress upon its progeny the ever-burning need to carry on our ancient religious heritage, as its sole and rare survivors. But how can we complain about apathy among our children when we have not cared to maintain even a single full-time priest anywhere in North America, nor built a residence for him?

It is not too late to impress upon our children the dire need to not fail, and end up as the last in a line of a glorious and most ancient heritage; a heritage that fascinated and consumed my entire life and inspired me to take time from my worldly duties to speak and write extensively about it. Even as I am pushing eighties, I am willing to share my rare fortune with the next generation. At least I have the satisfaction of inspiring my two sons, but I am not sure I can inspire my two grandsons!

FEZANA and Associations need to concentrate more on religion as future generations will not otherwise relate to it in any significant way, making it irrelevant or obsolete. We need to appoint a learned priest that will go around and inspire faith in our religion, as best suited to modern times. We direly need to hand over the leadership to the new generation and stop clinging to it. Let the youth focus on these issues, and tell us what we all could still do, and where we went amiss. Let's not lose hope, but work even harder for our survival, as our forefathers did despite terrible odds.

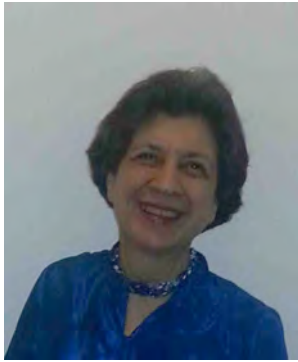
Aedun Bad! May it be so! ■

“...inspire, not direct our children to want to live their lives as Zarathushtis, with Zarathushtis, and really feel proud to belong ...”

Dr. Zareen Karani Araoz (zareen@managingcultures.com) of Boston, is President of “Managing Across Cultures,” a cross-border coaching, training and consulting firm, building leaders and teams that work across cultures, and Network Director of ZWIN (the Zoroastrian Women's International Network).

This challenge needs a many-pronged approach:

Build a data-base of all Zarathushti youth in North America and identify and connect them *all*, so that FEZANA can help organize opportunities to come/work together, know and appreciate one another, network on-line, and feel connected through their Zarathushti identity. This would also help widen the options of Zarathushti youth to select life partners.



Bring youth together meaningfully. Let FEZANA (with sponsorships) arrange a Jamboree, where every Zarathushti youth (15-35) is given the opportunity to come together for 3-4 days—for fun and games, and ending in substantial Youth Projects where everyone can continue to contribute and connect. **Today, only those who can afford it come together. Can we change that?**

Create an active regularly-meeting on-line community of Zarathushti youth. It could be a weekly “drop in and connect” on-line meeting, sponsored by FEZANA. Out of this may come: Zarathushti religion and heritage classes (youth researched and run), a Zarathushti Dance Troupe, Zoroastrian Orchestra, a Talent Search....

Have an Outreach Committee to identify, reach out to, and welcome those who have intermarried, their spouses and children, and integrate them in a loving inclusive way, with no differentiation, so the non-Zarathushti spouse **wants** to bring their children into this fold and feel welcome.

But most of all, I believe it is **a real shift in our adult community behavior** that would help. Our youth need to truly feel that belonging to this community and religion is meaningful and precious to them by seeing that our community lives in harmony and with good will. They should not see factions, bickering or bigotry in their homes or socially. They need to see Zarathushtis as loving, caring, kind and 100% honest. Then our youth will desire a Zarathushti spouse and really **want** to always be part of this sacred heritage. Few might do it only “to help the community survive”.

Our main challenge is how can we adults *inspire, not direct* our children to want to live their lives as Zarathushtis and with Zarathushtis, and really feel proud to belong and perpetuate our community? ■

“Spiritual values are best transmitted to children from within the four walls of the home through exemplary character of the adults.”



Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli (jbagli@rogers.com) of Toronto is passionately interested in perpetuation of the religion of Asho Zarathosht. He has served as President of NAMC (2002-2006), is actively involved in interfaith activities, and is presently studying commonalities among other Faiths with Zarathushti values.

The exodus of Zarathushtis from Iran to India 1300 years ago, had one prime objective - to preserve and perpetuate the religion of Zarathushtra. This they did diligently by having rigid ground rules of exclusivity. Zarathushtis who came to North America had a very different objective - to improve the lifestyle for themselves and their family. By and large they have done a tremendous job of attaining their goals, utilizing Zarathushti values.

What is largely overlooked is that in doing so **spirituality** has paid a heavy price. Factors such as higher education and diverse opportunities have directed the community to a lifestyle with a liberated mindset. It is no denying that adopting the western cultural traits is pivotal for harmonious integration, nevertheless, abandoning spiritual values of the Faith that help attain this lifestyle of comfort, is a recipe for disaster for the Faith. Spiritual values are best transmitted to children from within the four walls of the home through exemplary character of the adults.

While **marriages** within the community must remain our top priority, the community must erase the religious stigma associated with interfaith wedlock. In the interest of promoting the Oneness of the Human Brotherhood, we must impress upon our youth that they have done nothing wrong, nor have they violated any religious dogma by choosing a spouse of another Faith. Furthermore it must be emphatically reiterated - to erase the brainwashing of centuries - that they are **fully within their rights**, to bring their children up as Zarathushtis if they choose to do so. Implementation of these notions will guarantee a more efficient integration of interfaith couples within the Zarathushti community.

Regardless of the Faith of the spouse the couple must understand the commonalities within the diverse faiths. Concomitantly, they must also appreciate and transmit to offspring, the uniqueness of Zarathushti

values as being stewards of the world, caring for the ecosystem, for other Creations, for the underprivileged of humanity and in general for Peace and Harmony. I am certain if the community as a whole moves in that direction we can stem the tide of loss of interfaith couples and their children to our glorious Faith. ■

“A focus on religious education is paramount ... based on a standardized curriculum that is ... engaging for young learners.”



Daraius M. Bharucha [xermgr@rogers.com] is President of ZSO (Ontario), and active in community affairs for over 20 years. He is a History Teacher with the York Region School Board, and a recipient of the Governor General of Canada's Excellence in Teaching Award, 2012.

For the Zarathushti community to continue to thrive in North America, a three pronged approach is required.

Firstly, a **focus on religious education** for Zarathushti children is paramount. The focus of this educational thrust has to be to reinforce a sense of Zarathushti identity. The approach to education should be holistic and non-prejudicial while simultaneously reinforcing core values and beliefs of the faith. The approach should be based on a standardized curriculum that is comprehensive and inclusive and employs twenty-first century pedagogical techniques to make it engaging for young learners.

Secondly, **youth engagement and involvement** in community affairs is key to community continuity and to the nurturing and reinforcing of identity. The creation of forums, special events and purposeful initiatives in which youth can participate and take ownership, thereby developing leadership skills and a sense of community are vital and essential to nurturing identity and developing a sense of belonging to a faith community.

Finally, the **development of infrastructure** that is purposeful and geared to the local needs of Zarathushtis is important. This infrastructure should not only provide space for socio-cultural activities and the nurturing of spiritual values, but should be the hubs around which a sense of belonging and communal identity are reinforced.

If, as a community, we fail to effectively address these issues, then the continuation and maintenance of a distinct Zarathushti identity and the progress of our faith in North America will become difficult to sustain. ■

“... inculcate a love for the religion in our children ... they will grow up following their family's example instinctively....”



Ervad Jal N. Birdy [jalnbirdy@gmail.com] of California, a practicing structural engineer, has been serving Zarathushti communities in London, Houston and Southern California as a volunteer Mobed for the past fifty years.

It is not really a miracle that Parsis have survived for 1300 years in India when you look at the conditions under which they lived until very recently. A rigid caste system, little social and workplace interaction, women relegated to home building, arranged marriages within the community and a relatively hard life with little luxury all contributed to the migrants keeping to themselves and prospering as a distinct community. This closeness enhanced by distinct religious practices and customs, close family ties, building of infrastructure and encouraging intermingling between community members enabled Parsis to survive.

With Parsis migrating to the West, all the above conditions have reversed for them. Despite our best efforts we find that although we have an encouraging population growth, there are disturbing signs of insidious decline due to assimilation, intermarriage, disinterest, disenchantment and apathy in our future generation. We find ourselves in not too dissimilar circumstances to those of us who migrated to other European and Far Eastern countries instead of India and who have since disappeared.

So far we have tried to disseminate religious knowledge through Mobed councils and local religious classes, we have established local associations where we meet regularly, we hold Congresses, sports functions and fun retreats for the youth and we have tried to arrange marriages within the community.

This is all fine but what is really lacking *is inculcating a love for the religion in our children at the family level*. I remember during childhood our whole family singing *monajats* and *bandagis* together every morning and being told regularly the benefits of belonging to this great religion, of seeking Ahura Mazda's help and reciting *Yatha-Ashems* before embarking on any new task, of seeking *Behram Yazad's* assistance for success in exams, of *Ardibehsht Ameshaspand's* help in curing an ailment, of Sarosh Yazad's protection, etc. We grew up following their example instinctively in our daily lives which served as a spiritual prop for us and strengthened our love for our religion. We need to pass this feeling on to our children here. None of this is going to be easy particularly when many of us are apathetic ourselves and have not had the same religious devotion passed on to us.

We can only hope that every little effort in this direction will help stem the disturbing decline. ■

“First and foremost, first and second generation parents need the right education and guidance. Only then can they influence their children.”



Neville Bugli [nbugli@sbcglobal.net] has been actively involved with ZAOM (Michigan) since its inception in 2008. Neville has over 27 years of Research and Product Development experience in the field of air and fluid filtration systems. Currently he consults with companies in the automotive industry.

Thoughts on why children of intermarriages are not following the Zarathushti religion, based on comments received from the community.

This problem is not only in intermarried families but also in families where both parents are Zarathushtis. Many second generation Zarathushti families don't wear *sudreh-kushti*. Their children follow the same. Many children have their Navjote done, but do not follow through with wearing *sudreh-kushti*. In India the young wear *sudreh/kushti* because their parents wear it -- no questions asked. We never questioned it -- it is a part and parcel of being a Zarathushti. The parents should set the example.

Today's youth like to discuss and debate about religion, culture, history etc...but some don't have a passion to follow and practice the basic foundation of our religion. They tend to question everything. That is a good thing. So maybe, we are not doing a good job in explaining/educating why a Zarthushti should wear a *sudreh/kushti* and its importance. Maybe we should have a discussion and evaluate the reasons.

Gradual assimilation is a challenge. Small numbers make it difficult to meet, marry, grow, and follow! I strongly believe that parents make a significant impact whether their kids will grow up as true Zarathushtis or not. First and foremost the first and second generation parents need the right education and guidance. Only then can they influence their children.

I salute all the dedicated educators who volunteer their time, energy and resources to hold classes on the tenets of our religion. We may also want to consider a Cultural Road Show with prominent educators who can influence and articulate the importance of rituals and traditions to the first and second generation parents and their children. ■

“Comprehensive education, provided in different and effective modalities to our entire constituency is the answer ...”

Sarosh J. Collector [scollector@cdadvisorsinc.com] enjoys teaching religious classes and dabbling in his business consulting practice. He is a founding member and a past Board Member of ZAH (Houston), past Treasurer of FEZANA, and Founding Director and first Treasurer of WZCC.

Our problems with assimilation can be ascribed to our failure to provide comprehensive education to *all* our members, and to a religious void in the daily lives of our populace in North America.



Intermarriages. We need proper methodology and procedures, that allow the non Zarathushti spouse to study, internalize, be tested on their religious knowledge, and be allowed to accept their spouses' religion in order to provide a Zarathushti household for their children.

Children of inter-married couples. The deficiency is of adequate education and social support for the Intermarried family. No modalities exist that help the non-Zarathushti spouse to integrate both socially and religiously into the community. The children may attend classes yet have *no* reinforcement at home. This is like teaching a student a subject with a 126 hour curriculum for 24 hours, and expect them to pass an Advanced Placement exam. This only leads to a school dropout (for us it is dropping out of the religion/Zarathushti society). An issue to also address is the passive/aggressive non-acceptance of children of intermarried couples by some community members, which dissuades these children from staying involved within the community.

Comprehensive education. We need to emulate other religions who provide their followers the ability to learn, internalize, and participate in the religion. ***Our religious leaders should create sermons, and service format for mass worship*** for the community, at least once a week. Mobeds should lead these services, provide explanations, religious education and appropriate sermons targeted towards the average Zarathushti. The service (song/prayer/sermon) should last 15-30 minutes. Subsequently children/youth would go to separate sessions of religious education. Adults listen to another discussion led by appropriately educated Mobeds and lay leaders.

The above modalities could allow our constituency to interact more often (specially the youth), provide education to the parents, allow for a rational family discussion of issues that we deal with in a pluralistic society, and provide knowledge for those interested in learning. We should also incorporate and teach our theology along with rituals..

In closing, comprehensive education provided in different and effective modalities to our entire constituency would be the answer to our problems. ■

“If we want future generations to be enlightened Zarathushtis, we should first strive to enlighten ourselves.”



Dr. Keki Dadachanji [kekid@optonline.com] has served on the Board of ZAGNY and chaired the Program Committee of the 2012 Congress in New York. After retiring from Mars, Inc. in 2005, Keki became a lecturer at Rutgers and also teaches mathematics at Parsipanny High School, NJ.

Diagnosis. Many people want to preserve the Zarathushti religion because they like the social aspects. They rarely study and reflect on various religions, to determine why they want to remain Zarathushtis. If members of this group marry someone of another faith, their children are often able to find support structures within other religions, and see no compelling need to look to the Zarathushti religion to meet that need.

Parents should be able to listen to the children who ask “Why do I need religion?” and compassionately, through personal example persuade them of the significance of religion in life. Many Zarathushtis believe that the religion of Zarathushtra is the greatest, but cannot articulate why they believe that. Parents who cannot explain this to their children are not likely to succeed.

Remedy. If we want to change someone, we must first transform ourselves. If we want future generations to be enlightened Zarathushtis, we should strive first to enlighten ourselves.

Organize discussion forums on why anyone needs religion (any religion). Permit diverse points of view, and do not force conclusions. Some people will conclude religion is important, and will be able to tell others why. This is a rehearsal for how people may eventually be able to express importance of religion to children.

Organize presentations on major religious traditions with a view to extracting the best in them. We should refrain from trying to determine which is the best. We should simply leave these discussions by saying, if properly followed, any of them can lead us on the right path.

Finally, organize discussions on why we have chosen to follow Zarathushtra's religion, despite valid alternatives. I believe this will have a profound effect on children, and many of them will develop trust in their parents, and follow their lead.

I believe exclusion is against the basic idea of religion. We should welcome all who want to follow Zarathushtra's religion. Conversely, we should refrain from criticizing anyone who chooses otherwise.

Much of what I have suggested may be summarized under the rubric of "education," though with a different interpretation of "education." It is not lecturing, not information-sharing, not memorizing history or scripture. My concept is to have exchanges within "spiritual fellowship groups" with comprehension of basic principles, reflection on them, and sharing personal experiences on how they shape our lives.

If we were to follow these steps, we will not need to debate how we survive in future. A lotus does not ask bees to come to it; attracted by its fragrance, bees are drawn to the lotus. ■



“Getting children married is a parental responsibility, a religious responsibility and a social responsibility.”

Porus N. Dadabhoy, [porusdad@gmail.com] MS (Chem. Engg.) of Chicago, has 40 years experience in Manufacturing, Marketing and Quality Management. As a community activist he has led reform efforts, and was a candidate for DuPage County Board and Treasurer. His community service includes projects in India including Health, Child Protection, Education and Water.

Marriage is an institution that is favored by Almighty God, and a religious duty recommended by our scriptures. According to *Vendidad* [1V, 47] – “A man builds a house with fire, cattle, wife, children ...” [Vendidad 11,1]. Married people are better able to withstand physical and mental afflictions and to lead a virtuous life [Yasna L111,5]. There are further references in *Vendidad* [1V, 44 and X1V, 15]. As a poet says:

“What a delicious breath marriage sends forth, the violets bed not sweeter! Honest wedlock is like a banqueting house built in a garden, of which the spring flowers take delight to cast their modest odors.”

Getting children married is a parental responsibility, a religious responsibility and a social responsibility. Our record in North America over the years has been less than desirable: 60% inter-married, high divorce rate, absence of pre-marital counseling curriculum, large numbers of men and women over 30 still unmarried, and only 1 child per family. (In comparison Hindus and Muslims have a 10-15% rate of inter-marriages and a family size of 2.4 to 2.8.)

Most Americans get married to people they meet at school or work. We do not have this opportunity based on our small numbers and dispersion. While we have matrimonial web sites and *kajwallis* who make sincere efforts, the results are not there.

