

THE RELEVANCE OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

Mr. TEHOMTON ARESH

We reproduce here extracts from the paper of Mr. T. Aresh, presented at the recently concluded 4th World Zoroastrian Congress, in Bombay. Mr. Aresh lives in California, for over a decade, but has still maintained his firm roots in the Zoroastrian Religion and tradition, which can be gleaned from his paper. This is indeed heartening in the wake of what some mischievous priests and Parsees hell bent on Conversion and what not from that part of the world. Incidentally, Mr. Aresh is also the President of the Zoroastrian Anjuman of California.

We intend taking up some of the papers of this 4th World Zoroastrian Congress, and comment on some points, provided time and space are available.

CHANGING TIMES :

Surviving the torrential flow of the gushing stream, amidst the whirlpool of world Events, against the tidal waves of Time, stands the small but solid Zoroastrian race, firm as a rock... since thousands of years... will be through Eternity; as a Stepping Stone for Souls to cross over to the Land of Perfection.

There was a time when we Zoroastrians practised preserved and cherished the tenets and Spiritual Institutions of our religion, lived close to Nature, led simpler lives... But, as Mankind moved away further and further into the jaws of Materialism, into Scientific discoveries that headed for man's destruction, into a great technology obsessed with the ideas of providing more and more conveniences and getting rich too quickly, unmindful of the contamination of Nature's gifts to us, mercilessly polluting ourselves and our surroundings, WE BROUGHT UPON OURSELVES, out of our own doing, a RELEASE OF THE ACCUMULATED DE-

STRUCTIVE ENERGIES. We forgot for what purpose we were sent down on this Earth, and we drifted away from Him. We Zoroastrians, in our vain in-oxication of the so-called advancement, we even started frowning upon our age — old customs, tradition, tenets as out-dated and da'ing our ancestors back as stoneage people (incidentally, it is being discovered that the civilization, knowledge and scientific achievements of the people thousands of years ago, unknown in His'tory, surpassed those of the modern times).

Today ecologists are becoming more and more aware of the delicately poised, the living organism of the ecosphere, due to the reckless exploitation of the earth's resources. In these modern ways of life, we are hourly violating some law of Nature for which we must pay dearly.

A Zoroastrian's social life is not different from his religious life. The two are in'erwoven into an inextricable pattern. Social duties and obligations, are for him, Religious duties and obligations flowing from the commands of our beloved Zoroastrian, preserved either in the Scriptures or through tradition and customs.

The teachings of our Master Ecologist Asho Zarathushtra (in the Vandidad) about our way of life, if followed, could bring us gradually to an equilibrium and the enjoyment of the gifts of Mother Nature. These are known as Divine Rules of Universal Truths in Nature or the Tarikats. These Spiritual Disciplines constitute THE Zoroastrian way of Life, abhor most severely the desecration of the elements of Nature, air, water fire or earth, and help up to derive maximum benefits from them; whether it be our method of disposal of dead with its fool-proof built-in system or our reverence for fire and the consequent ban on smoking or our wearing of Sudreh

Kushti, which builds a veritable fortress of invisible vibratory powers to prevent pollution for reciting Nirangs before bathing, eating, answering nature's call, for cutting of hair and nails, for cutting of trees, ad infinitum — all for keeping the environment pure. What was taught to us thousands of years ago, is gradually not only being uncovered now, but our Western brothers are beginning to realize the Truth . . . and we like fools are trying to discard these precious secrets as outdated superstitions, and unscientific! The call is clear — Back to Nature, Back to Zoroastrian way of living. (Not the way Zoroastrians live now).

Let us suppose we were at a point on the circumference of a circle (cycle). As we moved away from that point along the circumference, we came nearer to it (from the other side). This is the exact situation we are in now at present. A single glance at our surroundings is sufficient to convince us that the Angere Mainyu is having a field day. The more we let Ahriman exert his powers, the quicker we will reach the limits, (when of course Nature will strike and Mankind will suffer immensely) will be nearer to the end of an age when, in the long evolution of consciousness, Man will step beyond the limitations of egobound desire, expand his understanding, and begin a new era of cosmic consciousness. Hence we will come closer to the same point.

