



The Parsi Press



Winter 2013 Issue

Youth Connections:

- ◆ Level One (Ages 5-7): Shireen Gandhi and Natasha Patel
- ◆ Level Two (Ages 8-10): Shireen Gandhi and Yezdi Kharas
- ◆ Level Three (Ages 11-13): Bepsi Sanjana
- ◆ Level Four (Ages 14-18) Shernaz Minwalla and Erich Tavadia

The articles within the Parsi Press are written by students in the Level 3 and Level 4 classes. The students sit in a room to create a list of events, writers volunteer to tell the stories, photographers polish their lenses, and deadlines are set. We are extremely proud of their initiatives to share their pride in their community.

Enjoy.

Wedding Ceremonies

The Youth Connections of the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan meets once a month for religion class. These fun classes discuss topics that allow kids to learn new things about the religion. In the month of November, the middle school students learned about marriage. They, along with their teacher Mrs. Bepsi Sanjana, studied the 10 steps of a Parsi wedding ceremony and the cultural differences between North American and Parsi weddings.

The first step is the Rupia Pervono, the unofficial engagement. Then, four days before the wedding is the Adravanm, during which the bride and groom exchange rings. The third step is the Madavsaro, when they plant a tree, which symbolizes a new beginning. The fourth step is the Adami, when the families exchange gifts. The Supra nu Murat is the fifth step, an event during which a paste of turmeric is applied to the bride and groom. Next comes the Nahan, which takes place on the day of the wedding, when the priest purifies the bride and groom. The seventh step is the Achumichu, which waves off evil. After this is the Araantar, where the bride and groom sit down as rice is thrown on them. The ninth step is the Chero Bandhanu, during which the bride and groom are bound by seven strands and the priest blesses the couple. Last but not least is the Hath Barvano, which is a game played by the sister-in-law and groom.

After learning the steps in a Parsi wedding ceremony the students discussed cultural differences between North American and Parsi weddings. One of the major differences they talked about was between the dress and the sari. Many Parsi girls raised in North America wear a sari for the rituals and change into a gown for the reception. A nick name the students made for a wedding which used customs from both cultures was a "hybrid wedding." Students agree that it was up to the couple's families to decide what type of wedding should take place.

As shown, Youth Connections classes have helped Parsi kids learn about their religion. The Zoroastrian Community hopes to have kids continue learning and discussing these important religious ideas.

Travels

During the November meeting of the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan's Youth Connections class, the young students of Mrs. Shireen Gandhi's class discovered new things about how their ancestors came from Iran to India carrying with them the sacred fire, the Atash, and how they were able to make peace with the king, Jadav Rana.

They learned the story of when the king gave a bowl of milk to the priests saying it was full, and they poured sugar into the milk, to show that they could blend in with their culture. The Zoroastrians settled down in what is known today as Sanjan,



The Parsi Press



Gujarat. The class learned about what life was like for their ancestors, and what their journey was like. "After class is over, go and talk to your parents about what their journey was like to America vs. back then," Mrs. Gandhi told the class. The class also discussed the idea that God is everywhere and always with us; no matter where we are or what we do, He is always watching us and making sure that we are safe from harm.

During the next classes, March through May, they will be talking about specific Zoroastrians, and why they were so famous. They will also be learning about the five Gatha days, in which we pray in five periods of each day: sunrise to noon, noon to three p.m., three p.m. to sunset, sunset to midnight, and midnight to sunrise. They will also be learning the three calendars, the Shashani, Kadmi, and Fasli calendar, and then the days and months of the calendars.

Gahambar

On November 11th, 2012, the Michigan Zoroastrian community came flocking to the Village Oaks Club House in Novi. Laden with food, flowers, and much more, this Gahambar, was one of many annual celebrations during which our local Parsi community gets together. The Gahambar is run entirely by community volunteers, with contributions of food and other goods for the Jashan relying heavily on the generosity of others. Everyone contributed in some way to the Gahambar, no matter how big or small.

The Gahambar started off with priests Noshir Sidhwa and Tehmton

Mirza performing a Jashan. Tehmton Mirza and his wife Zenobia reside in London, Ontario and have come down to Detroit each year for the past four years to be a part of our Gahambars.

At the commencement of the Jashan, Mobed Mirza asked everyone to stand for the duration of some prayers, after which, everyone was allowed to sit down. At the conclusion, the entire congregation recited the Tadorosti and Din-no-kalmo prayers together.

After the Jashan, appetizers were served. Families attending the Jashan provided appetizers which included fruits and ravo that were blessed during the Jashan.