We need new strategy, systems, processes, facilitating and better coaches if we want to “be the change.” (Ghandhi). Some thoughts that come to mind are:

1. Computerized match-making (e.g. EHarmony).
2. Surrogate mothers.
3. Arrange quarterly ‘Adventure Happenings’ (meetings) – by state, region, university.
4. Parenting classes for couples.
5. Bring singles together in social settings. Form a Widow and Widowers’ Club.
6. Have get-togethers by profession (e.g. lawyers, teachers, engineers. Update FEZANA Directory with professions.
7. Encourage inter-married couples to raise their children as Zarathushtis, in an honest and righteous manner.
8. Create a Zarathushti University Students’ Association to facilitate early marriages.
9. Extend the search on a global scale.
10. Create pre-schools for Zarathushti children.

Instead of top-down bureaucracy through FEZANA we need a bottom-up movement among the youth. The best match makers are the young people, the best references come from listening to young people. We need more community interaction, especially among the young.

We need to listen to our youth and based on reason, and benefits thereof, make marriage a viable and desirable option. ■

“... the root of most of our problems is apathy ... about our religion, and about taking time to learn and inculcate it into their children’s daily lives.”



Ervad Soli P. Dastur [dastur@comcast.net] was born in Tarapur to an Udwada Mobed family, became a Mobed in the MF Cama Athornan Institute, became a Chemical Engineer and worked for 30 years in Procter & Gamble. He is married to Jo Ann for 47 years, has twin daughters and 5 grandchildren, and spends his time in retirement in Florida, in research, writing and delivering tele-classes on the Zarathushti religion.

Photo: Er. Dastur with wife Jo Ann, at a wedding ceremony he performed on the island resort, Sanibel Island, Gulf of Mexico.

To me, the root of most of our problems is the apathy of Zarathushtis, especially in North America, about our religion, and about taking time to learn and inculcate it into their children’s daily lives. There is too much emphasis on getting together for celebrations but not enough for learning more about our religion, customs, scriptures, etc. We gather for celebrating Navroze and Pateti and Gahambars with big fanfare; have we done any such fanfares for having a religious education seminar, or a discussion on current religious issues? If we do, a very small number of members turn up. They are too busy with other things – sports, picnics,

camping, sleepovers -- and religion and community come last in priority.

We have to change our priorities in life or we have to face the inevitable!

As the children grow up, they look around and see their parents’ apathy and what do you think they grow up to be? A carbon copy. Then they find interesting life-mates in schools, colleges and the result is 60% intermarriages! I have performed 8 weddings in 2012 – 2013 and they are 100% - mark 100% - intermarriages! These intermarried Zarathushti spouses are following in the footsteps of their own parents and now instead of two Zarathushtis, there is only one Zarathushti parent, and the result is as expected -- their children do not follow Zarathushti religion.

With such social scenarios in our Zarathushti families, combined with the forces of “small numbers, dispersed population, conversions, disinterest, disenchantment, disengagement, apathy”, the future is bleak for our community. It is sad!

Do we have the will and determination to reverse these trends?

At this juncture of my life, I have to be pessimistic! Except for a very few dedicated families, the majority are just surviving in this foreign land and pass their time in day to day living without much thought for the future of their religion. ■

“... we need to focus more on networking and socializing within the younger generation.”

Sarvar Demehri [1sarvar@gmail.com] has been active in the Central Florida Small Group since 1981. She is married to Rustom Demehri and has a daughter Natasha, son Farokh and daughter-in-law Angela.

We can do a lot about the demographic concerns in North America, if we have a will and resolve to take action. The initial growth in North America was obviously from migration. Many of the intermarriages have been the natural result of assimilating into the culture of North America, mainly networking, socializing at the workplace, through mutual friends, “dating”, “Green Card”, etc.



The few “Get-togethers” our Associations and local groups have organized have mainly focused on adults and religion. Not that there is anything wrong with that. However, we need to now focus more on networking and socializing within the younger generation. We can delegate young individuals as leaders and help get them started. Have them create/and or utilize interactive networks. Have them organize trips for groups of young people.

We (The Associations) have to host more networking opportunities for our younger generations. For example, each Association could take turns planning quarterly 3 day mini-congresses. This would give our young adults opportunity of meeting and getting to know one another more often. In order to keep costs down, members of our Associations could take turns opening our homes to them, showing our cultures and generosity, and encouraging the next generation with examples of our adherence to our religious principals (Good thoughts, Good words and Good deeds).

To attract children of intermarriages we have to welcome non-Zarathushti spouses into our families/associations and into our places of worship. We should include them as valued members of our community and more importantly have their children feel proud of their parent’s religion by encouraging them to attend religion classes, etc. More importantly, we should not frown upon or discriminate against our fellow Zarathushtis who have married into another faith.

We do not convert, however, let’s encourage our next generation, whether they have one or both parents who are Zarathushti, to remain in the fold. ■

“... religious education from early childhood, ... the support of an open minded community, and the services of a great Community Center, may inspire our youth ... to stay true to our religion always.”

Bakhtavar Desai [BFDesai@aol.com] is President of ZAKOI (Zoroastrian Association of Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana) and conducts Religion classes and camps for children from ZAKOI and surrounding communities. She is a CPA by profession, is married to Fred Desai and has three children Shireen, Havovi and Farah; and also volunteers for local schools and Girl Scouts



First of all, we as a community need to make everyone, especially our youth and future generations clear about the fact that **the Zarathushti religion is for everyone**, irrespective of age, religion, caste, creed, or race. Anyone who wants to follow the Zarathushti religion should be helped and supported in going through the initiation and continuing support should also be made available thereafter in the form of guidance, continuing education, and community support.

Presently most of our people are living with some kind of fear that if a Zarathushti marries a non-Zarathushti, he or she will be forsaken by the Zarathushti community, and her children will not be willingly and wholeheartedly accepted by her community. Letting the children follow their spouse’s religion, even if one of the parents is a devout Zarathushti, is a convenient choice to make for almost anyone in order to avoid future social conflicts. So, as a community, an important step I would like to see us make is to proudly open the doors of our universal religion to all the people of the universe.

Having a **Community Center** greatly facilitates regularly scheduled community worship meetings, teaching religion classes and having cultural and religious celebrations. Such a Center also serves as a great tool to bring the youth together in a community. Our youth does not get as much opportunity to meet and bond with one another in smaller communities without a Center, as much as it happens in larger communities having their own Center. For this, I’d love to see larger groups like FEZANA come up with a system of proactive support for the smaller associations.

Last but not the least, **Religion Classes** must be made available to people of all ages in every Zarathushti community. Today’s generation questions everything, which is why they’ll love what they learn about our religion which is so practical, fresh and modern. Ours is the religion of common sense, which appeals to anyone who learns about it.

Beginning religious education from early childhood can create powerful and lasting feelings in a person – feelings of love, respect, and pride for one’s religion. These feelings, with the support of an open minded community and the services of a great Community Center, may actually inspire our youth and their future generation to stay true to our religion always. ■

“Work proactively so a time never comes where one might have to say, ‘Will the last Zarathushti kindly turn off the lights’ ”.



Kaemerz Dotiwala [q.environmental@sbcglobal.net] of Houston, is President of Mazda Yasni Zarathushti Dar-E-Meher Funds, established to construct the first consecrated Dar-E-Meher in the Western world, and a Founding Member and drafter of ZAH (Houston) and FEZANA. Kaemerz is President of Q.Environmental, Inc. committed to sustainable environmental solutions.

We cannot just stand by as silent spectators while the community could possibly be sacrificed on the altar of disinterest and complacency. We find two major schools of thought among the Zarathushtis:

- The liberal, which would like to increase our numbers through inactive proselytization, and
- the traditional, which believes that one has to be born of both Zarathushti parents.

The promise-keepers. Our youth need to realize that more than enough factual information exists that interfaith marriages result in the dominant culture totally absorbing the minority. They may need to make a conscious commitment to themselves that not for any other reason but for the sake of the survival of the religion, they will:

1. Marry only within the community.
2. Have a minimum of three children.
3. Become active participants in the community.
4. Truly educate themselves and their children in the message of Asho Zarathushtra and the reasons behind certain rituals, customs and norms.

The community will need to develop infrastructure and communal support system for these Promise Keepers: financially, intellectually, for health care, professional progress and entrepreneurial development.

If both the individual and the community work together proactively, History would not have to state that there once was a great community, that gave the world its first multicultural empire and charter of human rights, a community that withstood the vicissitudes of time, and against all odds, rose once again like a phoenix, boasting of high upward mobility, percentage of education and rate of success in the professions and enterprises. Let it not be said that this community disappeared because of success, complacency, disinterest and lack of communal commitment by a highly westernized generation.

Let all Zarathushtis work proactively to secure the future of our community so a time never comes where one might have to say, “Will the last Zarathushti kindly turn off the lights”. ■

“In our homes diligently follow customs, traditions and a Zarathushti way of life ... Help your children develop a cultural identity.”

Aspi Engineer [aspidengineer@gmail.com] along with his wife Ferzin and children Persis and Yohahn are enthusiastic members of the Greater Boston Zoroastrian association (ZAGBA). Originally from India, Aspi moved to Boston in 1993 and is currently serving his 2nd term as ZAGBA President.

In our homes: Diligently follow customs, traditions and a Zarathushti way of life. This can be something very simple, from the language you speak to the food that you eat, to the way you celebrate joyous occasions like birthdays. Help your children develop a cultural identity.

I would also add that another thing which we can do as parents is stay connected to where we come from. This is mainly relevant to those parents who were born in India/Pakistan and have a strong Parsi family and friend circle in India/Pakistan. My point is that if you are a parent who grew up in India and you visit India once in 10 years, your children have no way to connect with where their roots are. This leads to an erosion of their cultural identity and intermarriage is the final step in that erosion.

In our associations: Provide the opportunity for people who are geographically dispersed to meet. And for individual members take the effort to participate. While I don't have any data to back me up, I have to believe that children of those who are active in their local associations are less likely to intermarry than of those who do not participate.

What can FEZANA do? FEZANA can encourage/facilitate youth (starting with teens and into their 20's and 30's) to meet. The Young Professionals Team Building Retreat in Vancouver in 2013 is one such activity. But there could be a lot more, on smaller scales. So youth in New England/New York/New Jersey can get together, youth from Southern and Northern California can get together, etc. We should consider if we can do more 'meets' that are of a smaller scale than a few large ones - which are difficult to host. ■



“... we have to come to terms with our outdated and irrelevant stance on conversion.”

Rustom Ferzandi [rferzandi@gmail.com] is a Founder Member of the Zoroastrian Association of Kansas (ZAKA). Born in Mumbai, he immigrated to the US in 1980 with his family and settled in Kansas. He has been in business for himself, and for the last 15 years has been involved in land development.

I share the concerns of many of us who believe we may be facing decline, in spite of the fact that our population may actually be increasing. I would like to present the following suggestions:

- We should **have regularly scheduled community meetings**, and include our youth at these meetings to encourage them to get more involved and informed. With broader participation, we may be able to promote greater interaction and communication among more Zarathushti families within our communities regionally and across the continent.
- **Make religious classes as fun as they are informative**, in order to keep the children interested and engaged, to keep them coming back for more. Parents should also keep in mind that much of the education is in their hands; this means taking the time to teach their children prayers, our history, and cultural traditions. This complete and fully invested approach to educating the next generation is key in preserving our heritage, our religion, and our unique outlook on life.
- **Exclusivity is a thing of the past** and must remain in the past. Sadly, I have witnessed atrocious behavior, and negative attitudes against non-Zarathushti spouses. Under such negativity, how can we expect these inter-faith families to feel welcome and included, and their children to aspire to take up our religion? We should remember that pride in belonging to any group also involves acceptance by other members of that group. It is a fact of life that the world has changed and inter-faith marriages are here to stay.
- And finally, we have to **come to terms with our outdated and irrelevant stance on conversion**. It is our belief and we are taught that we live in a world of choice; that it is up to us to choose the righteous path, to choose what is true and what is false, in our quest to ascend to a heavenly plane. As such, our children are free to choose alternative paths in their quest to arrive at a holy afterlife. So why do we still persist in excluding those who want to follow our teachings in seeking their enlightenment and faith? Isn't it time to finally let go of a system introduced to us by assimilation into the Indian social system, whether by simple side effect of the Indian caste system, or perhaps as a condition we had to agree to as refugees so many centuries ago! ■

“To increase or maintain population growth there are no alternatives to (1) early marriage and (2) more than two children per family.”

Homi Gandhi [homidgandhi@gmail.com] of New Jersey, is currently serving as Vice President of FEZANA, FEZANA NGO's Main Representative to the UN, and co-chair of FEZANA's Interfaith Committee. He has also served a President of ZAGNY (2002 – 2008) and Trustee of Arbab Guiv Dare Mehr Zoroastrian Temple, New York (1993 – 1997).

The compilation upon which these concerns are based is not a scientific study, as its administrators concede. While this should not undermine the value of this study, one can certainly question the

conclusions drawn from it. Perhaps a review of this study by demographic statisticians and an evaluation of trends from previous studies are required.



The question raised is “how do we maintain a steady growth of intra-married Zarathushti children for the generations to come?” It is said that the replacement of population requires 2.1 children and as one cannot have fractional children, each family must have 3 children to replace the numbers. However, as many Zarathushtis marry late and/or do not have 3 children, we should aim at 4 children for each family to maintain our numbers. And so to increase the population, we should aim at 5 children per family! Of course, this was said in jest!

But in reality, to increase or maintain the growth of the Zarathushti population there are no alternatives to (1) early marriage and (2) more than 2 children per family. How can our community help our young men and women in this regard?

1. Support frequent meetings of eligible individuals (e.g. the recent initiatives of ZYNA young professionals).
2. Support frequent inter-continental exchanges of eligible youth (Return to Roots program, initiated by PARZOR is an excellent beginning; we must build on its success. Jews have carried out such programs for over half a century and Jains have initiated these programs in the last decade.)
3. Support young families with physical/financial help for babysitting, chores, etc.
4. Assist infertile couples with In-vitro fertilization technology (IVF).
5. Support successful professional women who would like to postpone motherhood by helping them avail of technology that allows them to freeze their eggs.

The above are some down to earth suggestions. However, the community must be vigilant and ready to take some out-of-the-box solutions should the situation warrant. ■



“For me it is an honor to be asked to officiate and bless the couple – whether intra or interfaith.”

Ervad Noshir Hormuzdiar [mhormuz@gmail.com] of Connecticut, is a retired Mechanical Engineer and has worked in the construction industry for 46 years. As a Mobed, Noshir has served the Iranian Zoroastrian Association of New York (IZA) since 1983 and the Parsi community all over the USA.

I was born in to a family in Mumbai, where both my grandfathers, who were practicing priests and my father, believed in the universality of the faith. After coming to Connecticut in 1977, I was approached by an Iranian couple to perform the *Sudreh Pushee* of a non-Zarathushti bride and then perform their Arshivaad. I agreed. This was the beginning of many such ceremonies. I find that for every ‘intrafaith’ ceremony, I perform two interfaith ceremonies. Most of the former are between Iranian Zarathushtis; it appears that Iranians generally marry within the community. If approached, I also help couples in interfaith marriages with Navjotes of their children. Two other points that need attention are:

Navjote of adopted children. I feel their Navjotes should be performed. In the early 1980s, I had an opportunity to ask Dasturji Minocheherhomji, who was visiting New York, about adopted children. His answer was if a child grows up in your house as your child, then he/she is your child in all respects and should be given all rights including a Navjote ceremony.

Navjote in adulthood. If a child and the parents decide to wait until adulthood to have their Navjote, we should welcome that. A Navjote can be performed at any age – a case in point being Neville Wadia, some years ago, in Mumbai. I have been approached by several Iranian Zarathushtis to perform their *Sudreh Pushee* first before their wedding ceremony. I have obliged.

At a meeting in New York, Dasturji Minochehrhomji expressed his opinion on the acceptance of non-Zarathushti spouses. He said that all the Zarathushtis having settled for good in this country ... and having formed an association ... should form their own Constitution and pass their own laws and by-laws in respect to the association. He further suggested: “... accept non Zarathushti spouses in the religion first and then perform their wedding ceremony. In that case there will be no question of their children being accepted. He substantiated this with a quote from the Avesta -- “*Anayo Takiasho*” or “People of other faith with us in our religion”.

As an ordained priest, I realize that no priest has any supernatural power or direct connection with Ahura Mazda to intercede on behalf of the living or dead. We provide a service to our people. Our job is to comfort and console in times of need. The Gathas have not mentioned any rituals or ceremonies. Though Zarathushtra endorses Marriage, he does not mention how it should be performed or whose ceremony can or cannot be performed. For me it is an honor to be asked to officiate and bless the couple – whether intra or interfaith. ■

“Although conversion is permissible ... it must first be established that he or she is motivated by purely religious convictions and love and devotion for the religion, and not by any other worldly considerations.”