If you look around, you will see the signs — Eastern philosophies are being recognized, as never before in the West, as offering valuable insights into the nature of the mind. The prophecies also speak of the Second Coming, Scientists, ecologists, geophysicists, meteorologists, anthropologists and all the other "ists" of the world are causing a new series of accelerated trends towards that "extra something" which is beyond one's physical consciousness.

Under such drastically changing circumstances, I would most beseechingly ask Zoroastrians to wake up and rise to the occasion. We are too busy chasing the illusory butterflies instead

of being happy with the pots of gold we possess. Let us realize that Mysticism, Spiritualism or the esoteric side of our religion, the meanings behind ancient ceremonial practices, beliefs, customs, etc. will be made a living force of dynamic reality as more and more scientists stumble upon the age-old Truths revealed to us already, thousands of years ago, by the Master of Master Scientists Asho Zarathushtra.

What then must we do? We must together return to our roots, our ancient principles our age-old time-tested Religion in its pristine purity as our brothers of all the other Religions are going to, too, eventually. We must begin now, and constantly and vigilantly strive to fan the fire of the Faith in Religion — pure, and unadulterated; and humbly accept Zarathushtra's Revelations. If we tend to glorify on our past, become complacent, and allow ourselves to drift along through life, the world will pass us by in its onward (spiritual) progress.

"Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now the glory and the dream?"

(Wordsworth)

The glory or the gleam could be locked in the darkness of our eyes that have grown blind due to the dazzle of materialism. Or it could be lost in the pre-occupation we all have with modern hectic (un-Zoroastrian) life's process that drains our time and energy. . . or it could be lost in the vain glory of our present day values in education — devoid of divinity. It is only in pain and suffering, most of us will learn that His way is the True way . . . we need to come face to face with what is happening in this world and its implications of these current events. We need to dust and dig up our old scriptures which not based on man-made conjectures and opinions, but REVELATIONS from AHURA — One Source — Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent.

So much for the Changing Times awaiting us. But why did we change our true colors and discard the robe of Ashoi say in the last 100 or

150 years? Progress in Religion does not necessitate whimsical changes in the Laws of Nature. These are introduced to cater to the worldliness and convenience of the so-called progressivists.

Universial Religious Scriptures and Divine Universal Truths are carved forever and can withstand the tests of all time. They do not need to change with Time. No one except Raenidars or the Resuscitators of Faith can have the authority to make changes in the composition of our prayers. Our last Raenidar Saheb was Das'ure Dasturan Adarbad Marespand and now (as we pray in Chithrem Buyat) we must prepare for our Saviour — our next Raenidar Behram Varjavand who will revitalize our Religion in India and Iran. Times may change but Truths remain static through eternity. A Divine, God-made, truly immutable, natural law can never be broken.

When man attempts to interpret the laws of Nature and God, and forms his interpretation into ethical and moral laws, he generally makes terrible errors and creates disharmony. Nature is God's laws made visible.

When the Zoroastrian population was in million and spread in all four corners of the then-known world, there were Zoroastrian centers of learning not only in scriptures and Pahlavi explanations of the same, but they were real masters of the alien literature of Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Hindus and Europeans, etc., and knew Sanskrit, Arabic & Urdu. Even living in India (for over 1,000 years) with all other castes and creeds, difficulties and inconveniences, have we ever dared or attempted to, or even thought of making religious changes. Why now?

AVESTA AS THE MASTER SCIENCE :

Many modern learned and scientific minded Zoroastrians are truly unaware of the great and rich spiritual wealth Zoroastrian Religion offers. With faded faith and analytical minds, doubting the validity and authenticity of our scriptures, ceremonies, tenets, they are always asking WHY and HOW. It is to them we urge, to keep con-

versant with the latest trend in Science. The discoveries of modern Scientists may help them to understand the reason WHY and HOW, as these furnish pointers toward such incomprehensible dimensions and events. They are also oblivious of the "esoteric sign" — the Mysticism which is the very Soul of the religion.

Therefore when we try to unlock the mysticism behind every Zoroastrian tenet or practice with the key of Spiritualism combined with Science, we get the empiric proof (to which our Scientific minds are accustomed to) and the right picture emerges. It is as if all the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle fall into their places.

