## BACK TO ZARATHUSHTRA

A Fervent appeal to Launch a ZARATHUSHTRIAN "AHUVRATTA" MOVEMENT as the One and Only Solution to the Present Malaise

As a great Master once declared, it is not for nothing that the Parsi Community has survived. It yet has an important Mission to tulfit, and our Community here in India, under the direct aegis of Pak Iranshah, is the only true vehicle of the Divine Message of Asho Zarathushtra which is as fresh and relevant today as it was over 8,000 years ago.

The solemn Word of Ahura Mazda, that from age to age He would send great Rainidars to revitalize and refurbish the Din-e Zarathushtra (ref. Behman Yasht), is the very foundation of the unshakable belief that this exalted Daena, propounded by the First and Foremost Prophet of the present Human Cycle, is destined to endure till the day of Frasho-Kereiti. On the strength of this inspired belief, our righteous pilgrim fathers sacrificed everything they held dear, even their very life and blood, and landed ion the hospitable shores of benigri Hindustan... not to seek fame, name, conquest, fortune or livelihood, but wholly and solely to discharge the sacred Trust of preserving the pristine religion of Zarathushtra and passing it on safe and intact into the hands of our next Rainidar Saheb. That august personage is none other than "Kae Din" (Defender of the Faith) Shah Behram Varzavand, the Rainidar of the oncoming Aquarian Age, whose advent is now imminent by the close of this century as ordained, promised and foretold.

As if defying the laws of probability, we have faced and overcome holocausts so severe that our extinction seemed virtually inescapable: the accursed Alexander and the savage Arabs did their level best to obliterate the ancient transan civilization and its glorious heritage from the face of the earth... yet you and I are still here to tell the tale.

However, our miniscule Community has puce again arrived at — Crossroads, and its

future course will hinge on how firmly and wisely it tackles the formIdable challenges confronting it in this fourteenth century after Yazdegard, most notably the fragrant repudiation of our sacred and time-honoured religious precepts and practices, the encouragement of mixed marriages, the condonation of Juddin Navjotes, the propagation of conversion and the spread of misinformation and disinformation amongst our youth and the ignorant section of our laity.

The apocalyptic events foreseen long centuries ago by Asho Zarathushtra and recorded in Fazeno Behman Yasht, Jamaspi and the writings of the sainted post-Sassanian Dastur Zatspiram Saheb - e.g. balls of fire in human form coming down from the sky, cataclysmic global disasters and the whole world taking on the appearance of a vast "Nasa-khana, nashan-gan" (burial ground) - are due to come to pass in the not-so-distant future. In other words, we are on the threshold of a New Age that will arise from the ashes of the Old, to be ushered in by our Varzavand Saheb.

At such an epochal juncture, the need to keep our religion intact and preserve our Community assumes a greater urgency and importance than ever before. We must be especially vigilant to ensure that some of our co-religionis s do not recklessly tinker and tamper, in the name of "progress", with immutable spiritual matter. Our covenanted mandate is to faithfully preserve, not to meddle or demolish. Of course; now as always, the Daena certainly needs its periodic Renovation, which only spiritual giants like Rainidars are authorized and competent to carry out. At present, we are swiftly approaching the close of the 1,700 year old Rainidarship of Dasturan Castur Adarbad Marespend Saheb

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and only his exalted successor, Shah Behram Varzavand Saheb, has the authority in Nature to decide upon and introduce whatever changes may be necessary to perform the sensitive and stupendous task of re-aligning the Daena to meet the needs of the forthcoming Aquarian Age.

Therefore, I humbly but fervently appeal to all true Zarathushtrians worldwide to forthwith "Anuvratta" Zarathushtrian Movement on the lines of the Jain Community's similar successful experience. Every devout Zarathushtrian who faithfully participates becomes an "Anuvratti", i.e. one who vows to follow the agreed programme (cf. Din Yasht, 5: "Anumatay-e... anukhtay-e... anavarshtay-e Daenayai": Thinking, Speaking and Acting in accord with the Daena). Every Anuvratti may add after his or her name the proud initials "Z-F", i.e. Zarathushtra-Friyo, the "beloved of Zarathushtra", as a stern reminder and declaration of the sacred obligation undertaken in selfless service of the Prophetof-Prophets and His supreme Daena.