After an hour and everyone had had their fill of food, Mobed Tehmton Mirza gave his annual Mehergan talk. This year, the speech was about the concept of heaven and hell in Zoroastrianism. He described how, on the way to heaven, a soul will come across the Chinvat bridge. On the other side is heaven, and below it is purgatory. If a soul has followed good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, the bridge will be wide and the soul will be able to cross into heaven. But if the soul is bad, the bridge will be razor-thin and the soul will fall into the abyss below. Mobed Mirza made several references to other religions and even cracked a couple of jokes.

After the talk, the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan presented Mobed Mirza and his wife with a gorgeous bouquet of flowers. Soon after, the ZAOM committee members made some announcements on association matters, such as different ways to raise funds for the association. This was followed by a



The Parsi Press



lunch of rice, dhansak, salad, and kebabs. After that, dessert was served, thus ending the Gahambar on a sweet note!

The most important part of the Gahambar may not be the Gahambar itself, but the idea behind it. The idea of getting together and working as a team to make such an event possible holds many lessons for other communities and organizations as well as our own.

The Journey

By Armaity Minwalla

The concept of the afterlife is one that has been studied and theorized about for centuries. Every religion has its beliefs about not only the actual destinations of heaven and hell, but the journey. Christians believe in a purgatory between heaven and hell. Muslims believe that an angel judges the souls and determines whether they go to heaven or hell based on the soul's answers to three questions. This is a difficult topic both in that it is a heavy subject to speak about and that it is usually ambiguous according to religious texts. Mobed Tehmtan Mirza once again spoke at the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan's November Ghambar, and this year he enlightened the group about this serious topic as it relates to Zoroastrians.

As usual he makes a very heavy topic lighter by adding bits of humor and story-telling. However, the humor did not take away from the intellectually stimulating and thought provoking

messages of his speech. Arguably the most interesting part of the afterlife in Zoroastrianism is the journey to the final destination. Heaven is the final destination for all Zoroastrians as hell is a temporary place where one's soul is punished for its past sins. This is a testament to Ahura Mazda's undying and bountiful mercy. Some religions tell their followers to fear God. Zoroastrians and God have a relationship based on

respect and love, not fear. The soul's journey to heaven or hell is also based on the weight of its sins. To get to heaven the soul must first cross a bridge. The width of that bridge is determined based on that person's sins. This may be why Zoroastrians pray for the souls of their loved ones for four days. Those final prayers are the last push, the final appeal to God to send help that soul across the bridge safely.

Zoroastrianism also proves to be one of the most accepting religions. Though it does not fully allow conversions, yet, the conversions are not necessary for one's soul to go to heaven. According to Mobed Mirza, all souls go to heaven—including the souls of people believing in different religions, and even those who do not believe in any religion. Mobed Mirza then clarified what heaven is and what it takes to get there. The word for heaven is "Vahista-ahu," meaning "best existence." This is one of the most straightforward



The Parsi Press



definitions of heaven given. The mantra that all Zoroastrians have anchored in their minds, "good thoughts, good words, good deeds," is all one needs to end up in heaven. Mobed Mirza confirmed that simply being a good person during life will guarantee a spot in heaven.

Parsi Community Editorial

The size of the Zoroastrian community throughout the six continents is dwindling. Due to the many Zoroastrians in hiding in Iran and other nearby areas, the exact population of Zoroastrians in the world is unknown, however, there is estimated to be only 120,000 to 200,000 of us alive today. Some researchers say the worldwide population may even be as low as 80,000. One may look at this number and say that's a lot of people, but when compared to our world population of over 7 billion, this number is miniscule. The truth is that if we continue at the rate we are going, in a few more years there will be no more Zoroastrians left in this world.

So what do we do? Well there are a few simple steps that all families can take to ensure that our religion lives on for much longer. Firstly, we need to raise awareness about our religion. We can begin by doing this at home. When a child is young, the parents should take the initiative to start teaching them the fundamentals. In our religion classes, young boys and girls from age four begin learning the basic aspects of our religion. Some of these include the seven creations,

the principles of good thoughts, good words, good deeds, and the teachings of our prophet. Parents can also devote a short one to two hours per week to review and go over new information, such as the reciting of prayers, with their children. This small amount of time per week will largely expand the child's knowledge about our religion in the long run. Once the children grow into adults, they will be able to pass this knowledge onto their children and keep the religion alive.

Once awareness is raised at home, we should begin telling others about our religion. This is where kids can also help. When someone asked about his or her religion, a Zoroastrian should not simply reply with "Indian," "Persian" or "it's a long story." He or she should instead take the time to tell our history. You never know, someone may become truly interested and even do some research.

Raising awareness is pretty simple, and while these next few things may seem difficult or time consuming, they are painless. Every true Zoroastrian should say their prayers every day and do their kusti. While not everyone knows all the kusti prayers, they can at least say the main ones. Taking five to ten minutes each day to pray makes you feel good and gives many the feeling of rejuvenation and being one with god. Though this means spending five less minutes watching TV, talking on the phone, or engaging in other pastimes, it is simple and rewarding. We should also attend our prayer classes or do individual research to increase our knowledge about our religion's many intricate customs and beliefs.