It is thrilling to note that our Asho Zarathushtra's teachings are being borne out and corroborated by discoveries made by advanced scientists of USA, USSR, UK, and elsewhere. It is our misfortune that we are not able to enjoy the fruits of such a wonderful legacy.

The days of mocking the ultra physical and spiritual events as unscientific or superstitious are now over. When ESP is an established fact, when Psychotronic generators are found to work, one has to accept the truth that religious practices and ceremonies are based on more profound laws than those discovered by physical sciences. For example, Dr. Alexis Carrel says: "Certain spiritual activities may cause anatomical changes as well as modifications of the tissues and organs. These organic phenomena are observed in various circumstances among them being the state of prayer." Avesta compositions have power to liberate spiritual energy within us.

There is a swing of Science underlying our Zoroastrian religious principles. Purity of the body, the laws of sanitation and hygiene, of health, and prevention of diseases against invisible microbes or druj, laws of physical magnetic purity, seclusion of menstruating women, Law of Genetics, all these are found in Avesta scriptures. The Vandidad injunction of Gaomaeza — how "taro" or bull's urine is declared to possess a certain amount of purifying magnetic force because the

12th Chakhra which has the characteristic property of receiving pure Khastra or electric current from the reservoirs of Nature, is located on the sexual organs of the "Gao-specials" animals; that the Nirang din ceremony is an elaborate process of preserving this Nirang intact and airproof so no germs may take rise therein for years, is beyond comprehension.

Staota on which our Manthra Prayers are based, is the fundamental Law of Vibrations which is the basic component of the whole creation. "This Law of Staota works effectively and incessantly in all the recitals of Zoroastrian ceremonials, and the genuine practical efficacy of Avesta prayers. It is on account of the charming efficacy of the arrangement of Avesta Manthra that the Yatha Ahu Vairuo is regarded as the best instrument, the only overpowering weapon — for smiting the Evil Principle Anghera Mainyu.

To those, therefore, who care to understand the modern science of acoustics, optics, electricity, magnetism, thermal heat, etc., and who also try to understand the mental science and the laws of Thought, it will be helpful to remind them that the laws of vibrations and unseen colours and forms both of sound and thought-play a very remarkable part in the efficacy of the Avesta. In all the Zoroastrian ceremonials this Law of Vibrations and colours (the Staota yacna) works fundamentally. Vibration is at the bottom of every visible and invisible thing in the universe.

That Sudreh-Kushti is not a mere symbol but an apparatus or a generator of spritual energy within, and absorber of Cosmic Yazatic energy without, could be understood with the help of radioactivity, cosmic rays and carbondating. That "Druj (evil) rushes from the North in the form of a fly" (hence we refrain from facing North — especially when we are praying) is being proved by the experiments of the Cheop Pyramid razor blade sharpener and a card model of an exact replica of a Pyramid.

Kirlian photography which takes pictures of aura of living things, gives us just a flash of the world existing with us but not known to us and had found only its outer unseen part. Zarathushtrian Science declares that it is a manifestation of a still interior and more subtle energy-body within a human being. Hence, what is found as "aura" by them is a part of "Aipi", a subtle etheric cloud-body surrounding each of us.

The knowledge of the Chakhras and their functions in the evolutionary process of the Soul, why the head and soles of the feet have to be covered at all times, the functions of the different glands, and the working of the two forces of good and evil on the magnetism of the two poles, the methods of agriculture, the importance of gham-bars, the fantastic solar system with Sun as an eternally charged battery, the different fire energies of both worlds; fire's role as Ahura Mazda's dutiful son helping the father in His divine work, the different kinds of electricity, Odic Light, Spectrochromemetry (Science of Colors) its role in effecting cure of diseases, chromo-mentalism (Beauty of Fine Forces) whirl-

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ings in an atom, functions of a cell, revolutions in the sky, Astronomy, Astrology, Numerology, everything, right from the speck of dust to Ahura Mazda Himself, are explained beautifully to the minutest detail in our scriptures which renders **AVESTA AS THE MASTER SCIENCE**. There is **nothing** on the face of this earth that is not included in the Avesta! And, yet, there are many among us who take refuge behind a few worn-out statements like (a) our Religion is very simple — Humata, Hukhata, Hvarashta: Good Thoughts, Good Words Good Deeds — (b) Only the Gathas are from Zarathushtra's time and only they reveal the true religion, (c) the rest of the Scriptures including Avesta are therefore to be discarded. This piece of philosophy is said to have come to their minds because Vohu Mano (the Good Mind) gives them the licence to think through the Freedom of Choice!