Dr. Pallan Ichaporia [PRIchaporia@aol.com] of Pennsylvania, is a Research Scholar and Assistant to Prof. Helmut Humbach, Mainz University, Germany. He is author and coauthor of the *Gathas*, *Zamyad Yasht*, *Pahlavi Yasna Of the Gathas* and *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, *New Translation of Minor Pahlavi Texts*, *Assimilation of Zoroastrians in Ancient China* (in Press).

Parsi/Iranian Zarathushtis are facing a critical situation, which can adversely affect the very survival of the community. Recent research on the assimilation of one and a half million Zarathushtis in ancient China (full details are in the Royal Museum of Beijing) may be helpful in taking some proactive measures. With a population of barely 21,000 we are too few among the 350 million North American majority having Judeo-Christian beliefs.

Intermarriages. My thinking is that it may be difficult to stop intermarriages but we can take steps to slow them down. The scriptures do not say that those willing to embrace the religion of Zarathushtra through proper learning should be prevented [see *Vendidad and Vaetha Nask*]. Although conversion is permissible by the religion, there are certain conditions which the candidate must fulfill; it must first be satisfactorily established that he or she is motivated by purely religious convictions and love and devotion for the religion, and not by any other worldly considerations. Further, an admission of a person born outside of the religion is only permissible if it is established that by such admission "no harm of any kind would be done to the Zarthosti Mazdayasnans themselves." [Justice Davar's printed judgment, p. 91]. Guided by these injunctions, we should welcome children of Intermarriages to become Zarathushtis through Navjotes and continuous learning.

Assimilation. What we should also do for the children born of **both** Zarathushti parents is to prevent their assimilation into foreign faiths. To prevent gradual assimilation due to our dispersed population, my suggestions are: Regular contacts through personal meetings, inviting them to association meetings, continuous learning of the teachings of our Prophet, and regular explanation of our scriptures and rituals. Also of help would be visitations to Udwada/IranShah and Mumbai *Atash Behrams*, and if possible to Iran. Reading of *Shah Nameh* in homes would also aid in instilling a sense of pride for our ancestors and traditions. And finally, the parents should take courses in the religion themselves, to become well versed so they can pass the knowledge to their children. ■

“The community should have the courage to accept reforms and adapt to the new environment.”



Dr. Daryoush Jahanian, MD [djahanian@gmail.com] was born in Tehran, and is a founder and first President of the Fravahar youth organization in Iran and the Zoroastrian Association of Kansas (ZAKA). He serves as a trustee of Rostam Guiv Trust and is currently President of Rostam Guiv Foundation.

I shall try to summarize my thoughts on how we can remedy the situation. The community should have the courage to accept reforms and adapt to the new environment. Certainly we need one standard, one direction and one goal, and a strong leadership that can take the heat. There may be disagreements and hurt feelings, but we must learn to be tolerant and patient and participate in a civil manner. Doing nothing is a poor option and keeps us stalled.

1. **Religious education** should start from a very young age. It should be a continuous process going beyond Navjote or *Sudreh Pushee*.
2. Establish an **on-line education** program for isolated families.
3. Bring our children (married to Zarathushtis or intermarried) into the community and **assign them responsibilities**, so that they feel like they belong.
4. Associations should bring the **younger generation to serve on the Board and committees**. Associations still controlled by the founding fathers are generally rusted.
5. In social issues **we have to take a stance**. We cannot waiver. That is why important social issues that determine the fate of the community remain unresolved.
6. Those who assume **leadership should have the courage to take a decisive direction** and weather the storm.
7. For the Zarathushti community to survive and thrive **we have to accept converts**. The Gathas are profound thoughts and amazingly modern -- they will attract interested people to our religion..
8. **A convert should be treated like one of us**. In this regard our Parsi brethren have to become more receptive not only of their Iranian co-religionists, but of those who sincerely are seeking spiritual relief by joining the religion.
9. We are living in North America, our new generation is neither Indian nor Iranian. We are not under jurisdiction of Parsi Panchayet or Iranian association; we face different challenges and **our social issues have to be resolved here**.
10. We have to **adjust our customs and traditions** to be more receptive to the young generation. Some traditions are un-Zoroastrian and crept in, due to our long stay in a different environment. We cannot keep them forever as tradition.
11. **Have Sunday services** including prayers and lectures, so that those who are seeking spiritual relief will not be attracted to other centers.
12. **Have an educated Mobed or Mobed-scholar** in our temples. Our next generation will be more receptive of an American/Canadian Mobed for spiritual guidance. This has to do with human psychology. We need to set up funds not only for religious education of Mobed-scholars but to finance at least a part of their cost of living in the future. ■

“The Canadian Multiculturalism Act encourages celebration of our differences, be it racial, religious or cultural ... then why have we so readily accepted the assimilation route?”



Teenaz Javat [teenazjavat@hotmail.com] is editor of the ZSO Newsletter. These views are her own and in no way reflect those of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario. She lives with her husband Mahveer and children Sherezade and Hormuz in Mississauga, Ontario and divides her time as wife, mother, journalist, writer, teacher and volunteer.

I am neither a Zarathushti scholar nor an expert on demographics. So when I was approached to share my opinion on Zarathushti demographics in North America I decided to begin at a micro level -- the family.

As a mother of two teens and long time editor of the ZSO (Zoroastrian Society of Ontario) newsletter, I have been privy to documenting family milestones for the largest diaspora of Zarathushtis living outside of Mumbai, India. I have documented births, deaths, navjotes and weddings. While interracial, inter-faith marriages are the norm, many Zarathushtis thereafter are taking the trouble to initiate their offspring into the fold.

All this looks good on the pages of the Newsletter. After that what?

The FEZANA study tell us over 25% of children of intermarriages are not following our religion. This demographic decline is unfolding at what I call breakneck speed in North America. And it is amazing to

witness how we as parents are facilitating it in the name of assimilation, even though our religious laws (as we know them) guide us otherwise.

The bedrock of Canadian immigration can be found in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act where different communities are encouraged to celebrate their differences, be it racial, religious or cultural. The law allows maintaining our heritage, language and intrinsic qualities we bring with us. These policies guide us away from the melting pot of culture toward a multicultural mosaic.

Yet, we as parents have so readily accepted the assimilation route. After all, it is difficult to stand out rather than blend in. The demographic decline is ours in the making. We have come so far in the 'anything goes' philosophy that it is time for us to evolve into a more open doctrine where we can allow the willing spouse of another faith group to embrace ours.

This quantitative decline can be averted if religious bodies such as the North American Mobeed Council (NAMC) allows for conversion of the willing 'other.' Only if both spouses are truly dedicated to the Zarathushti doctrine can they, to an extent, impress upon their children the values of our faith and thereby may just be able to mitigate the downward spiral.

However, for any change to pan out it should not be left to the whim and fancy of a priest or member of the laity to change the rules. It must be done at the level of the NAMC who in their collective wisdom have the ability and power to bring about change. ■



“... train and fund professional ministers to provide religious and spiritual guidance ...”

Dr. Rustom Kevala [RJKevala@aol.com] has served FEZANA as President, Treasurer and Publications Committee chair; and is currently serving as co-Chair for Funds and Finance. He retired from a career as a consultant in energy and environmental issues in 2006, and now lives in the Tampa Bay area with his wife Yasmin.

According to the French philosopher Auguste Comte, *demography*, the study of both quantitative and qualitative aspects of human population, *is destiny*. People like to be with like-minded people. As the population grows or diminishes, so goes the happiness and satisfaction of its members.

Today, we are at a stage where many of the first-generation Zarathushtis are retiring. The next generation is well-educated and economically self-sufficient. Their friends and business relationships are from the North American culture, very different from that of their parents. The question is: Has the first generation done enough to prepare future generations to remain as Zarathushtis?

Personally, I think that much more needs to be done; but not just by the first generation. Change is inevitable. It is how we manage change that will matter. Inter-generational effort is needed to accelerate the pace of our initiatives and make sure that we are always looking to the future and not getting bogged down by what the first generation and its forefathers did or did not do. We are fortunate that we have cohesive, democratic and forward-thinking organizations like FEZANA and NAMC that can pull us all together. Here are three areas where we need to focus our energies:

1. The religion should be meaningful to all Zarathushtis. We should develop a plan to ***train and fund professional ministers*** to provide religious and spiritual guidance and support.
2. We must take seriously our responsibility to ***teach our children to be good Zarathushtis***, and if necessary adopt children to ensure that our legacy continues. Children learn through example and not from aphorisms and commandments. Philanthropy, honesty and care for the environment are engrained in our culture and should be emphasized as our rallying cry. Religious holidays should be celebrated in homes as well as in gatherings to develop a sense of community and togetherness.
3. We must develop plans and ***carry out activities to bring Zarathushti religion into the mainstream*** in North America. This will require vigorous public relations, meaningful leadership in interfaith activities, and dissemination of information about the religion to the public. An endowed Chair for Zarathushti religious studies should be established at a university in North America.

All of this should be aimed at making future generations feel secure in the practice of our religion without fear of prejudice, pressure or persecution from other religions. ■

“After falling birthrate, the next most important reason for Parsi decline is the abandonment of our rituals and traditions – especially in North America.”



Sarosh Manekshaw [sarosh.manekshaw@gmail.com] lives in Houston. He has been a Guest Editor of two issues of FEZANA Journal. He is a frequent speaker at Zarathushti conferences and congresses.

The popular notion attributed to the decline of Parsi population is that Parsis do not accept conversion or intermarriage. While these are, perhaps, contributing factors, they are not the root cause. As Zubin Shroff, points out [Shroff & Castro, *Demographic Research*, August 2011] “... the main factor behind the dramatic decline of the Parsi population is the abysmally low fertility of the community...” If we are to have any hope of surviving as a community, my message to all fecund Parsis is to go forth and multiply, and that too, exponentially!

After falling birthrate, the next most important reason for Parsi decline is the abandonment of our rituals and traditions – especially in North America. Zoroastrianism cannot sustain itself as a living religion without ritual practices.

It is not sufficient to say we are good Parsis because we practice “Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.” This is an ethic that is common to all religions and not something patented by Zarathushtra for Zarathushtis only. What make us uniquely Parsis are those doctrines, ritual practices and traditions that differentiate us from the other major religions. These are the core of our identity.

I would speculate that over 75% of North American Parsis have stopped wearing their *Sudras* and *Kustis*. How, then, can we ever pass on our religion to our next generation when we presently do not even practice that which is the most basic requirement of being a Parsi? Unfortunately, it seems the trend is to just perform the Navjote, and then forever abandon the *sudreh* and *kushti*. I would classify such individuals as “Parsis in Name Only.” Their offspring have little hope of ever growing up as practicing Parsis, and another whole generation is thus lost through their parents’ apathy and neglect.

We Parsis are also obsessed by the issues of conversion and intermarriage. No conference or seminar can be held without the vociferous raising of these topics. Although I am personally in favor of acceptance of children of intermarried couples into the community of Parsis, this acceptance comes with conditions. Intermarried couples must commit in advance to raise their children as Zarathushtis; they must learn and be knowledgeable about the basic tenets and rituals of the religion; and most importantly, they must teach their children about being Zarathushtis by performing and involving them in their daily ritual practices.

Perhaps, our numbers may not rise because of the low birthrate, but with a commitment to our rituals and traditions, we can still be a vibrant, actively practicing, spiritual and religious community. ■



“We need to reinvent our religion, we have lost the core, the essence of it ... we need to go back to the basics...”

Hosi Mehta [HosiMehta@aol.com] served as President of ZAC-Chicago, co-chairs FEZANA’s Welfare Committee and is involved with numerous local civic organizations - Kiwanis Club, Character Counts, Mentoring Programs, and was Commissioner for City of Elmhurst, IL. He is founder and President of Mehta Motors and My Car Wash business that he operates with sons Shawn, Shero and Shazad.

I would like to reinvent our religion. We have problems because we do not know who we are, what we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to live? What is our identity?

Customs, traditions, rituals are necessary in all religions and they change and adopt to different circumstances as time goes by and we have changed, whether we like to admit it or not. Even the most orthodox among us do not practice the religion as it was practiced hundreds of years ago.

We need to define the qualities of a good Zarthushti. I am not talking about both parents or one parent being Zarthushti. I am talking about personality traits one has to work towards imbibing in ourselves. I briefly brought this up at the FEZANA AGM but the whole topic was misunderstood.

I am talking about working on developing traits like respecting and enhancing human life, respecting and enhancing nature, set aside a percentage of our income for charity, train our thinking to be positive-life enhancing, train our words and communication to be uplifting for ourselves and others, train our actions to bring out the best in us and in all around us. Refrain from negative thinking-worries, jealousy, ego boosting thinking, anger, self defeating thoughts, words and actions etc.

We should feel special in our presence and others should feel good about themselves when they are around us because of the positive vibes we spread around us.

We are supposed to be helpers of Ahura Mazda, *hamkars*, to help bring about *frashokereti*. What are we doing to be that?

We learn about history and our great past but what are we doing just now that our kids and grandkids can talk about and live on that legacy.

Every generation should show progress of the community and our creation in their life time; with all the resources we have, where do we stand to show that progress?

We need to go back to the basics of our religion, learn how to live our life with those eternal truths as a priority, maybe not just a priority but as a necessity.

We need to reinvent our religion, we have lost the core, the essence of it. ■

“Programs like ZYNA, Return to Roots and a thousand such programs should be supported and encouraged to flourish.”



Gev F. Nentin [nentin@optonline.net] has served as President of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) for 12 years. He is a senior banking executive with a 30 year track record of success.

Here are some suggestions to keep our next generation “within the fold.”

Develop online religious education programs.

1. Zarathushtis and non-Zarathushtis alike must be taught and made to believe in a higher being first. The current generation is turned off religion, any religion. I would rather see them accept a God first.
2. Curricula must be relevant to the 21st century.
3. Show a comparative study with other religions. Proudly publicize richness of our religion.
4. Develop programs catering to non-Zarathushti spouses.
5. Programs must be easily accessible via the internet.
6. Availability of these programs must be widely publicized.

Accept and welcome non-Zarathushti spouses and their children.

1. Welcome non-Zarathushti spouses and children of intermarried couples into our fold.
2. Encourage groups like ZIG (Zarathushti Interfaith Group in NY) to organize and flourish.
3. Allow, facilitate and celebrate non-Zarathushti spouses to do their Navjotes if desired. Why not have pre-arranged and publicized special days when non-Zarathushti spouses can have their Navjotes done?
4. Have navjote prayers translated and made available in English, so worshippers understand what they are praying. No non-Zarathushti will mumble words they do not understand. This is imperative if non-Zarathushti spouses are to have their Navjote done.
5. Encourage children of intermarriages to assimilate amongst us.

Encourage and facilitate our youth to meet and marry.

1. Programs such as ZYNA, Return to Roots and a thousand such programs should be supported and encouraged to flourish. This will pay enormous dividends.
2. Establish a data base of eligible Zarathushti youth of marriageable age.
3. Match-making should not be a dirty concept. It has worked for millenia in india. professional couples find it hard to meet other Zarathushtis. ■

“The expansion of para-mobed program needs to be elevated to top priority ... we need good religious teachers, both male and female, born in priestly class or not ...”



Framroze K. Patel [goolbai@comcast.net] of New Jersey, served as FEZANA president (1998 – 2002) and was on the FEZANA-ZAH team for the World Zarathushti Congress in 2000. Framroze served as the first Treasurer for FEZANA, and has continued to lend his accounting expertise to set up standards and practices for FEZANA, WZCC, ZAGNY and other organizations.

Intermarriages. In this country personal and individual freedom is treasured. Zarathushtra’s message emphasizes the ethical and moral principles of good and evil, freedom of choice. The Scripture also accentuates *“Harken with your best counsel, contemplate with your best judgment...”*.

In Ha. 53, *The Wedding Songs and Sermon of Zarathushtra*, the Prophet grants freedom of choice, and in describing the good qualities of Jamaspa, says that he (the father) believes Jamaspa is the appropriate one to be her husband. He asks her to deliberate on this matter herself, and act only as her own wisdom may dictate. The last line of Ha. 53.3 reads: *“That she may take counsel with enlightened understanding”* [*The Hymns of Zarathushtra by Dinshaw J. Irani, 1994.*]

Hence, it would be duplicitous to tell our children that when it comes to selection of one’s life partner you do not have freedom of choice and cannot “use your best judgment”.

Assimilation. We have heard the age old refrain that “I do not understand what I am praying.” We have enough literature in English and Farsi to understand the message of the Prophet. Our heritage has survived for more than fourteen centuries primarily because of the service of the priestly class. The expansion of the Para-mobed program needs to be elevated to top priority.

We need religious teachers, both female, and male, both born in priestly class, and non-priestly class. Let us look at Swami Narayan ‘panth’ – a prominent social and religious organization in India. Its principal objective is to serve humanity. Swamis are not born into a privileged family; Swamis become swamis because they choose that, of their free will.