The Movement is decidedly and unabashedly orthodox - that much-abused term really meaning "right doctrine", as derived from the two Greek words "ortho" = right, genuine + "doxa" = doctrine, opinion. Its clear objective is to protect and preserve the time-honoured and lofty precepts, practices and traditions of the Revelation of Zarathushtra - so that our tottering Community and imperilled Daena may not be further damaged prior to the advent of the new Rainidar Saheb.

The accent is intensely personal, and the appeal is directly to the bar of the individual conscience. Each Anuvratti is only required to solemnly take a private vow before his or her inner Self, pledging maximum personal efforts to adhere to and propagate the Anuvratta Programme which should encompass the following:

(1) Implementation in daily life of the supernal Ethical Principles enshrined in the Holy Cathas and other sacred texts, with feet

- firmly placed on the straight and narrow Path of Asha (absolute Righteousness, Truth, Purity, Piety).
- (2) Performance of as many of our daily Tariqats as possible, with the minimum proviso of constantly wearing Kashti-on-Sudreh next to the skin and regular performance of the Kashti ritual on prescribed occasions, especially at the time of commencement of each Geh.
- (3) Regular attendance at Atash-kadehs, especially on Hamkar days and "adoption" of the nearest Atash-kadeh with a view to taking a personal interest in its general welfare such as contributing/collecting donations for its Kathi and Maintenance Funds, etc.
- (4) Complete faith in the sanctity and efficacy of our Avesta Manthravani, with a sincere effort to regularly recite from the Khordeh Avesta as many of our sacted Prayers as possible, together with a broad understanding of the beautiful meanings behind the celestial words.
- (5) Performance of or participation in our profound Pav-Mahel Ceremonies such as Nirang-Din, Yazashne and Vendidad, Gahambars, Jashans and those intended for the repose of our dear departed.
- (6) Preservation and correct use of our hallowed Religious Institutions such as Pak Atashkadehs and Towers of Silence expressly established and intended for the exclusive use of practising Zarathushtrians.
- (7) Disposal of only the Zarathushtrian dead in Towers of Silence through the Dokhmanashini method which remains unsurpassed on all counts ecological, ethical, scientific and spiritual.
- (8) Bunak-pasbani : insistence on marriage strictly within the Community, both parties being Zarathushtrians only and the nupital ceremony conducted exclusively according to the sacred Zarathushtrian rites.

- (9) Attunement with Pak Iranshah, is a simple 5-minute daily regimen at 12 noon (local mean time) at home or work: (i) Finda private spot, cover your head and close your eyes; (ii) Silently recite the short Gathic verse "Oos moi uzareshva..." from Yasha 33-12; (iii) Visualiza your consciousness rising higher and nigher, titl it reaches the sancturn sanctorum at Udwada and attunes itself with Pak Iranshah there; and (iv) Terminate with the silent Prayer Veh Mazdayasnan afrukhteh barazaha der payandeh bad! Zarathushti Din shad bad!" = May the good, resplendent Religion of Mazda-worship be preserved for a long time! Blessed be the Religion of Zarathushtra! (For further details, please refer to Chapter 14, pp. 70-72.)
- 10) To propagate throughout the world the pristine Message of Asho Zarathushtra, in the manner done by the one and only Zoroastrian College which now has branches in all the five continents of the world. (See Haptan Yasht, Karda 8.)
- 11) A band of like-minded Zarathushtrian Anuvrattis (ZAs) may come forward to evolve and carry on some form of productive Community Work, full-time or part-time according to their individual circumstances - entirely in the noble spirit of the sublime "Ashem Vohu", i.e. without any profit or personal motive. One-third of the resulting income, if any, can be spent for the needs of indigent and poor Zarathushtrians, more as Divine mizdem or gift than as charity. The balance two-thirds should be kept by the ZAs for meeting that community's or group's long-term needs. Those who can afford it, may also contribute a part of their personal income every month.
- 12) Generally, to devise and implement individually or with similarly-oriented Zarathushtrians, all such faith-building and Daena-strengthening activities as would further our urgent Cause - e.g. holding Shahnameh Kirtans, publishing low-priced

and responsibly-wilten booklets on key subjects for wide circulation even amongst our poor, organizing informal groups for religious study or tuition, arranging grouppilgrimages to Udwada, and so on as has been done by Mazdayasnie Monasterie and by the Ilm-e Khshnoom Institute, before that, in the time of Ustad Saheb Behramshah Shroff.