GATHAS AND AVESTA : THEIR RELATIONSHIP :

In the first place, the words **HUMATA, HUKHATA, HUVARASHTA** are not in the Gathas, but in the Avesta, — which they do not think of as important. Then why not discard them like all non-gathic “humbug”?

Secondly, there is nothing inconsistent between Gathas and other Avestan scriptures. The Gathas contain the Divine Truths, and teachings in terse compact words in a poetic form while the latter, the same Truths and teachings in an elaborate way in prose, and the Pahlavi writings expand and explain them further.

The entire scriptures are contained in 21 volumes called the 21 Nasks. It encompasses all the laws governing all the planes of the Universe: that is the Spiritual, the Subtle and the Physical. They are the loftiest, the best, the most excellent of all laws ever taught about the evolution of the Soul. Hence, the universality — or the universal greatness — just as the river includes its tributaries, just as a big tree covers all the small ones — because of its all — exhausting or

including each and every law of the Universe. **This characteristic can never be taken to imply Proselytism.** A Zoroastrian, when he observes the rules of his religion, remains parallel with Nature. The effect of this parallelism is accumulated invisibly in Nature and the effect extends **ALL OVER THE GLOBE** as it rotates and revolves, thus reaching and affecting each and every member of the (human) animal, vegetable and mineral kingdom. This is another quality that marks it out as Universal.

The Gathas : “Yanim Mano, Yanim Vacho, Yanim Shyothanem, Ashaono Zarathushtrahe, Fera Ameshaspenta (Gatha Geurvain Nemo Ve Gathao Ashonish)”.

The message of this preamble to the Gatha is that the thought, word and deed of our Zarathushtra flow from the highest inspiration — also indicates that Zarathushtra's thought and word and deed flow from the “Gatha” and are culminated in Ga'ha. The word Gatha is not confined only to the 5 Gathic Manthric chapters on our prayers, but **IT ALSO DENOTES THE DIVINE BEINGS NAMED AS GATHAS.**

Zarathushtra's physical, mental and spiritual constitution is the living manifestation of these divine channels of the Gathas. These channels vibrate with Divine Light, which we ordinary humans cannot receive. Zarathushtra, who could absorb the Light, reduced its vibrations in His 5 Gatha compositions, in such words as the human tongue can utter. Those are our 5 Gatha prayers.

A fact of great importance to be borne in mind is that — the Gathas are a small portion of the Avesta literature containing hymns and cannot therefore be expected to embody either a complete philosophy or an exhaustive ritual. — Some other facts: (1) Original Zoroastrian Scriptures comprised of 21 Nasks which were written by or at least during the time of Asho Zarathushtra, (2) Avesta writings are parts and portions of

21 nasks. Hence it follows that Avesta was written during Zarathushtra's time.

The unique feature of the 21 Nasks is that each Nask corresponds to one particular word of the prayer "Yatha Ahu Vairyo." The Nask as "Satud Yasht (21st Nask) has 33 chapters, which includes the Gathas and more than half of the Avesta texts of the Yasna! So, both the Avesta and Gathas are derived* from the same source.

In the Gathas, there are dialogues between Ahura Mazda and Zarathushtra, between Geush Urvan and Geush Tashan, Zarathushtra and his disciples, between Ahura Mazda and Ameshaspentas; Truth, observance of Contract, and Monotheism are encouraged. Zarathushtra abolished the then rampant belief in many Gods, and taught that there was only one God — Ahura Mazda, as the creator of the Ameshaspentas, Yazates, men and animals, the entire creation, spirit matter, water, earth and trees, sky, sun, moon, and stars.