Let every meeting or celebration, be it social functions or a pot-luck group begin with prayer, however, short, or in any language: “Grant us the wisdom to speak the words that should be spoken, the prudence to do what needs to be done, and grant us acumen, grace, dignity to fashion our lives according to the demand of changing times.” ■

“Intermarriages have been and will be the greatest factor leading to future decline of our religion and community.

Er. Parvez P. Patel [udvada@aol.com] was born in Udvada in a mobed family privileged to perform Buoy ceremony of Iranshah, studied in Cama Athornan Institute, and graduated from Bombay University in Commerce and Law. He has been in USA since 1970 working as an Accountant and Financial Planner and taking care of religious needs of Zarathushtis in Tri-State area of NY, NJ and CT.

After several requests from the editor, I am expressing my views, however unpleasant they may sound to the reader. Born and raised in Udvada, and trained in a Zarathushti seminary in Bombay, my views have always been orthodox and traditional. Having lived in the Western world for over four decades, I have observed a tremendous amount of lack and latitude in thought and action among my co-religionists, Behdins and Mobeds alike, in their day to day observance of religious beliefs and practices.



Whereas the older generations have done their utmost to preserve traditional values, cultures and customs, it seems to me that the new generation of Zarathushtis have compromised on those values disproportionately, which can be seen from giving up on practicing whatever little prayers they learnt to qualify for their Navjotes, to not wearing *sudreh* and *kushti*, to no desire for knowing more about their religion and to having very free and liberal views about choosing non Zarthushtis as their life time partners.

Intermarriages among Zarathushtis have been and will be the greatest factor leading to future decline of our religion and community. Today's youngsters do not understand (nor care) about how intermarriages have adversely affected their parents, families, community and finally themselves. As a priest, I have been asked by parents, to convince their children and change their minds, but to no avail. Most, if not every parent has urged and begged their children to marry among the fold, as they grew up. I congratulate those who have listened and put in the time and effort to find suitable Zarathushti partners from around the globe, and feel sorry for those who have sought the easy way, blaming their parents for bringing them into a mixed culture, conveniently forgetting that their parents too grew up in a similar culture.

Intermarriages have increased from 24% to 60% last year, in North America, and the trend in India is not much better. I sincerely urge today's younger generation to think, not about their self-centered, selfish urges and desires, but to think seriously about what would happen to our community in the next couple of generations, if this trend continues. ***My sincere appeal to my own priestly community is to refrain from performing such inter marriages, and Navjotes of their children. Amen! ■***

“The promise to Jadiv Rana does not affect us in North America, nor does the sword of Islam hang over our heads.”



Fariborz Rahnmoon [fariborz.rahnamoon@gmail.com] of Vancouver, BC, is author, researcher and webmaster of www.ancientiran.com.

In 1854 when Maneckji Limji Hataria went to Iran he found his fellow Zarathushtis in a dire state. They were harassed and abused and persecuted by the law and by the general public, for not being Muslim. This had caused many to convert and their numbers to dwindle. Maneckji reported that there were only 7,711 Zarathushtis left in Iran.

With financial help from the Parsis and political help of the British, Maneckji paid to the King of Iran the dreaded Jizya tax in a lump sum and procured freedom from paying the tax for ever, not only for the Zarathushtis but also other minorities. Thereafter the population grew to what we are today, in spite of the atrocities and continuous abduction of Zarathushti girls.

The infant mortality rates in those days was very high. The average mortality age was low. There were many other drawbacks like economic backwardness of the nation, the lack of employment and business restriction for non Muslims. None of those became a factor against growth in population.

Before the baby boomers, families were very large -- in spite of high infant mortality rates, the children that lived averaged to four plus. The population grew in the generations that followed. Then came the family planning era and we did not realize that as a minority community we needed to keep growing -- instead we followed the “*Hum Do Hamare Do*” plan better than the majority. Plus orthodox beliefs and the fear of Islamic laws, respectively, made us abandon those that married outside the community.

Our community in North America is now becoming religiously knowledgeable and open minded. It is up to our community leaders to be brave, not be influenced by systems and beliefs of their home countries and release the brakes. The promise to Jadiv Rana does not affect us in North America, nor does the sword of Islam hang over our heads.

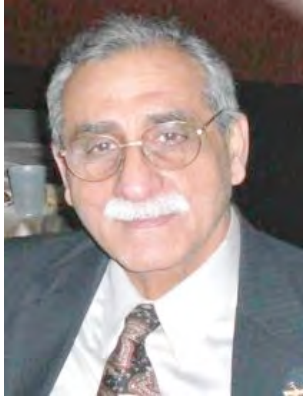
We can start with embracing the spouse and children of mixed marriages by having a system of assimilation and education.

We also need to support research of and promote the pre-Sasanian teachings of Zarathushtra and re-educate ourselves.

We are known for our generosity -- we should also learn to share the abundant wisdom of Zarathushtra, for that is what he propounds in his Gathas [28.5 FR]:

*Asha when you gain, With minds good use,
Having realized wisdom, The path to righteousness
The ultimate message of Wisdom, Through words excellent,
We shall turn (convert), Those who do not know (With tongue) By speaking ■*

“Come together as a worldwide ‘community without borders’ and commit to grow and prosper – perhaps through an entrepreneurial renaissance.”



Rohinton Rivetna [Rivetna@aol.com] of Chicago, has devoted a lifetime building infrastructure for the Zarathushti community in North America. His involvement with Interfaith work has brought recognition and respect for the Zarathushti religion.

It does not take any profound demographic studies to conclude the obvious; one simply needs to observe a sampling of families (both inter- and intra-married) around you. How many of their next generation will remain practicing Zarathushtis? And how many will retain bonds with the community? The conclusion is inescapable. The situation looks even dimmer when one looks at succeeding generations down the line.

Many of us are too busy establishing ourselves – at home, at work, at school, amidst our new neighbors. Too busy to pass on (albeit modified somewhat for the time and place) our rich heritage, history, and religion to our next generation. Too busy to realize that the responsibility for the very existence of the **religion** and **community** could well be in our hands.

Where do we go from here?

We may build Infrastructure in North America, but if we cannot inspire succeeding generations to carry the torch, it shall have been in vain. We may build aviaries to arrest the decline of the vulture population in India, but in the words of the Duke of Edinburgh (London, 2011), "if there are not enough Zoroastrians for the vultures to eat" it shall have been in vain.

Maybe we should strive to revive those traits that were the hallmark of our community. We were proud of our heritage and carried our identity as a badge of honor. We were observant of our ritual practices, customs and traditions, We were entrepreneurs, which made us prosperous. We were respected and recognized for our Industry, Integrity and Philanthropy.

Knowing the value our community has brought to humanity over centuries past, and the potential it holds for the future, should give us the vigor and strength to redouble our efforts. We can come together as a worldwide "Community without Borders" and commit to grow and prosper – perhaps through an **entrepreneurial renaissance**. The prerequisite is that we look at ourselves as a global community, not insular – what happens to us in India or Iran or North America or anywhere, happens to all of us. We are too small in numbers to fragment.

A sense of a new beginning and vibrancy must fill the air. Allow all ideas, all initiatives to flourish. Allow the garden to grow rich in diversity as nature itself, the more diverse the richer it gets, but all in complete harmony, as does nature all around us.

Let us inspire our next generation, and with redoubled effort make our community blossom and grow, knowing that the hand of Ahura Mazda is ever beckoning. ■

“What is taught and modeled at home is more important than any institutionalized program that we may devise ...”

Aban Rustomji [aban@coatingindustries.com] a member of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston, is the Chair of the FEZANA Information Research Education Services (FIRES) committee.



We built centers and prayer halls and met at congresses, held Sunday School to impart religious knowledge and more. Now we want to ensure that the younger generation should stay in our fold and perpetuate our centuries long beliefs.

We, the parent generation, came to North America to embrace the new world. The premise was and still is that in North America we have the freedom to fulfill our potential. If that holds true for others, like it does for me, then why do we need to reinforce an identity and practices so closely tied to the lands we left? Our younger generations are not finding Zarathushti spouses, not because they don't try. It is because their efforts just do not work in such a small community. This generation is an amazing, inspirational group who run programs like Young Professionals by ZYNA and Zoroastrian Return to Roots. They are community-minded, professionally driven, and ethically aware. They have used the unlimited potential of North America to make in a real impact, and they are

keenly interested in addressing the needs of our community in their own manner.

What can we do to address the concerns?

First, **provide rich community events** where we can learn about who we are in a vibrant relevant setting -- dynamic community events allow individuals to decide what's important for them so they can make the relevant connections for their families. What is taught and modeled at home is more important than any institutionalized program that we may devise. An example: My 5 year old grandson wanted to know why he had to visit the Cyrus Cylinder exhibit when he would rather play baseball on a sunny afternoon. His mother started to explain the 'history of kings,' but that was of no interest to him. But then she told him that he and Cyrus had something in common. What was it? "It was," my daughter said, "that you and Cyrus say the same prayer, and that prayer may have inspired him to be a great king." He happily spent the afternoon at the museum.

Second, we need to **welcome non-Zarathushti spouses** and see them as an integral part of the religious and social community. If a family unit is not considered as a 'whole,' then we can come up with all sorts of plans and blue prints, but in the end we will not get the desired result. ■

“... promote the philosophy of Zarathushtra ... especially to non-Zarathushti Iranians ... encourage and welcome conversions into our faith aggressively all over the world”



Sohrab Salamatipour [salamatipour@yahoo.com] is President of the Board of Trustees of the California Zoroastrian Center (CZC). He was born in Taft, Yazd, Iran, graduated as a medical doctor from Shiraz University, moved to USA, specialized in Pediatrics, and lives in California with his wife and two children.

The population of Zarathushtis in Iran has diminished for numerous reasons over the past 15 decades: it dropped from several million people to less than 60,000 after the Islamic revolution in 1978, and continued to decrease to its current estimate of 20,000 followers because of immigration out of Iran and into various parts of the world. If we happen to notice an increase in the number of Zarathushtis in North America, it is due to immigration rather than any real growth in our community.

The current growth pattern of Zarathushtis is so slow that even if no more Zarathushtis were to convert to a different religion, still the chance of survival of our faith is very low and soon our faith would cease to exist

unless we make major changes in our community's growth right away.

I believe Zarathushti leaders, including both sides of extremists, should come together and discuss this urgent issue and its solutions, which are clearly divided into three main parts:

- We should increase the number of Zarathushti centers throughout North America and encourage our existing Zarathushtis to come together and educate our children as well as future generations.

- We should strongly promote the philosophy of Zarathushtra as much as possible, especially to non-Zarathushti Iranians who would be eager to learn about their own ancestral culture.
- We should encourage and welcome conversions into our faith aggressively all over the world in order to increase the Zarathushti population. ■

“Perhaps our destiny is always to be the ‘sugar in the milk’ and bring sweetness and enlightenment into the lives of those around us!”

Nazneen Thanawalla Spliedt [nazeher@aol.com], originally from Karachi, and her husband Ehler have lived and worked around the world, before coming to ‘retire’ in San Francisco in 1998. They are both actively involved with their local association – ZANC, where Nazneen is the President. They also share their other interest, The Society for Asian Art, to which they devote a lot of their time.



Good thinking community leaders in all regions where Zarathushtis reside are worrying about our falling numbers, not only as a demographic but more importantly, as active followers of the faith .

With increasing numbers in our community in multi-faith/multi-ethnic marriages, which will be inevitable, it is important to welcome the spouses and their children into the community with active outreach on the part not only of their extended families but the local associations and FEZANA.

FEZANA could set up a committee or panel devoted to eliminating or reducing the challenges faced by couples and children in inter-faith marriages. Local priests together with the local association board members could go out of their way to welcome and involve these families into our community events and perhaps give religious/cultural courses specially designed for people who have not grown up in the Parsi/Zarathushti way.

We have to accept the fact that with immigration comes assimilation . When our ancestors came from Iran to India they also took up the customs and traditions of another country and changed the face of our religious practices. Perhaps our destiny is always to be the ‘sugar in the milk’ and bring an iota of sweetness and enlightenment into the lives of those around us!

To keep the Good Religion of Zarathushtra alive, it is time to think and act dispassionately about our future and set up an apparatus that will allow people to join the Zarathushti faith in good conscience, so that the precepts and ideas of the faith can truly be a Gathic faith as envisioned by Zarathushtra. ■

“The best way to get the family... to be active in the community, is to ask them to volunteer their services in the area of their expertise.”



Dinaz Weber [kenanddina@yahoo.com] is President of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago. Dinaz and her husband Ken have been active members and served the Chicago Zarathushti community for many years.

The best way to get the family (whether it is an inter-marriage or whether both are Zarathushtis) to participate and be active in the community, is to welcome them, get them involved, and ask them to volunteer their services in the area of their expertise. The responsibility lies on both the Zarathushti spouse as well as the Association and community members.

Though I am married to a non-Zarathushti, I wanted my children to grow up as Zarathushtis, so I made special efforts to involve myself as well as my family in community matters. We came to the darbe mehr for children's religious classes and sleepovers regularly, even though we lived over an hour away. The third Sunday of every month was dedicated to this, regardless of conflicts with other activities that our children may be involved with. My children made friends with other Zarathushti children, we met regularly and the children bonded. We organized and participated in the annual Halloween party, the Christmas party (where my husband, Ken was Santa several times), camping trips, youth camps, youth congresses and more As parents, we enjoyed taking part in these activities for the sake of our children.

In the early days when we were building the darbe mehr, Ken helped with cleaning the grounds and cutting down trees. For years, Ken was the 'official' photographer and videographer at ZAC functions. Even today he is in charge of maintaining the ZAC website and online databases.

My strong suggestion to parents is to make the community a priority in your family's life, especially when the children are small, so they will make lifelong bonds and stay involved. ■

“Let us build Atash Kadehs in every community so our children will grow up with some spiritual understanding of our religion, and not only focus on the social side.”



Ervad Kobad Zarolia [kobadzaria@gmail.com] of Toronto, was the Founding President, and is the current President of NAMC. He has served as Executive Officer and President on the Board of ZSO, and is the founding President of OCZF and a Founding Director of WZCC.

How do we slow down the trend for Zarathushti youth to marry outside the faith? Here are some of my thoughts as a priest and a community worker.

100-150 years ago in India we as a community had adopted an idea from the Hindu culture that it was a responsibility of the parents to see that children were married by the age of 25 or so. As a community we have given up that responsibility or rather transferred it to our children, in the name of being 'modern', 'Western', 'highly educated' etc. So this trend, over the last century, has increased the rate of intermarriages, late marriages and no-marriages.

That has led to a decrease in our population where our children complain that there are not enough young people from which they can choose their partners. That, of course, leads them to look at other communities when looking for their life partner. Here it is -- the full circle!

How do we change this cycle?

1. Let's start talking about marriage early -- at the age of 16 -- in our religion classes, stressing the responsibility of your marriage to yourself, to your family, and to your community. If these facts are explained to them at an early age it will leave a lasting impression on the children
2. Talk to your children about the religion being reflective and not prescriptive -- explaining that whatever choice they make, that you will be there supporting them. However explain the pro's and con's of marrying within the community vs. outside.
3. Let the families also emphasize the same message. Interact with families of children of similar age, so they can start meeting possible life partners.
4. Let us build Atash Kadehs in every community so our children will grow up with some spiritual understanding of our religion, and not only focus on the social side. Some spiritual understanding, will make it easier for them to accept the above goals.

I wish I had this much understanding when my children were young! ■

[Thoughts from the 'Next Generation' are continued in Part II].

FEZANA JOURNAL, Fall 2013 - ONLINE ADDENDUM
ADDRESSING DEMOGRAPHICS CONCERNS IN NORTH AMERICA

THOUGHTS FROM 'NEXT GENERATION' ZARATHUSHTIS

“The first important action I would take is to do more to teach, encourage, and welcome spouses and children of mixed marriages into the Zarathushti community.”

Zareen Hakim Austin [z_creation@hotmail.com] lives in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, with her husband, Phero, and children, Rushad and Shiraz. She works as a graphic designer and enjoys volunteering in her local community, the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec.



When asked the question “Where are you from?” I usually reply that my parents are from India; or give my canned longer response -- that I was born and raised in the USA, my ethnicity is ancient Iranian/Persian, culturally I am Indian and American...and we practice the religion of pre-Islamic Iran, etc. You get the picture – it’s a mouthful!

I’m sure that many first generation Zarathushtis in the diaspora share the same dilemma. How do we revive the religion when the cultures may differ? How will my children, who are culturally Canadian, American, Quebecois and Parsi, explain their identity? How will my friends’ children, who, more often than not, come from multi-cultural or multi-faith families, explain their connection to Zoroastrianism?

The point I am trying to make is that it is not so much **where** we come from, but **what** we choose to believe in, and the kind of life we practice on a daily basis, that matters. This, along with relevant rituals, is what binds us as fellow Zarathushtis, no matter what our cultural identities may be.