A sizeable number of Anuvrattls can make a world of difference at a time when we are teetering on the brink of the precipice of self-doubt, self-deception, self-denigration and possible self-destruction. It is they who can provide the beleaguered Parsi Community with a well-knit and well-motivated orthodox nucleus which can be counted upon, through selfless service and shining example, to help extricate the Daena and hence the Community from the present sorry pass where our cultural identity itself has been undermined and our very survival made to hang in the balance.

The damage is already extensive, and much of it can be laid at the door of just one disturbing phenomenon: mixed marriages, whether contracted by Parsi women or Parsi men. This is no exaggeration. A careful analysis of the Community's deep malalse cannot fail to reveal that most of the corrosive and once undreamt-of controversies that have threatened the existence of our time-tested religious institutions and practices and have dissipated the vitality of our Community almost to the point of debilitation usually have their source, directly or indirectly, in inter-communal marriages. Just observe how many of those painful controversies - conversion, Juddin Navjotes, attendance at religious ceremonies, entry into Atash-kadehs and disposal in Towers of Silence - are interlinked with and derived from a misplaced desire to accomodate the few religiouslystranded Parsis who have non-Parsi spouses and half-Parsi offspring. One reasonable estimate says that only about 5% of Parsi men and 11% of Parsi wornen marry outside the Community. Even if, for sake of argument, we were to arbitrarily and unrealistically double or

treble that figure, is there any justification whatsoever to permit what still remains an erring minority with its own axe to grind to disrupt an entire Daena?

As the very term "civil" implies, marriages do not constitute marriage sacraments in Zarathushtrian Religious Law which unambiguously lays down that no marital union can come into being unless it has been sanctified by two fundamental pre-requisites, viz Nahan (sacred ablution) and Ashirwad (nuptial benedictions). Also note that the Ashirwad Ceremony itself affirms the following : "avar Dad va Aeen-e Din-e Mazdayasni" = (the bride has agreed to enter into marital status) in accordance with the foremost law and creed of the Mazdayasni Religion. To clinch the matter, the Holy Vendidad not only refuses to recognize such "civil" marriages but goes a step further in Fargard 18, para 62 to declare such unions as acts of sexual impropriety and hence sins against the Daena (see also Chapter 69, Section 436, p. 407). No wonder that some proponents of mixed marriages carry on an ignorant and shameful vilification campaign against Pak Vendidad itself and would gleefully. expunge this treasured Text (the only sacred "Nask" still preserved in almost complete form) from the Zarathushtrian scriptural library were they given half a chance!

For those to whom the magnitude of ourmisconduct still does not appear to be too grave, we must select a few poignant lessons from our own past to illustrate how ominously history seems to be repeating itself:

- (1) The fall of Iran has always followed hard on the heels of a ruler marrying outside the fold:
- (a) Shah Dara married a daughter of King Philip of Macedon and Iran fell at the bloody hands of Alexander, Dara's son by that unsanctified union, according to the testimony of the peerless poet-historian Firdausi.
- (b) Anoshervan the Just married a Jewess. His grandson, Khushro Pervez married a

Roman Princess - under the incongenial influence of the alien mother, Khushro's son rebelled against our ancient religious practices, e.g. Dokhmanashini. The resulting discord and dissension was instrumental in bringing about the collapse of the mighty Sassanian Empire at the hands of the Arabs a mere 23 years after the death of Khushro Pervez.

- (2) Offspring of mixed marriages are almost invariably lost to the Daena and the Community by ultimately going out of the fold:
- (a) Shah Behram Gor married a daughter of the King of Kanoj and his children by her became the "root" of a Hindu tribe, having failed to assimilate themselves into the Iranian mainstream.
- (b) Some bands of Iranian refugees came over by a land route to India under the leadership of Shah Yazdegard's son. They settled in what is now the State of Rajasthan, intermarried with the local populace and soor lost their ethnic and religious Iranian identity. However, their adopted communal name "Rajput" even today serves to remind us of their origins the children of the Raja (Shah) of Iran, Raja-Putra or Rajput. It is known that the Rajputs, as a distinct ethnic group among the Hindus, carne into existence only after the fall of their Sassanians.

The writing is already loud and clear on the wall for those who would care to see it. The time for the coming of Shah Behram Varzavand Saheb is nigh, but we may have already lost everything by then if we keep up the present breakneck pace of doubting, denying and destroying. The one and only course open to us is BACK TO ZARATHUSHTRA, and the best means of achieving that end is the immediate launching of the Zarathushtrian Anuvratta Movement.

The choice, as always, is ours alone.

- Beharam Pithawala