It is also stated in the Gathas that Zarathushtra was sent by Ahura Mazda because Geush Urvan (Soul of the Earth) raised a challenging cry toward Him that there were upon the earth terrible conflicts between good and evil; the Earth had become full of oppression. The Soul of the Earth was then informed that Zarathushtra was coming and would combat effectively against all forces, energies and weapons of evil. Zarathushtra then came and binds the evil, rampant on Earth. Then He taught men to fight evil within him. These external and internal evils referred to throughout Gathas is **to fight against evil** and not fight to convert others to Zoroastrian Religion! He wishes to convert people from **IRRELIGION TO RELIGION** not a Christian to a Parsi. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra gives us Freedom of Choice to choose between the two paths and warns us of their respective consequences. This choice is moral and not religious.

Each Religion is entitled to profound respect and is based on Truth. Goodness and Piety are not the monopoly of Zoroastrian Religion only. Each individual is born into a particular religion

according to the **GREAT PLAN OF AHURA** and should practise the path laid down by his prophet. So a true Zoroastrian does not go out to convert or be converted, nor encourages others to betray their own Religion by accepting converts. **Every individual should** most scrupulously adhere to the rail-road of his religion; by doing this he not only helps himself but avoids clashes and helps the entire Railway System.

Each one of us has a designated role to play on this earth; each one of us having different spiritual constitutions, having "druj" in varying intensity was sent down for the alchemization of evil into good, to be perfected, and hence have different paths to traverse. But although our "ideas" (or our ways) may differ, we all share the same "ideals"! Like players of different instruments in the Orchestra of Life, we should stick to our own instruments or there would be a disharmony of the symphony!

In spite of all this, a fusion of all Religions is hinted at, talked about and prophesized, in our Scriptures. But when? Certainly not in the modern times! When the Dravo (Evil) in each soul will be alchemized, when all souls will be perfected, when collectively Ignorance will be changed to Knowledge, when the final aim of Farsho Kereti will be fulfilled, **then** an order of White Brotherhood or Ardafarvash will be possible. We have to work and progress along these lines. How do we help? By going on the path of our ordained Religion, we contribute 9/10 our virtues (sawab) to nature for the upkeep of the Religious Mysteries, keeping only 1/10 reserved for our own progress. This is our contribution to the Brotherhood of Ardafarvash. Such high ideals and such broad-mindedness!

In the meantime, we have to take up the cudgels, arm ourselves with Knowledge of Religion and purpose of Life, and prepare for the darker days ahead of us. Let us don the armour of Faith and once again take up the golden weapons of our dear Zarathushtra's teachings and

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fight as true warriors (Ratheshtars) to defend ourselves in this battlefield of Life. It is not going to be easy. But wherever a Zoroastrian may be; in India, Iran, Gulf countries or in the Western World — just anywhere, he can and he should adhere to a Zoroastrian way of life. What prevents him? There is no religious oppression in modern times and now when the trend is toward Spiritualism, it will be even more inspiring and significant to follow the principles of our Faith. We must be ready for these. "Times of Testing". We must be prepared for and pave the way for the coming of our Saviour, Behram Varjavand and be worthy of receiving Him. We must unite to relieve the glory therefore of the Zoroastrian Faith and hope and pray for the "Roshan Rooz".

The Relevance of Zoroastrianism in the Modern World

by

ERVED BURJOR H. ANTIA

What is religion. Over a hundred years ago, Donald Grant declared "a man without religion is, at best, a poor reprobate, A FOOTBALL OF DESTINY, with no tie linking him to INFINITY. But a woman without religion is worse—a flame without heat, a rainbow without colour and a flower without perfume. Religion is a way of life which binds man to the ultimate condition of his existence. It defines man's role vis-a-vis his creator and his relationship to the world. It embodies a system of beliefs and practices through which the ethical fabric of a society is bound together.

What is the situation prevailing in the world today. Urbanisation and industrialisation are corroding our age old social moral and spiritual fibre of our society. We are living in the age of discord and discontent, disorder and destruction.

Base your life on Asha. As you all know the Zoroastrian religion is based on the immutable and eternal law of Asha which means uprightness, straightforward or righteousness in our day-to-day life. Asha is a very comprehensive term in the Zoroastrian ethics. It signifies order, discipline, harmony, etc. and includes all sorts of acts of purity, truthfulness and beneficence. The very first prayer that a Zoroastrian child is to recite Ashem Vohu which means righteousness. "Righteousness is the best gift and divine happiness alone. Happiness to him who lives for the sake of best righteousness" From order and discipline proceeds progress. From disorder and discord one reaches to destruction.