I was asked to share my thoughts on these demographic concerns and to come up with a specific action to revive Zoroastrianism in North America. Without a doubt, the first important action I would take is to do more to teach, encourage, and **welcome spouses and children of mixed marriages** into the Zarathushti community. In my opinion, intermarriage is not even an issue. Let’s embrace it. We must happily welcome these families into the Agiaris and Atash Behrams to learn about our religion and to experience the beauty of prayer and rituals. We must encourage *Navjotes/Sudreh Pushees* and Zarathushti wedding ceremonies. The good news is that we are already doing this in North America, and statistics, though informal, indicate that Zoroastrianism is on the rise, despite the increase of intermarriage.

A wise and respected Zarathushti scholar in our community once told me that if a person, any person, with his/her *vohu manu* (good mind) makes the choice to believe in the principals of our great religion, it is our (fellow Zarathushtis’) **duty** to help them. Not doing so would go against Zarathushtra’s universal message and vision. If you think about it, how else could a religion and philosophy have spread throughout the ancient Persian world at one time? Many people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds were and still are Zarathushti! The same applies now.

It is sad that possibly our Parsi and Iranian cultures may gradually evolve into a new North American Zarathushti culture -- nevertheless the religion of Zarathushtra should and will live forever. ■

“The best way to engage our next generation is by becoming a living example and role model ...”

Farzin Avari [farzin.avari@gmail.com], is a graduate student working on her Masters of Arts in Teaching, Chemistry. I have the privilege of teaching Sunday School in Atlanta for the last three years.



This is an interesting topic that warrants discussion because the community should look at the situation from a different perspective. For example, we ought to think about the way we are living as Zarathushtis today, where religion is taken for granted. We have a beautiful religion, and yet few Zarathushtis take the time to understand it. What if we valued our religion as much as we encouraged our children to study in school? We need to teach our children about our faith and traditions. The best way to engage our next generation is by becoming a living example and role model (e.g., by getting involved, starting an organization, joining the Sunday school program, incorporating traditions into your life and explain them to your children). If we don't encourage learning about our faith, then how can we expect the next generation to cherish our faith?

At a teachers' workshop, a question that silenced the room was: "How many of you attended your own Navjote? Did you know what was happening during your own Navjote? Did you really understand the commitment you were making?" This question summarizes the problem we are facing. I believe that if you do not understand the religion and its customs, then why follow the faith?

I have committed myself to learning more about our faith. I believe that "from the existing religions, ... the one that is the biggest of all, the best of all, and the noblest of all, the religion of Hormazd" is for me. It took me a while to research and understand the faith before I found my drive to get involved with the Zarathushti community. Now, I teach Sunday school in Atlanta, and I try to teach the children in Atlanta about our faith and engage them in discussion so they may also one day find that Zoroastrianism is the best religion for them.

I wish adults were more active in the community. I have been given many excuses (e.g., no time, ask others) when I was actively seeking someone to help me learn more prayers, and it's disheartening to find that kind of response. I, however, am stubborn, and I will continue to search for someone to help me, but I worry about children and how they would react when they do not find role models in their lives. I wish there was a weekly adult prayer class led by priests with varying viewpoints, similar to those at other churches and bible study groups. ■

“Let us teach and help our children to focus on being the right person instead of spending time on finding the right person.”

Meher Amalsad [babameher@prodigy.net] of California, is an Inventor, Engineer, Senior Math Educator, and author of **Bread For the Head**™, whose inspirational work for humanity has been endorsed by world psychological masters. He has spoken to Fortune 500 companies and professional organizations. His message has been seen on radio, TV, cable and satellite talk shows nationally and globally. Visit <http://www.bread4thehead.com/>.

Marriage on the Carriage ©

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In 1993, while I was conducting an interactive youth forum titled: *SINGLE MINGLE WITH A TINGLE BUT NO JINGLE* at the First World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in California, a young girl stood up and said:

“Mr. Amalsad, I am having difficulty finding the right person.”

And my reflective response to her was:

“Young lady, if you shift your focus from **finding** the right person to **being** the right person, you will find that the right person will automatically gravitate towards you.”

About 6-months later she called me and said:

“Mr. Amalsad, that statement literally changed the fabric of my life. I am calling today to tell you that next month I am getting married to a Zarathushti. Thank you for sharing this wisdom with me because it really works.”

Let us teach and help our children to focus on being the right person instead of spending time on finding the right person.

Since my daughter Anahita was very little, I have always told her that I would like you to marry a Zarathushti, but if you choose not to, you will still *ALWAYS BE MY DAUGHTER* because you are my daughter first and a Zarathushti in the second place. Once she knew that on this matter she is accepted unconditionally, no strings attached, guess what? She is engaged to a Zarathushti and is extremely happy with her choice.

Marriage is not a bind but a sacred bond between two people; and we as parents need to be mindful of not to put our children in a binding relationship with us or their prospective life partner. I am a firm believer that in life, whatever you focus on expands and whatever you are looking for is looking for you. The same is true for intermarriages. Our focus should be on encouraging, not enforcing, our children to consider marrying within the fold. That is the key to building a caring, compassionate, harmonious, altruistic, committed and a prosperous family and community.

We must provide opportunities for our children to mingle within the fabric of our community, but we need to give them the freedom to choose. When they feel accepted unconditionally they will bring their children to our community without any reservations. So love them for who they are and not for whom they choose to marry, because the more your children feel valued, the better their values will be in sync with yours. This will help to promote and culminate in a productive Zarathushti Renaissance across the globe. ■

“Overall, people feel these practices are outdated and have alienated many from earnestly practicing the faith.”

Kainaz Amaria [kainazamaria@gmail.com] is a multimedia journalist for NPR, based in Washington, D.C. She has a B.A. in international relations and political science from Boston University and an M.A. in visual communication from Ohio University. In 2010 she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to Mumbai.



In May of 2013 I self published a short film titled *"Being Zoroastrian"* (<https://vimeo.com/65067357>). It was the culmination of my master's thesis in Visual Communication from Ohio University. Initially it was distributed solely to close family and friends; but it quickly spread throughout the Zarathushti community. In just two months it had received nearly 5,000 views and I have fielded responses, criticisms and concerns from all over the world.

The piece seems to have resonated with many people spanning geography, age and ideals. Some shared their own experiences with me:

"I feel like there needs to be more people like you creating films like this, to help create awareness to our religion, who we are, and our beliefs. My mom is from India, my dad from Iran, so not only have I had the "Zoroastrian" disconnect with the rest of the world, I am also torn between Iranis and Parsis. I always wanted to bring awareness to this - that we should unite as one, no one should feel confused, especially in their own faith."

While there are many contentious points in the film, there are two that have garnered considerable interest. The first is that I state one must be born into

the faith through Zarathushti parents and the other is that if a woman marries out of the fold she is shunned from raising her children Zarathushti.

I am fully aware that these practices are not defined in our scriptures. And the film does not highlight this discrepancy. This has, rightfully so, touched a nerve and sparked a lengthy dialogue in my inbox. Overall, people feel these practices are outdated and have alienated many from earnestly practicing the faith. A common sentiment is that "Sadly, we have become our own worst enemy."

My goal for the film was to capture the overall 'zeitgeist' of the Paris community through my own personal journey. I regret that I couldn't go further into Zarathushti's philosophies, which I believe transcend the contemporary issues predominantly discussed in our community. Perhaps that will be the next chapter. ■

“I want a world where the Zarathushti population grows, and the extinction elephant in the room is but a specter. Help me achieve it”

Spenta Cama [scbosco@yahoo.com] lives with her family in New York and is an active member of the ZAGNY community.



A letter to my children (and yours)

My religious observance has changed with time, but my desire to be part of the Zarathushti community hasn't. It's a basic human trait to want to belong. Your relationship with God and/or belief may change as you age, but I hope if you stray, you return and always make room in your heart and mind for Community – BE ACTIVE! Why? Because you determine what makes community – just like in politics: you have no right to complain if you don't vote.

I stopped wearing my *sudreh/kushti* in my teens – too embarrassed. Who wants to explain religion in the locker room? The habit/ritual of praying stopped, too. But I continued religious classes and loved meeting friends, maintaining community connection.

Being “old” (as you always remind me) is a benefit. I know my friends don't care what I wear, and people generally live and let live. Praying my kushti brings me peace, calms the frenzied pace and is my thanks for all, especially you. It doesn't define me, but is integral to my identity. You are Zarathushti, whether you like it or not and despite me marrying a non-Zarathushti.

Your grandparents immigrated here, bringing religion and culture with them, just like our ancestors reaching the shores of Sanjan. Granny/Papa diligently transferred the bonds from Karachi/Mumbai while striving for the American dream. My generation and yours don't have an automatic Zarathushti community (like Parsi Colony), unless we build it. We're spread out, but the effort rewards like no other: not having to explain yourself, speaking Gujarati, and, yes, telling inside Indian jokes, among a few. I don't know all the details of the traditions surrounding weddings and *Navjotes*, or the words to the *Mubarak* song the ladies sang when I got married, but know the song brought forth joyous tears.

I want a world where the Zarathushti population grows and the extinction elephant in the room is but a specter. Help me achieve it. Commit to a Zarathushti life and doing your kushti prayers regularly. Do your kids' *Navjotes* no matter whom you choose to marry, inviting your family and closest friends, but also Zarathushti community friends who love and support you.

*“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.” (Invictus, William Ernest Henley)*

Go get 'em. I love you. ■

***“... the recipe of success has already been constructed by our forefathers ...
Simply follow the traditional tenets of the Zarathushti religion.”***



Faridun Dadachanji [fkdadacha@gmail.com] was born in Anchorage, Alaska. He currently lives in San Diego and obtained his degree in Economics and Finance from the University of California, San Diego.

For generations Zarathushtis have been revered for their values, hard work, charity, and helpfulness.

In today's society, there is too much of an emphasis on numbers, demographics, statistics, projections, and forecasts.

Numbers don't inspire people, people's actions do.

Why try to discern new methodologies to augment population demographics once the recipe of success has already been constructed by our forefathers?

Multiple actions are not needed, only one is. Simply follow the traditional tenets of the Zarathushti religion. Our forefathers didn't deviate from this path; so why should we? ■

“Make Zarathushti holidays a priority. Stories of the discovery of fire at Jashan-e-Sadeh, the NouRuz table, the thanksgiving gahambars, inviting fravashis during Muktaf can be made appealing to children ...”



Farishta Murzban Dinshaw [FDinshaw@rogers.com] has taught students ranging from toddlers to seniors. Currently, she teaches in the Immigration and Settlement Studies graduate program, Ryerson University, Toronto.

One solution to the dilemma of decreasing Zarathushti population through assimilation is to increase Zarathushti education in the home. A child cannot be expected to grow up embracing a strong and deep Zarathushti identity when identity shapers are absent in the surroundings. Especially in multicultural communities, parents hold a supersized responsibility to ensure that Zarathushti values, history and heritage are passed on to their children. This takes a conscious, unwavering commitment over a long period of time.

Make a Zarathushti home a priority. From a special altar for prayers and pictures of Zarathushtra to books about Zarathushti history and religion, to tablecloths with Persepolis figures, to mugs with farohars to mealtimes, children should see evidence of their Zarathushti identity displayed in their surroundings.

Make religious education a priority. No parent says, “Soccer practice is more important so it’s okay to miss school” or “I don’t know enough about mathematics to help you, but you’ll pick it up somehow somewhere, no worries.” The same level of importance given to secular education needs to be given to religious education. Local associations can support families in this by organizing religious classes for all ages according to their interests. Art and songs may interest children but young adults may prefer ethical debates and photography projects. In its role as an umbrella organization, FEZANA should develop a universal curriculum of downloadable lesson plans, handouts, and talking-points under a specific tab on their website. The *FEZANA Journal* should have a dedicated section with information for parents and teachers.

Make Zarathushti holidays a priority. The story of the discovery of fire at Jashan-e-Sadeh, the setting of the NouRuz table, the thanksgiving ritual of gahambars, the inviting of fravashis during Muktaf can be just as appealing to children as July 4th fireworks and Santa Claus.

Make socializing with Zarathushtis a priority. Parents need to *make* opportunities for their children to meet other Zarathushtis even if this means driving two hours to attend a wedding, inviting other families over for a weekend, persuading children to attend camps and conferences organized by Zarathushti associations.

Make service and charity a priority. Parents need to exercise civic responsibility – raise funds for a worthy cause, volunteer, vote, advocate for marginalized groups, be environmentally responsible – and explain to their children how this matches the Zarathushti duty of working towards a perfect world or *freshokereti*. ■



“American youth are not used to sitting in conference halls during a Zarathushti congress and hearing elders shout at each other about how ‘mixed’ kids are not ‘real Zarathushtis.’”

Anahita Dua [Anahita.Dua@uth.tmc.edu] is a surgery resident at the Medical College of Wisconsin and an active member of the Zarathushti community, with a Parsi mother and a Sikh father.

The Guinness Book of World Records lists Zoroastrianism as a “major religion nearest extinction.” Strategies have been implemented to attempt an increase in Zarathushti numbers, such as attempts to have youth to mingle at conferences in the hopes to sparking a union. Frankly, that was never the solution and the key to preventing extinction of our religion is obvious, as indicated by the FEZANA demographics study which shows: there has been an upward trend in intermarriages; and over 25% of the children of intermarriages

are not following the Zarathushti religion.

These two facts are not independent of each other. I am a child of an intermarried couple. My mother strived to teach us Zarathushti ways and my father made no attempt to deter her. My brother, sister and I are intelligent, contributing members to society that would make great additions to the Zarathushti religion. From my mother came the three of us and assuming we each have 2-3 children that would be 9-12 solid Zarathushtis that would carry on our faith into the next generation. But that didn't happen. Instead, the Zarathushti religion will get maybe 2-4 of us, if that, and who knows if our kids will pass it on or not.

And why is that? It is because American youth are not used to sitting in conference halls during a Zarathushti congress and hearing elders shout at each other about how "mixed" kids are not "real Zarathushtis." It is hard enough explaining our religion to other Americans, we should not have to also explain ourselves to our own people. So what's the outcome? Those "mixed" kids who carry the Zarathushti banner with pride in the beginning sour. They marry Christians, Jews, Hindus, or Muslims and are welcomed into the partner's homes of worship. More importantly, their children are welcomed into the other religion. Naturally, the gravitation to the new and welcoming religion is such that Zoroastrianism becomes an afterthought, mentioned occasionally and eventually erased from the family's lineage.

So what's the solution to our dwindling numbers? Recognize they are *NOT* dwindling. Zarathushtis are marrying, but having babies that are not being welcomed. If we continue to have our "mixed" kids sit outside on the steps of our fire temples as only our grandparents go inside to pray because we are not "allowed" inside in case a "real" Zarathushti "is offended" nothing will change and we will indeed go extinct. ■

“We must embrace our diversity, celebrate our assimilation, and strengthen our inter-connectedness to remain relevant and serve as responsible stewards of our faith for future generations.”

Jim Engineer [jim.engineer@e-rainmaker.com follow him @jimengineer] of Chicago, is a founding member of the NextGenNow leadership team nextgennow.org and has been active in North American Zarathushti affairs for 20+ years. He founded e-Rainmaker Public Relations in 1999 and was named one of the 'True Cybersecurity Influencers on Twitter' in 2013.



Opinion: Assimilation + Inclusion = Hope for the Future

The single greatest challenge facing the North American Zarathushti community is the unequivocal inclusion of non-Zarathushti spouses and their children into all North American Zarathushti communities. While the broad majority of North American Zarathushti communities have adopted inclusion as a mantra and practice, the elephant in the room remains.

It's sad in the year 2013, to read that the highly-respected ZAH-Houston, a vibrant, fast-growing and talented community, has to draw a sharp distinction on its inclusion policy (housed on Harvard University's Pluralism Project site):

“... The moderate American position, held by many ZAH members, would allow the non-Zoroastrian spouse to attend meetings and would gladly accept the offspring into the religious fold. However, several priests and lay members refuse to accept anyone with mixed background. One very orthodox Houston-area priest will not allow Zoroastrians who married out of the community to attend his ceremonies. Given the small size of the congregation and the low birth rate, many young adults (and their parents) see intermarriage as very likely; exclusionary policies like these are seen by the some members as a

serious threat to the continued existence of the community. . .

This dangerous precedent openly excludes non-Zarathushti spouses and their children from rituals, practices or prayers ceremonies they perform; any perpetuation of similar exclusionary practices threatens our North American Zarathushti existence.

Today, a number of Zarathushti communities are actively considering raising capital to enrich their Darbe Mehr's spirituality and beauty. Construction of Atash Kadehs in particular, featuring perpetually-burning fires, forces the question of inclusion for non-Zarathushti spouses and children into these 'elevated' centers of spirituality.