(Yasna 43.6.)

To uphold Asha at all times and in all circumstances of our life is a duty enjoined on a true Zoroastrian. What reward awaits the man who treads the path of Asha is exquisitely indicated in the following version of Hoshbam "O, Ahura Mazda, grant that through the best Asha we may catch the sight of" THEE; We may approach THEE; We may be united with THEE". (Yasna Ha LX 12).

It will thus be observed that the fourteen syllables of the Ashem vohu, by which a Zoroastrian child is first initiated to the Zoroastrian faith contains an all embracing code of ethics by which the child pledges itself to uphold TRUTH, JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALIOR fraud, hypocrisy and falsehood.

The same message is echoed in the Ustavad Gatha.

Existence of Spenta Mino (Good spirit) and Angre. Mino (evil spirit) in our scripture indicate that the World is a battle ground between the forces of good and evil. According to our holy prophet Zarathushtra, man can approach his creator, get happiness and experience "the mind's internal heaven" as Wordsworth puts it, in spite of the seeming wickedness of this world, only through righteousness.

In every religion certain verses are regarded as specially sacred. The most sacred verse in Zoroastrianism is said to be the Ahuna Vairya.

to Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy Baronet and opined that the mode of disposal of the dead by Parsis an admirable way from sanitary reasons and quite apart from religious feelings.

Similarly the rules regarding contamination and quarantine followed in twentieth century are also laid down in our Vendidad which says that no one should touch the dead body after 4 hours from the time of the death, as rigor-mortis sets in and if a person touches dead body, he has to take Barashnum i.e. staying apart for 9 nights (Vendidad-Paragard IX-35). This is nothing but the principle of quarantine accepted by any civilized country i.e. any person coming from any country with yellow fever without a proper certificate, he is to be segregated for a period of 9 days. It may also interest our nutritionists/dieticians that Vendidad lays down that high protein diet is to be given to a certain type of persons under certain circumstances. It is astonishing to observe that our Vendidad does not deal with only physical pollution but also with genetic pollution and condemn mixing of the seeds of the Zoroastrians with non-zoroastrians (Vendidad Paragard 18-p. 62). It is a great pity that some of our co-religionists, who are strictly following the principles of genetic pollution for their dogs and horses are not following the same principles for their sons and daughters.

Rituals. Rituals ceremonies are of great importance in a religion which upholds the path of devotion for its followers. Attainment to the highest ideals of Truth, Goodness and Beauty is through progressively gradual stages. It is futile to talk of taking a big jump from the rudiments of spiritual development to the highest state of supreme holiness. For the majority of mankind, symbols, rituals and ceremonies were aids to their progress, in

matters spiritual, just as a child at the primary stage needs concrete symbols to grasp the fundamentals of alphabet or arithmetic. From concrete to abstract is always the general principle.

The object of Zoroastrian rituals, in the first place, is to purify atmosphere, insofar as they are performed on a clear spot with fire burning with incense (Vendidad VII 79-80). Such an atmosphere is conducive to the presence of invisible spirits, whose association in the rituals, performed with piety and sincerity of heart, is generally conceded. In Yasht XIII-84, it is said, that the shining Immortals come to the offerings via the illuminated paths (raoxshanaongho pantano avayatam avi zaothrao). In the same Yasht-64, it is said, that the guardian spirits (fravashis) proceed in the midst of offerings in thousands (myazdaham baevane upavazante).

So far, we have seen the close association of invisible spirits with rituals wholeheartedly performed, as well as the existence of the former. But the main object of the Zoroastrian rituals and ceremonies is to secure their blessing. As stated in Yasht XIII-49-52 the guardian divine spirits (fravahrs) are attracted to the simple offerings presented to them during the last days of the passing year by the sincere devotees, through their heart-felt prayers, and departing, they pronounce blessing on their votaries.

The belief in securing blessing from divine spirits, does not find favour with some, according to whom noble deeds of virtue alone, find favour with God. Nobody would deny that But, if the world were full of people, all practising deeds of virtue there would be no need of any religion

religion which aim principally at the enforcement of sanitary rules, kindness to animals, hospitality to strangers and travellers, respect to superiors, and help to the poor and needy.

It is evident that this is the most complete and comprehensive code of morals to be found in any system of religion. It comprises all that is best in the codes of Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity with a much more ample definition of many vices and virtues which, even in the Christian religion, are left to be drawn as inferences rather than inculcated as precepts. Thus, laziness, cheating, selfishness and envy are distinctly defined as crimes, and their opposites as virtues and not merely left to be inferred from the general maxims of 'loving your neighbour as yourself', and 'doing unto others as you would be done by.'

The application of religious precepts to practical life is another distinguishing feature.

Thus kindness to animals is specially enjoined, and it is considered a sin to ill-treat animals of the good creation, such as cattle, sheep, horses or dogs by starving, beating or unnecessarily killing them. This is provided in a separate code.

Another precept laid down in our vendidad, thousands of years ago, and which is much talked about today is anti pollution and environment measures, which are now accepted and followed by even a tiny County Board of the twentieth century to prevent pollution of any element of nature, such as water, air, fire and earth. Not only our Western scholars, but also medical persons have praised the method of disposal of our dead as far superior method than that in vogue in many of the western countries (Louis L. Seaman M.D. of New York). Way back in 1886 the Hon'ble Mr. Justice John Scott of the Bombay High Court wrote on 30th November, 1886

Gathas. Gathas present philosophy of the highest moral and spiritual significance e.g Yasna 30.2 lays down that man shapes his destiny through his free will and choice. He can accept or reject virtue or sin. But once the choice is made, he is responsible for the same to himself and his maker. Corollary of the foregoing principle of freedom of choice is the ennobling principle of Akem Akai Vanghuhim Ashim Vanghave Good to the good doer and evil to the evil-doer Another ennobling principle of Gatha is Ushta Ahmai, Yahmai Ushta Kahmai chit-i.e Happy is he by whom others are made happy (Ha 43-1)

The Gathas which are pure and lofty in spirits, present guidelines of the highest moral and spiritual significance. Thus the principles of Gathas provide answer to many of our ills and problems of today. For a Zoroastrian, his religion not only means performing good thoughts, words and deeds, but to understand and live by the ethical infrastructure of the Amesha Spentas.

Amesha Spentas. As you know Zarathushtra has referred to in the Gathas the Seven Amesha Spentas Seven Immortals. (Seven Archangels). Every Amesha Spenta is a mighty divine power and his authority reigns supreme over a particular virtue as also a particular creation of the Universe. Ahura Mazda — Human being — Wisdom Vohu Maneh — Animal — Good mind Asha Vahishta — Fire — Righteousness Khoshathra Variya—Air—The Divine Kingdom Armaiti—Land—High thought or devotion Haurvatat — Water — Perfection Ameratat — Vegetable — Immortality

Those, who invoke the blessing of these seven Amesha Spentas, achieve their af-

esaid traits and therefore it is rightly mentioned in Ahura Mazda Yasht that the Amesha Spentas, are the creation of the Universe of Ahura Mazda, its protector, guardian & nourisher. Who in the world would not like to adopt & follow the noble and everlasting virtues of Ahmesha Spentas, whether he lives in the twentieth century or fortieth century?

Vendidad an ethical code for the Zoroastrians to follow. The code of morality enjoined by the Zoroastrian religion is as pure as its theory. Our Vendidad (Vi-dev-dat-Law against evil) which is about 3000 years old denounces the following sins which find place in a penal code of any civilised nation of the twentieth century.

Murder, infanticide, poisoning, adultery on the part of man as well as women, sorcery, sodomy, cheating in weight and measure, breach of promises whether made to a Zoroastrian or non-Zoroastrian, telling lies and deceiving false covenants, slander and calumny, perjury dishonest appropriation of wealth, taking bribe, keeping back the wages of labourers, misappropriation of religious property removal of a boundary stone, turning people out of their property, maladministration and defrauding apostasy heresy, rebellion. These are positive injunctions.