Simultaneously, three socio-cultural gaps continue to widen, threatening to dissolve and dilute our relevance as a North American religious community:

1. Next generation leadership, participation and engagement.
2. Proactive education and social outreach to non-Zarathushti spouses and future generations.
3. Active and ongoing bridge-building initiatives between Iranian and Parsi communities.

FEZANA must engage in immediate and proactive leadership to help bridge the schisms and divisions that exist in the undercurrent of North American Zarathushti life.

Let's respect our cultural and ideological differences, but not at the cost of spiraling deeper into a downward population trajectory. We must embrace our diversity, celebrate our assimilation, and strengthen our interconnectedness to remain relevant and serve as responsible stewards of our faith for future generations. ■

“We are a special, unique, group of people. We can't allow what our ancestors fought for, just to survive, to dissipate into the annals of history.”



Dr. Tanaz R. Ferzandi [tferzandi@tuftsmedicalcenter.org] was raised in Kansas City. She is the Director of Urogynecology and Pelvic Reconstructive Surgery at Tufts Medical Center. She lives in Boston with her husband Dr. Jeffrey Zarin and their 5-year old twins Sohrab Isaac and Tehmina Rose.

I am Persian. I am Zarathusti. This is how I define myself. This is how I often introduce myself, especially living in the Northeast where my name is a clear indication of my heritage. I grew up in the Midwest where, by chance, my father Rustom K. Ferzandi, and his dear friend Dr. Daryoush Jahanian ‘found’ each other and realized there were a handful of Zarathusti families around. They formed an association that thrives in spite of small numbers, but is as cohesive as it can get. The children meet for regular religion and prayer sessions. They do not draw lines between Iranians and Parsis. They are all Zarathusti.

I speak from experience because my father is Iranian, his family comes from Yazd, and my mother is Parsi. I have noted in other cities, there are lines drawn – and it truly saddens me. It is an old saying, that together we stand, divided we will fall. I feel this is truer today than since the persecutions and executions that destroyed our faith in the years after 648 CE. It is not due to the hateful violence and death that ensued then, but rather the indwelling apathy and external circumstances of my generation.

I was asked what I felt, as a member of the ‘younger’ generation, would be important in keeping our faith alive. We are today, more than ever before, marrying outside of our religion and moving away from practicing our faith. I say – look to our fellow Jews, we can learn from them. We have similar paths in history – yet, they thrive (even in small populations worldwide) because they consider themselves *JEWS* first, then nationality, ethnicity, creed, whatever. It is not only their religion, but also their identity. It is what bonds each and every one of them.

When I speak to someone who actually knows what a Zarathusti is, they speak of our religion with awe – they understand what our ancestors went through and what it has taken over a thousand years to just survive. They respect the (then very advanced) concepts that the Persian kings lent to the educational, state and political thoughts of the time. They understand that those very kings also enforced tolerance – something that was not the norm then.

When I had my children, I purposely chose Persian names from the Shah Nameh, a source of pride they will feel and carry with them and their identity. We are a special, unique, group of people. We can't allow what our ancestors fought for, just to survive, to dissipate into the annals of history. ■

“Our religion is beautiful from several angles. The simple, yet profound, insight it offers is a great touchstone in life.”

Dr. Natalie Gandhi [invania@encouragenewbiz.com] is a Philosopher and Entrepreneur. She serves currently as a World Director of WZCC. **Rusi D. Gandhi** [RusiGandhi@gmail.com] is a Real Estate Broker, Investor and Developer. He is a past World Director of WZCC. Rusi and Natalie live in New Jersey with their baby Asha.

Zarathushti Demographics: A Science, A Spirit, and A Vision

by Natalie and Rusi D. Gandhi, © June, 2013.



How do demographics take us into the survival and flourishing of our people? Consider it as a science with a positive spirit and vision.

As **an empirical science**, demographics is as good as the assumptions it presumes. It would be very interesting to see empirically-based assessments of Zarathushti demographics with comparative models using different, but plausible, assumptions. For example, if we answered "Who is a Zarathushti?" by including the population of children born to any Parsi mothers in Mumbai, what are the comparative outcomes? We are fortunate to see Zarathushtis who are not Parsi, but instead from the Iranian side, some who look as if they may have just stepped out of a stone relief at Persepolis. What happens if our demographic modeling is built from assuming a once-extant and very large Achaean population of Zarathushtis? Why?

A Spirit. If a young girl, call her Anahita for example, grows up in a good place that happens to have no other Parsis but her immediate family, Anahita might look twice for unusual ways to build connections with people. Thus, Anahita might look to the inner spirit and soul of another, whether that individual be Zarathushti or not. For those who are not Zarathushti, perhaps Anahita looks for the part of the person so similar to the Zarathushtian concepts of Truth and Righteousness that she can build upon this shared kinship with the person. Anahita, by her own good cheer and strength, might bring out and help to magnify the Zarathushtian-themed aspects of her fellow friend.

A Vision. Our religion is beautiful from several angles. The simple, yet profound, insight it offers is a great touchstone in life. One way in which the religion is beautiful is that it offers unending occasion for the study of the same. Throughout life, one can always learn more of the good religion. Knowing this about her religion, Anahita awaits its deeper answers to life's perplexities while enjoying the gifts it gives her today. This confidence in the religion, that there will always be something new, beautiful, and meaningful to learn regarding it, helps her as the religion's advocate. She may not have all the answers to a friend's queries, but she has enough to offer a thoughtful, kind insight.

Recently, it was reported that the Amish in America double their population every twenty-two years. Our people should look at examples wherein small and distinctive minority populations do unusual and successful things. We should keep learning, about others and about ourselves. ■

“My Russian-Jewish husband and I, have been surprised at how much we feel our families have such similar values... family-first, humility, ... waste-not-want-not, loyalty to your community ...”



Nina Godiwalla [ngodiwalla@yahoo.com] of Houston, an MBA from Wharton, is CEO of MindWorks, and has been sought out as a leadership expert by prominent institutions like NASA, the White House, and the Smithsonian. She is also the bestselling author of **Suits: A Woman on Wall Street** and is featured in major media – USA Today, TIME, Forbes, MSNBC and CNN.

I was asked during the Q&A session of one of my speaking events, “I noticed at the end of your book you mentioned you’re married to a Russian. Can you share with us the cross cultural challenges you face?” I found myself pausing for a long time. I could think of challenges in my marriage immediately—he multi-tasks when I speak so it doesn’t feel like he’s listening, he turns the TV too loud, and he takes too many weekend naps. More came to mind, but I’ll spare you. But cross-cultural? The only thing I could think of was that he and his family all speak in Russian when I’m around. On very rare occasions when I hear my name in the conversation, I find it annoying. That’s all I could think of.

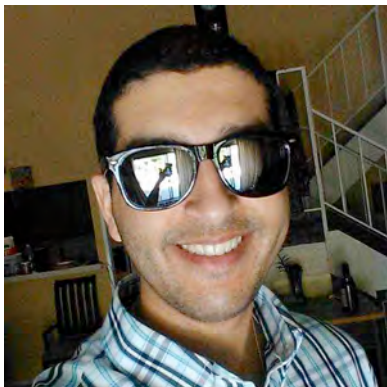
Both, my Russian-Jewish husband and I, have been surprised at how much we feel our families have such similar values. Despite the obvious nationality differences, our parents are both American immigrants. It has taken us a while

to articulate some of the similar values: family-first, humility, don't count your chickens before they hatch, waste-not-want-not, and loyalty to your community. These are just a few.

When I went to Russia and met my husband's great aunt. It was as if my grandmother had come to visit me. She took out her best food. Spent all day cooking from scratch and despite my hefty portions, while we ate, she smiled at me and asked my husband in Russian, "Why isn't she eating? Eat more. Eat more." At the end of our visit she gave me a card with a Russian Orthodox saint on it and told me this angel would take care of me. It sits next to the card my grandmother gave me of Sai Baba.

My husband and I are both part to tight knit religions-- Zoroastrianism and Judiasm. Both our families know what it's like to be discriminated against. And what it is like to be part of a tight-knit community that, at times, may not be accepting of others. My husband and I are so excited that in our hometown, Houston, the Jewish and Zarathushti community centers are so close by. Our children will be a part of both centers and learn about the richness of both religions and cultures. When our kids get conflicting information, we'll have to explain that not everyone in this world believes the same things. And that this is the beauty of our world. It's diverse. You always have something to learn from someone else. ■

“The assimilation that we all face living in North America shouldn't replace everything that has been passed down to us ... our culture and most importantly our religion.”



Mehernosh Gundevia [mgundevia@gmail.com] was born in Pune, India , has lived in Toronto, and currently resides in Irvine, California. He has a Masters in Mechanical Engineering and is working as an engineer. He was Youth Coordinator for ZAC for four years and is heavily involved with the local youth and the Association.

These questions and this general discussion tend to be very controversial amongst our community and yet no matter what the general outcome it will still not do much to change the status quo.

My personal belief is that our population relies heavily on the previous generation and their actions. I feel modern society has placed too much pressure on assimilation into local culture. It's happening to such an extreme that we are erasing the foundation on why we have lasted all these years --

which is our culture and most importantly our religion. This places the burden of our future on the shoulders of the elders and parents of the current youth.

The assimilation that we all face living in North America shouldn't replace everything that has been passed down to us. We shouldn't forget what our ancestors went through to preserve our religion, and yet we so easily forget. Children and youth are only reflections of their parents and their environment. If the parents share the interest and passion in furthering their knowledge about our religion, then the same will be mirrored in their children. ■

“Our realities have changed from when we lived in India or Iran and it is time to adapt to our new realities by concretizing our acceptance of others.”



Zenobia Homavazir [zenobia_homavazir@hotmail.com] at left with daughter Anaita, is a social worker, born and raised in Toronto. She and her husband Blair have three children that they are raising within the Zarathushti faith.

Our declining population is a monumental challenge to future generations. However, what appears to be lacking in order to address this challenge, is a leadership body that is empowered to make decisions for Zarathushtis around the world. Without consensus and unity, our community is divided into many factions. How do we move forward without a clear idea of where we are going?

We need a clearly articulated vision of our future and a plan to achieve it. This needs to include **how we define a Zarathushti**. In North America there is massive ambiguity around conversion,

interfaith marriages, and children of mixed marriages where the mother is Zarathushti. Whether or not we agree with these practices, they are a reality and ignoring it will not address our declining population.

Eight years ago I married a Canadian, who shared similar values and ideas about the world. Despite finding my life partner I felt tremendous guilt, driven by the pressure to marry within the community and keep our religion alive. We need a paradigm shift so that interfaith marriages are viewed as an opportunity to share our faith and celebrate love. If interfaith relationships are accepted, and the couple welcomed, the likelihood increases that the family will participate in the Zarathushti community.

I have three beautiful children, who we are raising as Parsi. I speak to them in Gujarati, they are learning their prayers, they are taught our teachings and attend our functions. Yet formally, and by traditionalists, they will not be accepted as Zarathushtis. I have a hard time explaining this part of our culture to others. To me, my children are no less Zarathushti than a male who married outside our faith, yet for some reason they will not be treated the same.

In addition, issues will continue to arise as demographics change in our community. As infertility issues become more common, will we embrace children who are adopt or conceived through donor eggs or sperm?

I believe that our community needs leadership and vision to grow. We need a more inclusive definition of who is a Zarathushti and we need to embrace new members of our community. If we don't, we risk alienating these individuals. Our realities have changed from when we lived in India or Iran and it is time to adapt to our new realities by concretizing our acceptance of others. ■

“The Zarathushti pioneers of North America have laid a solid foundation for future generations to build on ... it is now up to the next generation.”



Kayras Darayush Irani [ikayras@hotmail.com] has been a youth volunteer with the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia since 2009. He enjoys his work with the community and appreciates all the volunteers he works with on a regular basis, all with the simple goal of bringing Zarathushtis together in the spirit of unity and harmony.

After reviewing Mrs. Rivetna's extensively researched demographic study, one of the questions to me, was "What can FEZANA do to reduce and possibly reverse these disturbing trends leading to assimilation?" My response is, "Hasn't FEZANA done enough?" In the last 26 years, FEZANA has worked tirelessly to encourage Zarathushtis across all generations to be actively involved in countless ways. Some of the many opportunities for Zarathushtis to get involved are through Congresses, Youth Retreats, United Nations work, Religious/Avesta Studies, ZYNA, YLEP, Sports Olympics and this list goes on and on. It is now up to the next generation.

The Zarathushti pioneers of North America have laid a solid foundation for future generations to build on. Whether a Zarathushti joins a committee, or if they attend a large scale event in a different city, almost every year, FEZANA has always had a common goal of bringing Zarathushtis together to network, socialize, reunite, develop friendships, and hopefully bond in matrimony. Most importantly these avenues allow individuals to reflect on their religion and culture or learn more about it. This common ground gives so many Zarathushtis a sense of security, and also reinforces their identity.

I am not a political person in anyway whatsoever, and personally, I never give my opinion about any matters relating to intermarriage at all. At first, I was seriously hesitating writing a response to this question. However, the simple truth is, I cannot avoid the topic forever. Personally, I believe that it is up to each and every individual to chose a path, and decide how they want to live their life. The opportunities are available to them, they simply have to choose what path they want to pursue and follow it!

I know I am on the fence with this issue, but if they choose to get involved with events or projects hosted through their local association, FEZANA or any other global organization, I truly believe that by participating and volunteering in these events, each individual can and will meet their partner within the faith.

If however, a Zarathushti chooses to pursue a partner outside the faith, that is their decision as an adult and individual, and we must all learn to accept that choice. Through acceptance, we prevent isolation. Our acceptance as a community gives these intermarried families the encouragement to have their children develop an identity by learning about the teachings of Ahura Mazda. What will we decide to do within the community? The choice is ours. ■

“If we adopt an attitude of acceptance and we understand that a strong, vibrant and evolving culture will protect the underlying faith, we will naturally grow in numbers and strength - while preserving what matters.”



Persius Kanga [pkanga@gmail.com] was born in Mumbai, India; raised and educated in Toronto, Canada and now resides in San Jose, California. He is married and has two children.

What will it take to bring about a Zarathushti renaissance in North America? Two elements come to mind:

- The role of a transformative culture in preserving faith, and
- Accepting and leveraging inevitable change to benefit our culture and protect our faith.

The Role of Transformative Culture: Our cultural underpinnings in India evolved over time and are different from our co-religionists in Iran. For many centuries, our culture evolved and thrived in India. It may stand to reason that our ability to sustain an ‘evolving’ culture in India sheltered our faith – and

made it possible for the religion to continue. It may also stand to reason that if a culture is abhorrent to change or is inflexible, it loses its ability to adequately shelter the faith or the underlying philosophy. Culture is certainly linked to the Zarathushti faith in that it forms a protective layer around faith, philosophy and religion – allowing the faith to flourish. Understanding this link and that a flexible culture may actually help sustain faith, philosophy and religion, will position us to grow our community and ‘gain’ numbers and strength – rather than losing individuals to the Diaspora.

Acceptance and Leveraging of Change: We have an incredible opportunity to enhance our numbers in North America and beyond. If we adopt an attitude of acceptance and we understand that a strong, vibrant and evolving culture will protect the underlying faith, we will naturally grow in numbers and strength - while preserving what matters. The key is to leverage an evolving culture to grow our numbers, not stifle growth by rejecting the evolution of the culture. Please note that even if new-comers were not allowed entry to the religion, cultural change would still occur – as has happened in India and elsewhere. The point is to embrace the change and turn it into a positive element – rather than fighting it.

The debates of ‘whether’ to accept new-comers to the religion are themselves a deterrent to growth. Many Zarathushti individuals tire quickly of such debates – and if they or their spouse or children are on the fence, it is obvious which side they will fall to. If, however, we project a welcoming message, the chances are much higher that we grow our numbers and continue to be a relevant force in this world.

Historically, there must have been acceptance of new cultures and new-comers to the religion; else it would not have been possible for Zoroastrianism to be the state religion of the Persian Empire. ■

“Hold forums to stimulate intergenerational dialogue ... take it to the next level with FB, Skype, Twitter where ‘youth’ can share experiences, concerns, thoughts, ambitions, and goals.”

Zeeba S. Kayani [Zeeba.Kayani@uth.tmc.edu] is the Contracts and Grants Specialist for the division of Pediatrics at The University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. She is currently a mentor for the ZAH Middle Group where she co-leads Sunday school classes.

The focus and the reason I have chosen to put my thoughts to paper is to energize and empower youth to be proud to be Zarathushti. The NextGenNow Inter-Generational session at the 2010 NAZC was a booming success. My experience provided me with an insight that the ‘youth’ of North America 1) do have a voice, 2) are hungry to impact the community, 3) want to be heard and respected, and 4) are proud to be Zarathushtis.

First, on a local level, I propose that our Associations have monthly forums between youth and young adults, on what it means to be Zarathushti in North America. There are many parents that prefer to involve their children in non-Zarathushti cultural activities, and choose not to make the same commitment to Zarathushti activities. To help them commit to this forum, I recommend that it be scheduled before or after Sunday school, which in Houston is



only once a month. These forums would specifically address concerns of community bonding, prevention of disenchantment, youth engagement, and stimulating intergenerational dialogue. Solidarity between the generations **should** be a shared responsibility. It's crucial that the youth members of our Associations feel welcomed, confident, valued, and respected. These forums can unite generations and help build a personal and community identity while encouraging tolerance and acceptance.

I am aware, there are some associations that do encourage such forums, but why not take it to the next level! With FB, Skype, and Twitter, city/state lines have become redundant. Tap into the youth's passion for social media which will allow a flow of ideas, provide an outlet where they can share their experiences, concerns, thoughts, ambitions, and goals. Using Skype or hosting an open forum webinar on a national level, bi-annually can be a great gateway for Zarathushti Associations and smaller Zarathushti communities in North America to develop lasting relationships.

What do all Generations want? It's an important question that needs to be addressed by every Zarathushti in North America. The future lies in the next generation. Their upbringing lies in ours. Dialogue between the younger and elder generation should be open and free. Good words, thoughts, and deeds are the fundamentals of our religion... But the core is also our freedom of

choice. We have to start respecting the decisions our younger generation makes. ■

“We are not alone in our struggles with passive assimilation ... Jewish community leaders pieced together a solidarity campaign targeting three population groups - the youth, young professionals, and newlyweds ...”



Dr. Nikan H. Khatibi [nikan2@aol.com, www.DrNikanKhatibi.com] is an award-winning physician and published medical journal author and researcher. He is currently completing his residency training at the Department of Anesthesiology at the Loma Linda University Medical Center in Southern California.

Zarathushti-American Mutts: Fighting Back Against Passive Assimilation

I hate to be the pessimist in the group, but we have a real dilemma on our hands. We are losing future community leaders, religious priests, faithful parents, and philanthropic donors, all in the name of passive assimilation. For years, we as a community have simply stood by as sheer bystanders watching our youth get welcomed by various faiths, cultural groups, and academic societies with open arms. While our community has spent too much time on meaningless cultural argumentative agendas that have simply suffocated the free speech of our youth, alienated interfaith couples, and sent a message that diversity is not welcomed. If we wish to remain an instrumental member of the North American community, we as Zarathushti-Americans must abandon our previous strategies and embrace more welcoming viewpoints.

We are not alone in our struggles with passive assimilation. Take the followers of Judaism for example. Many Jews today grow up fully assimilated and comfortable in a secular society and environment. Hence it was no surprise to Jewish leaders 5 years ago when a published study showed that 50 percent of Jewish men and women underwent interfaith marriages. Were these interfaith couples judged, excommunicated, or demonized by their congregation? Absolutely not! The Jewish community leaders saw this study as an opportunity to piece together a solidarity campaign targeting three population groups within their communities - the youth, young professionals, and newlyweds. We need to do the same.

For the pre-collegial 12-18 year old teens, we as a community must help them make friends within the religion. Whether through local events or preferably summer/winter camp retreats, something must be done before these teens head off to college and are preoccupied with their studies. **For the young professionals**, 21-30, career building and securing a financial future is of highest priority. This is where facilitating sponsored group participation in leadership conferences, monthly social mixers can be instrumental. And finally, **for the**

newlyweds, by being inclusive to all faiths and ethnicity, we can ensure not only respect for our religion by non-Zarathushti spouses, but also, entertain the possibilities of getting them and their children involved in the religion.

So in summary, we need to focus our efforts on relationship building at all ages, nurturing steadfast community leaders, and harvesting philanthropic support. ■



“One must realize that our culture/religion is like water for fish. We simply cannot live without it!”

Dr. Parmis Khatibi [parmis99@aol.com] has a doctorate in Pharmacy, and is an Anticoagulation and Antithrombotic Clinical Specialist at University of California, Irvine Medical Center and a Clinical Adjunct Professor for the University of California, San Francisco as well as USC Schools of Pharmacy.

One must realize that our culture/religion is like water for fish. We simply cannot live without it! In order to preserve our identity we have to have our children be involved in religious classes and various events at their local Zoroastrian Center or at family gatherings geared towards children and our faith, so they become acquainted with other children of the same faith.

As children form relationships with their Zarathushti childhood friends, they form a bond that is quite different from any bond formed with children from their elementary/junior high school. These bonds stand the test of time because of the familiarity one has with one another, and that special connection of being Zarathushti.

It is normal as children become adults, go to college and graduate school, they digress away from their religious/cultural gatherings simply because of lack of time. However, with unique weekend team building retreats or professional building workshops, these young Zarathushti professionals will come together and connect as a ‘Zarathushti community’ which they all have in common.

Lastly, as these young adults start their own families, they will bring their own children into their very own community that gave them fond memories and provided them with the religious/cultural upbringing that has made them global citizens today.

However, none of this can be done without an individual's own desire to be part of the community, and their own personal effort; though sometimes, a little nudge from parents does not hurt, regardless of the age of the child. ■



“One of the strongest ways in which we can continue to keep the fire alive is to support and develop the resources of our local Zarathushti community organizations.”

Dr. Daryush Mehta [daryush.mehta@alum.mit.edu] is a biomedical engineer and research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital and represents the Zoroastrian faith as a chaplain at Harvard and MIT.

The Zarathushti religion will thrive in this ever-changing world. Today, the Internet. tomorrow, brain-computer interfaces! Regardless of the times, we need to continue to address ongoing issues of apathy and disengagement in the Zarathushti community. I would like to propose that one of the strongest ways in which we can continue to cultivate good thoughts, good words, and good deeds is to empower our local Zarathushti community organizations.

My wife and I are blessed to be a part of the Zoroastrian Association of the Greater Boston Area (ZAGBA). ZAGBA is inclusive, nonjudgmental, caring, fun, and knowledge-seeking. The strength of ZAGBA comes not only from its organizational structure but from its individuals, its teachers, and its families. The Boston community model took me under its wing during my tenure as a graduate student and brought me closer to the Zarathushti faith. I became engaged in Gatha study sessions and helped organize numerous social and educational activities with

the Zoroastrian Students of Boston. As new (!) parents, we look forward to our son's future participation in ZAGBA's children's classes that are taught by dedicated teachers.

My interaction with ZAGBA presented me with an opportunity to represent the Zarathushti community as a local university chaplain and play an integral role in interfaith activities on and off campus. This experience has strengthened my own commitment to the Zarathushti religion by learning the language of loving one's neighbors and listening to the life stories of religious and non-religious friends. I feel privileged to be a part of the Zarathushti community and would like to encourage all to think deeply about what drives their moral compass, whether theistic or atheistic. From my experiences, an important way is to continue to support and develop the resources of the local North American Zarathushti community organizations. With this and many other ways, we can keep the fire alive! ■

“FEZANA ... can play a key role ... The second ten-year Strategic Plan includes a goal that encourages Hamazori, coming together of different Zarathushti entities/groups that will enable the process of integration.”



Mahrukh Motafram [mahruk83@gmail.com] resides in Seattle, WA with husband Feroze and son Jamsheed (daughter Freya resides in Manhattan, NYC). Mahrukh has been active with FEZANA since 1990 – as Small Groups Chair, Assistant Secretary, Vice President, and Chair for FEZANA Strategic Planning. She served as PR Chair for the NA Congress (2001) and compiles “Milestones” for FEZANA Journal.

The question we need to ask ourselves as we are growing in North America is **why** we are losing some of our children to other faiths. The issue is not whether we have inter/intra marriage, but how can we retain children of inter marriages (especially) within our faith. It's relatively easier if both parents are Zarathushtis. However, we often see spouses of interfaith marriages involved in the community, and in turn the community reaching out to accept both the spouse and the children. Acceptance of interfaith spouses and children is a solution, but not the only solution. It is a definite step in the right direction. As far as intra-marriage, years from now, even if this generation has the opportunity to marry within, it is doubtful there will be a pool large enough to continue this trend.

In North America, we find ourselves in a unique situation. We face different sets of circumstances that we have an opportunity to embrace. We have Zarathushtis from Iran and India coming together with two different ethno-cultural backgrounds. The one factor that binds us together would be the core principles of the Zarathushti religion. Our Zarathushti identity depends upon how we evolve as Zarathushtis in North America. By celebrating our differences we have a chance to emerge as a strong and healthy Zarathushti community, which embraces most of the spiritual and cultural characteristics conducive to our lives here in North America. This type of integration will create harmony, Hamazori between us all, thereby promoting liaisons.

FEZANA, as a coordinating body in North America can play a key role in encouraging such a dialogue. The second ten-year Strategic Plan for FEZANA includes a goal that encourages *Hamazori*, coming together of different Zarathushti entities/groups that will enable this process of integration. ■

“It is up to each and every one of us to bequeath our ancestors' teachings, which they defended and perpetuated against such great odds, to our children.”

Shenaya Tarapore [shenayat@gmail.com] is an Architect in northern California; she grew up in ZANC, through which she developed a sense of community and many enduring friendships.

Pirzad Motafram [pirzad@gmail.com] is an Electrical Engineer who grew up in Mumbai, India. After moving to Northern California, a Parsi colleague introduced him to the local community where he felt welcome and included.

The couple met at a ZANC Navroze function in 2008, and married two years later.



In the North American context, a Zarathushti identity can be a very private experience. In a community that is spread over such distances, we hope to imbue a vital connection to the Zarathushti continuum at many stages of life. Having a child *Navjote'd* is where the Zarathushti identity begins, not where responsibilities are fulfilled. It is up to each and every one of us to bequeath our ancestors' teachings, which they defended and perpetuated against such great odds, to our children. Zarathushtis are often regarded as historical artifacts, and while we value history, we too keep religion on a shelf. However, praying occasionally as a family can be very meaningful and intimate, especially when everyone participates.

We hope to encourage a sense of belonging and the importance of participating. We like to meet newcomers to the community, and try to invite them for more events. Our local association does an admirable job of planning a variety of activities throughout the year, and of keeping in touch with community news. Our association includes a wide area and age range, so annual, membership-wide events take significant efforts to plan. We may be able to emulate the 'meetup' model to have smaller, local, casual events aimed at specific groups and organized around a specific activity or venue - like a seasonal hike, or knitting groups.

Both of us had hoped for a Parsi spouse and gave the criterion some priority -- believing a shared identity was a point of compatibility. However, our community has also made a virtue of integration, and intermarriage is inevitable. As a community, we cannot continue to make any person feel like he or she has left the fold by marriage or as a child of intermarriage. We hope that non-Zarathushti spouses are not merely included in every religious occasion, but are invited to participate fully, and are lauded for doing so. No child should be made to feel like he or she is any less than wholly Zarathushti. So often, it is personal relationships - more than faith, that establish a Zarathushti identity nowadays. However, without faith it seems less likely individuals will feel strongly enough about the Zarathushti continuum to perpetuate it for generations to come. ■

“On-line access to materials has been essential to parents trying to prepare children for their Navjote. We can use technology to enhance what we have kept so sacred for all these thousands of years.”



Ferzin Patel [ferpsych@aol.com] lives in Pomona, NY, with her husband of 17 years Rajan and son Davin. She has served on the ZAGNY Board for 6 years and recently co-chaired the 2012 North American Zarathushti Congress in New York.

Here are some proactive and encouraging paths for us to take, in our homes, associations, and by FEZANA.

The first is to **have an open heart** when trying to connect with your past. For those who have veered away for one reason or another -- non-inclusion, disinterest, long distances, career focus -- there needs to be an open-mindedness to reconnect. When I first married a non-Zarathushti, I was concerned that the community would not accept me, but I had to accept the idea of them not accepting me, and as soon as I forgave myself, I was no longer afraid, because I knew I was still the same person embracing the same values. Take a leap of faith!

Second, we need to have **local associations formally welcome individuals and families** -- Zarathushti or inter-married. The comfort of being welcomed and accepted, draws them to the community.

Third, **enhance our religious education materials** and access to those materials. For people in remote areas, a web-based religious class is the only option. For larger associations we need to develop a core curriculum, with materials which are interesting, translated accurately, not outdated, and a teaching method which peaks interest in children as well as adults. FEZANA could spearhead these initiatives by establishing a sub-committee to start building a core program for adults and children. On-line access to materials has been essential to parents trying to prepare children for their *Navjote*. We can use technology to enhance what we have kept so sacred for all these thousands of years.

Most religious classes and gatherings in North America occur once a month, if we are going to build a healthy community in our niches, we have to meet more than once a month. I found that I felt most connected with my fellow Zarathushtis when we recite prayers together, work to raise money for a Shoe Drive or work together to organize a Congress. These activities bring people together. We need to feed our souls more often with opportunities to work together and have talks which inspire and help us in our daily lives, not just educate the mind but build the spirit. ■

“Today I recognize the value of what I saw my parents practice daily and now greatly believe our community's survival, especially in the Diaspora, begins at home.”



Urvaksh D. Patel [Urvaksh.Patel@gmail.com] grew-up in the Chicago Zarathushti community, but now lives in Washington DC. Since earning his MBA, he has been working for the World Bank as an Infrastructure Finance Specialist for its Sustainable Development group, and is now an active member of the Washington DC community.

I was lucky to be raised in a strong Zarathushti home where I saw religion practiced daily by my parents. It was never a choice, but rather just a way of life to which they themselves had become so accustomed. Raising my sister and me in a much more cosmopolitan environment than the one they grew up in, I think my parents felt a greater responsibility to ensure that Zarathushti values and Parsi culture would become a part of who we were, so that it would never be lost in our family's future generations. Today I recognize the value of what I saw them practice daily and now greatly believe our community's survival, especially in the diaspora, begins at home.

The onus for our community's continual growth rests largely on parents to fulfill their responsibility in more actively practicing the religion and traditions within the home. It is not enough to take children to religious classes, visit libraries and museums, and encourage attendance to conferences. Undoubtedly, all of these have a place in fostering Zoroastrianism, but only by seeing parents actively instill it in the home, can its importance be magnified enough for children to then embrace it as they grow older. Children become what they see. They are significantly influenced by experiences in the home. It is the safest place for their development, and if the home is missing the practice of Zoroastrianism, then how can we expect future generation to embrace it?

It is a seemingly easier path for parents to allow their children to fully assimilate into and embrace the culture and traditions of the Diaspora land, especially when Zarathushti children almost never come across others of their religion in school or social circles. However, if parents take the other path – a slower and more patient process of awakening Zoroastrianism in their children by practicing it fervently in the home – only then will the community continue to grow. ■



“The best way to sustain and grow our community is to educate and motivate the youth on its rich history, enlightened teachings, and the accomplishments of our revered ancestors.”

Zenobia Ravji [zenobia.ravji@gmail.com] is a graduate student in Journalism at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. As a Journalist, she hopes to bring awareness of the Zarathushti religion and community to the world.

We belong to a small yet very influential community. In my opinion, the best way to sustain and grow our Zarathushti community is to educate and motivate the youth on its rich history, enlightened teachings, and the accomplishments of our revered ancestors. The strength of a community lies in its leadership. Our Zarathushti community has a strong foundation of leaders to support and nurture our members. The next generation of leaders needs to be just as strong if not stronger.

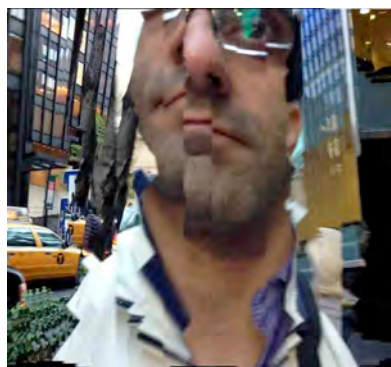
There is a growing apathy among Zarathushti youth. In order to change this apathy into enthusiasm, we need to make an extra effort on educating the 'echo-boomer' generation on where they come from: millennia of profound thinkers, emperors, businessmen, entertainers, and religious leaders. From its origins in ancient Iran to the Diaspora, we continue to contribute to the advancement and enlightenment of the global community.

A few weeks ago I met a couple from India who asked me about my background. I told them I was Parsi. They were elated to meet me. It turned out that they had their education financed by the Tata Group. They went on to express their gratitude and admiration of the Parsi community and its unwavering generosity to people of all communities around the world. This was just one of many similar encounters I've had through my travels.

There is nothing more that motivates me to contribute to my Zarathushti community than our commitment to humanity. So I ask my fellow Zarathushti youth to join me in committing to carry on the principles of our community and preserving it for the advancement of not just us, but also the world. ■

“How can we design our Darbe Mehrs to provide that feeling of peace, spiritual upliftment, and connection with Ahura mazda, that would inspire people to come?”

Cyrus Rivetna [crivetna@rivetna.com] principal of Rivetna Architects, Inc. in downtown Chicago. While he has an impressive portfolio of residential and institutional projects, his deepest interest is in designing Dar-e-Mehers that build upon the traditional past, and also fulfill evolving needs in the Diaspora. Cyrus also has an enthusiastic interest in Photography.