The following are condemnable from religious point of view; Abandoning the husband; not acknowledging one's children on the part of the father; cruelty towards subjection the part of a ruler, avarice, laziness, illiberality and egotism, envy. In addition there are a number of special precepts adopted to the peculiar rites of the Zoroastrian

with its doctrines and other formalities. A ritual whole-heartedly performed and in no way a nuisance to others, but a means of developing healthy emotions, is certainly a noble deed.

The most important object of rituals and ceremonies type of this is to express gratitude to God for the seasonal bounties bestowed upon mankind, who should never forget this virtue. It is an evil day for men, therefore, when intoxicated with knowledge of physical science, they cease to offer their gratitude to the Most High. The importance of rituals has been rightly emphasized by Lord Reglam in his treatise on the ORIGINS OF RELIGIONS he observed :

"These rites and rituals make up religion as we see it practised. For the religious or a vast majority of them, they are not merely

a part of religion but RELIGION ITSELF. Religion according to them consists in the due performance of these rituals. Religious belief is belief in the value and the efficacy of these rituals and Theology consists in giving reasons why these rituals should be performed".

However, performing rituals and being ethically dishonest is of no use, as the religion or its rituals are not the cloak to be worn on special occasions, but armour to be worn every day by every minute, by every second.

A true Zoroastrian however also needs to recognise and experience the devotional life of the faith through the celebration of the **ganambars** the **jashans**, the **nirangdins**, the **muktads**, the going to the fire temples. These are some of the ways in which a Zoroastrian can experience the faith through its rituals.

Recently there is a fashion amongst some of our ultra modern Zoroastrians to deprecate our age old system like Dokhmenashin or Muktaad ceremonies or our age old rituals like gahambars, jashans, I can only remind them what one of the greatest historians of our times Will Durant has said:

"Intellect is, therefore, a vital force in history, but it can also be a dissolvent and destructive power. Out of every hundred new ideas ninety-nine or more will be probably be inferior to the traditional responses which they propose to replace. No one man, however, brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdoms of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history."

The same message was delivered by Dr. Samuel Johnson in 1763. In the LIFE OF MILTON he declares:-

"To be of no church is dangerous. Religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by Faith and Hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and reimpresed by external ordinances, by stated calls, to worship, and the salutary influence of example."

If Dr. Johnson thought the importance of rituals as the foundation of the religion in 1745 and Will Durant considered them indispensable in 1945, who are we small people of feeble minds and erring judgment to judge the superior wisdom of our ancestors who have formulated them with precision and dexterity and generations of priests have adhered to them for the ultimate salvation of the community.

For us to scrutinize their wisdom be to scrutinize our own folly for we are incompetent to emulate their example.

As the poet Cowper narrates:-

"God moves in a mysterious way His Wonders to perform; He plants his footsteps in the rides upon the storm"

As Tryon Edwards observed:-

"What we need in religion, is not new light, but new sight; not new paths, but new strength to walk in the old ones; not new duties, but new strength from on high to fulfill those that are plain before us."

The old highwaya are safe and wide. They have been chalked out by inspired souls and pious men through spiritual inspiration and divine light. Generations of our ancestors have trodden these paths and achieved their salvation. Let not the present generation in a moment of madness, in a fit of blind fury or in a mood of mental arrogance abdicate these bright paths and hazared the unknown.

Zarathushtra voice is still! a living voice. From the aforesaid study of the scriptures of our religion it can be observed that Zarathushtra was the first man who gave a definitely moral character and direction to religion (Yasna 31-1.)

His teaching has stood the test of time and is as fresh today as it was given about 8,000 years ago and his religion has been therefore, recognised as one of the nobles religions ever founded. The principles of the Zoroastrian religion are so logical rational and scientific that in the last century, a leading western Avestan Scholar, Samuel Laing wrote in 1837:

"The parsee has no reason to tremble for his faith if a Galileo invents the telescope or a Newton discovers the law of gravity. He has no occasion to argue for Noah's deluge or for the order of creation described in Genesis. Nay even, he may remain undisturbed by the latest and most fatal discovery that man has existed on the earth for untold ages and instead of falling from a high estate, has been continuously by slow and peaceful progress from the rudest Origin."

[Extract from the paper presented at the 4th World Zoroastrian Congress.]