Zarathushti leadership in North America is relying on the noble notion that the perpetuation of our religion is a personal responsibility. Perhaps that may not be so for many Zarathushtis. With the pulls and pressures of life, one needs to prioritize where limited time and energy are used. If it's perceived that soccer practice is more important than going to the Darbe Mehr, then soccer practice wins! The challenge then is how does one inspire young families to make Religion a priority? What can we offer that would make people want to come to the Darbe Mehr? Of course, good food, fun and socializing is always a draw – but that can be found elsewhere just as well, with friends from school or work.

There is one thing that the Darbe Mehr can offer that cannot be found anywhere else, and that is Religion and Spirituality. Religious doctrine and practices can be taught, and should be a number one priority, at home and in religion classes at the Darbe Mehr. Spirituality, on the other hand, cannot be taught, but is felt. How can we design our Darbe Mehrs to provide that feeling of peace, spiritual upliftment, and connection with Ahura mazda, that would inspire people to come? How can we make our communal prayers – jashans, muktad and other festivals – more beautiful, spiritually uplifting and meaningful, to draw more people to come? How can we organize and structure our offerings to cater for the whole spectrum of desires and needs for religious practice and spiritual fulfillment of members?

As an architect I see the world through the lens of architecture. The buildings that North American Zarathushtis inhabit, portray a 'culture-heavy' and 'spiritual-light' community. With the exception of a few, our Darbe Mehrs are dominated by large banquet halls, and the prayer room is relegated to a small non-descript room – almost an afterthought. Imagine a Christian church where the fellowship hall over-powers the sanctuary, or a Buddhist temple where the shrine is through a door, around the corner, and down the hall. I'm not suggesting that building an appropriate prayer hall will solve all the challenges, but it is a good place to start; I do believe that architecture affects and reflects the community it serves.

To summarize, our communities currently prioritize the social-cultural aspects over the religious-spiritual. We need to take a holistic approach and now focus more on the latter, to create an appropriate balance. ■

“If we make faith education fun, we will encourage excitement amongst our children and ensure that they want to be a part of the story as they grow and have their own children.”

Fred Sarkari [fred@fredsarkari.com, www.fredsarkari.com] is an international speaker and a best selling author. As a licensed Psychotherapist, he focuses on human engagement in our personal and professional lives.



Continuation Of Our Story

As Zarathushtis, we all want to pass our faith down to future generations. However, faith cannot be inherited like a genetic trait. It cannot be instilled like an academic lesson. After all, our faith is not merely our own. We are part of a larger story. If we want people to connect spiritually with that story, we need to make them part of the story.

When teaching our children, it is important to not simply delineate facts and events. We need to bring the story to life. Zarathushtis have a rich, unique history. If we make faith education fun, we will encourage excitement amongst our children and ensure that they want to be a part of the story as they grow and have their own children.

More than that, children should understand that their faith is not static. To the contrary, Zarathushti belief is an organic, evolving story. We need to invite children to add their own chapter to the story, which will be passed on to future generations.

My parents instead of telling me about the development of Zoroastrianism, they told me about their lives. Instead of saying that their faith was important, they told me why. They told stories, not just of the good things but the difficult things as well. From that, I saw that their faith was real and vibrant. Nothing makes me prouder of my faith than knowing it is a continuation of my parents' stories. I want to become part of the story they started, part of the story that generations of Zarathushtis have been telling for centuries.

These tactics are not only useful with children; they are critical for sharing the faith with anyone. Once we bring people into the story of our faith, growth will be natural throughout the community and within its members. Zarathushti marriages will boom and more children will be born. Interfaith relationships will be stronger if the non-Zarathushti spouse is invited to be part of the story as well, ensuring that any children from the union will grow into proud Zarathushtis.

As a community, we need to tell our story. We need to share who we really are and tell others what we have faced. If we want to create a living legacy, we need to start living that legacy now.

Once we do, others will follow.

In summary:

1. We need to tell our story.
2. We need to bring that story to life.
3. Make faith education fun.
4. Invite children to add their own chapter to the story. ■

“Consider establishing an ‘actual’ Agiary somewhere in North America with our holy Fire transferred from one of the Agiaries in India ...”



Sarosh Sepai [sarosh@hotmail.com], President of ZAPA and current Chairperson of FEZANA Small Groups Committee is an IT consultant with IBM. He lives in Pittsburgh, PA with his lovely wife and daughters Benaifer and Friyana. He brings lots of enthusiasm and fresh ideas, but most of all devotion for his religion combined with zeal to serve the community selflessly.

May I dare say, the reduced numbers are symptoms of a larger issue -- gross lack of motivation/drive amongst most Zarathushtis. The kind of passion within our hearts for our great religion, that other religious communities have for theirs, is seriously lacking.

Observations

- Increasingly, children of intermarriages (and even families where both parents are Zarathushti) do not follow the Zarathushti religion.
 - Zarathushti couples today pass on fewer religious customs/traditions to their children, than earlier generations did.
- Special days of the year are increasingly being forgotten – *Atash-no-Parab*, *Pani-no-Parab*, *Boman Mahino*, *Hamkara* days, etc.

- Daily prayers have been reduced to *Ashem Vohu* and *Yatha Ahu Vairiyo*. Fewer youth perform daily Kushti.
- Many Zarathushtis also follow other religious deities and beliefs.

Recommendations

Educational. (1) Have religious camps for adults as we have for children; (2) Regular live online (via Skype) religious discourses for adults and kid-friendly discourses for children. (3) Regular online sessions for teaching prayers, beyond *Ashem*, *Yatha* and Kushti prayers; and (4) Create a common repository of the above discourses and teaching materials, on a website.

Motivational. Invite people with passion and soul, to move the audience spiritually; (1) Our religious leadership should take a more active role in reaching out to it's followers; (2) Create a group of motivational speakers and prepare material. (3) Our PR committee should help promote this group to our associations. (4) Have speakers travel to various associations – not to talk, but to motivate and awaken our brethren.

Popularize the religion among Zarathushtis – The FEZANA PR committee should come up with innovative promotional materials. One example is the interesting excerpts/Nirangs, etc. printed in pocket calendars from Union Press, Mumbai.

Employ specialized professionals. (1) Employ scientific interviewing methods to gather data and interview a larger section of our communities beyond just association heads. (2) Leverage UNESCO's work with the Zarathushti community, to seek funding, expertise, or both, to help conduct programs

FEZANA should consider **establishing an 'actual' Agiary** somewhere in North America with our holy Fire transferred from one of the Agiaries in India. This would be a huge event and a tremendous boost to the morale and faith of Zarathushtis in North America. ■

“We can wield greater influence and identify opportunities by building relationships with policy makers and by having community members who are plugged into local and federal government.”



Viraf Soroushian [sviraf@gmail.com] is a Southern California native. As a college student, he formed the Zoroastrian Youth of San Diego to serve all the young adults in America's finest city. Currently he resides in Washington DC where he is completing his graduate studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

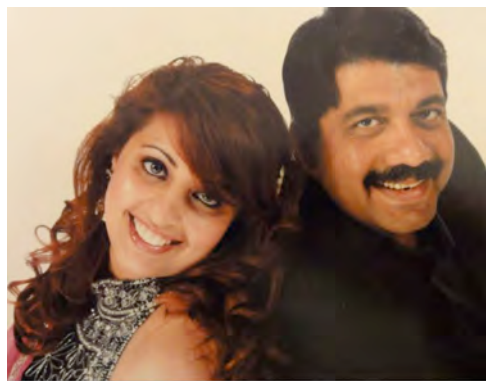
Greater Inclusiveness. I am a strong believer in building strong and inclusive communities. As Founder and President of the Zoroastrian Youth of San Diego, I successfully brought Parsi and Irani-Zarathushti young adults together as a group simply by making it easy, convenient, and worth their while to participate. Out of a club of less than 20 members, lifelong friendships were forged and two marriages emerged.

Consider needs of young adults. My experiences with the broader local community lead me to believe that more effort needs to be made to engage young adults and to consider their specific needs in larger community decisions. Take something as simple as the location of a community center. In Washington DC, we have a centrally located Baha'i temple and two Jewish Centers. Both groups have active and vibrant youth groups with tons of programming targeting the age group of 18 to 35. On the other hand, Zarathushti Centers tend to be located in suburban areas not easily accessible by public transportation. We should be aiming to make our Centers more easily accessible and centrally located, even if it does mean paying more for the real estate.

Get politically active: When it comes to professional achievement, Zarathushtis easily rank among the most successful religious communities in North America. Yet, we are greatly skewed in the direction of science, engineering, and law while shunning politics and government service. Yet these fields are critical to us controlling our own destiny in the West. We can wield greater influence and identify opportunities by building relationships with policy makers and by having community members who are plugged into the local and federal government. We only have to look back one century to see how beneficial this was for the Parsis in India. Even in Iran, we rely heavily on our single Member of Parliament to be the defender and advocate for our community. An easy way for us to encourage broader interest in public policy is by setting up a scholarship or fellowship for young adults to

pursue these types of professions. But our community shouldn't stop there; we should consider establishing our own advocacy organization to represent our interests to policy makers. ■

“Discussions on spirituality and making teachings of our religion user friendly is another way that we can increase interest in participation. Have more ‘active learning’ of the Gathas and Shah Nameh ...”



Dr. Zenobia Tantra [dqzen1@gmail.com] P.T., DPT, CAPP – PF, CCI, CFMS, is an Integrative Practitioner, specializing in the Pelvic Floor from Conception to Menopause and Beyond.

Zubin Tantra [zubintantra@gmail.com] P.T., FAAOMPT, CCI is a Fellow of the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists.

The Tantras are founders of Lake County Physical Therapy, LLC and The Zen Tantra Wellness Center, LLC in the Chicagoland area and live in Illinois with their children Zaara, Rockstar and BellaBoo☺

Zenobia Tantra writes:

My humble viewpoint has always been that the “*Only Thing Constant is Change.*” Yes, it is very important to protect and preserve identities, customs, rituals, religion, etc., but it is also true that, “*A mighty Oak will fall in the breeze, but a blade of grass can weather the worst storms.*”

Also, Life is the best teacher if we are willing to learn from her and history repeats itself because we never learned the first time around. I am not trying to get all philosophical, but if we want to be caring, compassionate with respect for all, then we have to put our money where our mouth is and include children of intermarriages irrespective of the sex of the spouse. After all, we are a religion that treats men and women with equality. Also, Love has no Religion or Language.

Discussions on spirituality and making teachings of our religion user-friendly is another way that we can increase interest in participation. Have more ‘active learning’ of the Gathas and Shah Nameh, that involves children from a very young age so they can see the wealth that we have. Let us first educate ourselves and then use books like the Shah Nameh to teach everyday manners, customs, etiquette, etc. to our infants.

Communication is also key and even though we have no difficulty with getting our viewpoint across, it is how we do it sometimes that can make the difference. We can agree to disagree but we do not have to be confrontational and rude. That is also something that tends to put people off and they may seek other paths. Give participants a ‘voice and a choice’ and encourage suggestions and work as a team to find solutions that can keep the aspects of tradition and also help with building the community.

Love, kindness, compassion are key and if we can treat each other with respect and better than we would want to be treated, then I think that we would truly have not only lived a good Zarathushti life but we would have lived a good life, period. The emphasis should always be on “Quality of individuals, not just Quantity.”

I would like to conclude with this quote by Mr. John Lennon:

*“You may say I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one,
I hope someday you will join us, and the world will live as one.” ■*

***“The challenge is to rekindle the light in our hearts
and let that light shine the way.”***

Zubin Tantra writes:

Our community is an amalgamation of nationalities and cultures – Indians, Pakistanis and Iranian living in a very open and free country where self expression, freedom and individualism is encouraged. We know people bond together in times of trial and hardships and grow apart when we are at peace and prosperous. When tragedy strikes (e.g. funerals) our numbers are strong, but sadly at Gahambars our numbers are dismal. This I believe is human nature and one that is always there in free societies. The more freedom and self importance we have, the more we get egocentric, in contrast to the monarchies in ancient Iran and India.

The fact that there is a rise in the number of Zarathushtis in North America is immaterial; rather, what essence do we impart to our communities, our country and our neighbors? Other than great stories of our heritage do we give our kids or our community anything to be proud of? If we cannot have great role models that are alive and truly great how do you expect the next generation to feel connected to our community? If they see individualism and fighting in the Board and among the adults do you think that the disenchanting youth will want to be connected or want to set examples for their children with their community?

Of course change is an inevitable process in all our lives, and we say we should be ready for change, but are we? We still impose our old views of religion on our kids, and with the freedom they have today in our great country they are certainly free to reject those views. What is the use of building larger Atash Kadehs and Dar e Mehers when the fire in our heart is not there?

I believe we need to let each one choose what they want to do to show the impact of our religion in their lives.

I believe we should create opportunities for youth to be able to come to our classes and practice our religion the way they see fit.

The challenge is not just to expect that every one should light a diva at home and say their prayers and teach their kids to say their prayers; the challenge is to rekindle the light in our hearts and let that light shine the way. ■

“It is my hope that the work of the pioneers of FEZANA, lives on in North America ... That we grow in large numbers, and are respected and acknowledged like our ancestors were in their home countries.”



Behrose Taraporewalla [behroset@gmail.com] of Los Angeles, has served as Chair of Zoroastrian Youth of North America and Zoroastrian Youth Without Borders. She is an Education Specialist, and believes that being a Zarathushti has shaped her as an individual, constantly motivating her to create and mobilize positive change in this world.

“What can we do as a community to bring about a renaissance in North America?” is the question; often looked at as controversial, but does it really have to be? I beg to believe that it does not.

I have a dream that...

Our population will grow, through our teaching of tolerance -- there are fanatics, conservatives, moderates, and liberals present in our religious community (and every community). As individuals, families, and communities

we should promote understanding and demonstrate respect for all, as well as an understanding for their beliefs without necessarily embracing them. Furthermore, promoting *unity* to build *community*.

FEZANA will promote programs to attract diverse groups of youth to gather, resulting in meaningful relationships, allowing youth to get to know one another on a deeper level, and establish relationships through their interest, wants, and needs. This can be done through annual volunteer projects, networking events, mentorship programs, etc.

Intergenerational relationships will flourish, while never forgetting the foundation laid by the first generation. Both youth and elders need to work in harmony, establishing beautiful relationships where they give and take equally. There will be a metamorphosis, and our culture will change as the new generation takes over, and builds upon the foundation laid by our first generation in North America.

All age groups are represented at events locally, nationally, and internationally -- programs should be of high-interest, and no age-group should be excluded or secluded.

Programs are developed for young adults and families after they relocate for study or work -- creating a ‘networking committee’, so that they are able to connect with other Zarathushtis, even where there is no Association or Small Group. This would create a strong connection across geographical boundaries, where people can feel included no matter where they live.

It is my hope that the work of the pioneers of FEZANA, lives on in North America, for my children and theirs. That we grow in large numbers, and are respected and acknowledged like our ancestors were in their home countries. We all must live our lives and keep the fire burning in all we do to move forward towards *Frashokereti*. ■

“... patiently persist and ask the youth to get involved. And you will see wonderful long-term results as they become an integral part of the community and take on roles of responsibility and leadership.”



Arzan Sam Wadia [arzan@wadias.in], originally from Bombay, currently resides in New York City with his wife Shirrin; practicing as an architect and urban designer. Arzan is a board member of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY), also runs Parsi Khabar (www.parsikhabar.net) an online portal about Parsis, and is an active Rover of the Sethna's 18th West Bombay Scout Group.

The diasporic growth of Zarathushtis in North America is but one facet of a very complex structure. While we are growing in numbers, what really needs to be understood is the quality of that growth. The emphasis on religion needs to go hand in hand with the inculcation and fortification of our unique cultures. Be they Indian or Pakistani or Iranian Zarathushtis.

Our formal community organizations need to celebrate our differences and uniqueness, be it customs and rituals, food, clothing and social behavior. Most times in an ideal pursuit of amalgamation, we lose out on these unique qualities and try to find the few disparate items for a common ground. This destroys our culture.

For me religion is in many a ways practiced through the daily living of social and cultural customs. Even though I live in New York City, I still love and need my *dhansak* on a regular basis. On seeing a fellow Zarathushti from India I still will break into Gujarati to create an instant bond which only a shared language can bring.

As individuals we need to get our young people involved. All it needs is to ask them. I have lived in New York since 1998. And twice a year attended the ZAGNY celebrations. However it was only when someone took the time to ask me to get involved and showed me areas where I could devote expertise and time, that I really dived into the community. So, to all the older first-generationers, I urge you to identify the youth and patiently persist and ask them to get involved. And you will see wonderful long-term results as they become an integral part of the community and take on roles of responsibility and leadership. ■

THE END