Although these may seem like large commitments, they are, in



The Parsi Press



reality, all reasonable and achievable. If a significant number of the remaining population takes up a few of these practices, our community will begin to thrive.

Building a Strong Foundation

Throughout the first couple months of the 2013 year, the youngest class of Zoroastrians, ages seven and under, took part in a variety of activities which allowed them to learn about our religion while still being interested and entertained. The children continued familiarizing their tongues with the Gujarati language by softly, but surely beginning to speak in complete sentences. Recently, they have mastered introducing themselves by stating their name and age and even asking their classmates how they are feeling. In preparation for the upcoming Navroze Mubarak function, the kids began cutting out pictures of objects that belong on the Haft Seen table and discovering the significance of each item. These illustrations and explanations were later laminated and preserved as place mats which were on display at the Navroze celebration. To end the afternoon, the children enjoyed taking turns reading the comic book, *Life of Zarathustra*, where they learned about our prophet's life from his birth to his early childhood.

It is uplifting to see our religion being introduced to these children at such a young age. Despite the fact that these little ones might be novices to the ways of our religion right now, with each class they attend and every project they take part in, they get a flavor of what our culture is about and are slowly becoming more

knowledgeable in what it really means to be a Zoroastrian. Although it may seem far away at the moment, someday these young Parsis will have to carry on our religion's legacy; they will be the deciding factor to whether or not our faith will carry on for generations or slowly dwindle away, but with the amazing foundation our ZOAM teachers have provided for our youngest class, I have no doubt in my mind that they will be successful.

Passage Posters

On March 17, 2013, the Michigan Parsi community held its monthly religion class. In Shireen Aunty's class of 10-11 year olds, the students created posters of the journey that someone in their family took from India to the United States. Here, the students wrote about the reasons why this family member moved to the U.S., how the Parsi community welcomed them, etc. They later presented these posters at the community's Navroze function, located at the Village Oaks Club House.

Making these posters is very important because it makes the students aware of what their parents/grandparents had to do to come to the United States, as well as how hard it was to initially adjust to life in America. This awareness helps the students appreciate how privileged they are to be able to live in this country. Overall, the class was very productive and helped the students realize the freedoms that they take for granted.



The Parsi Press



The Characteristics of a Zoroastrian:

On March 10th, 2013, Bepsi Sanjana's class learned about what the characteristics of a good Zoroastrian should be. The characteristics of a Zoroastrian are the following: Being charitable, honest/trustworthy, and responsible. They also learned good qualities like listening before speaking, understanding the other person's opinions, respecting religious views, open-minded to others, good manners, and has a good sense of gratitude(thankful). "These are important character traits that all Zoroastrians should have," says Mrs. Sanjana

Another thing they learned was possessing the Amesha Spenta qualities:

- ⊕ Vohu Mano – in human beings is the good mind.
- ⊕ Asha – principled, honest, ordered, lawful, and for some piety or righteousness.
- ⊕ Haurvatat- seeking excellence in everything you do.
- ⊕ Amertat- Teaches you the way of life.
- ⊕ Armaiti- serenity
- ⊕ Khshathra- having dominion and sovereignty over another life.

One of the last things they learned was about possessing the six virtues: Reason, self-control, modesty, trustworthiness, gratitude, and hope. These virtues contribute to the reputation of the Zoroastrian people. With these virtues, there also come six vices: Malice, anger, arrogance, deceitfulness, greed, and despair. "By

giving ourselves good qualities, and traits, we can get rid of the vices and protect our virtues," says Bepsi Aunty.

The characteristic of the Zoroastrian person affects everyone surrounding him/her, thus giving the people surrounding them good qualities like theirs. What you do can also affect the people around you, so try your hardest to possess good qualities!

Good Choices

By: Armaity Minwalla

Khshathra means having dominion and sovereignty over one's life. Khshathra is one of the qualities of the Amesha Spentas, the protectors of the seven creations. These are qualities that every Zoroastrian should possess. Focusing on Khshathra brings to light a fairly unique Zoroastrian quality. Often people say things like, "God has a plan" or "God controls my life." Zoroastrians are allowed to and required to make their own decisions. This freedom of choice is something many religions do not have. A good Zoroastrian is responsible for his or her own actions. This is where "Good thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds" come into play. That mantra is the basic principle for how a Zoroastrian should live. God cannot control a person's thoughts, words, or actions. This is a mantra Zoroastrians learn at an extremely young age and continue to use into adulthood and then with their own children. So even early on, Zoroastrian children know that their actions are in their hands. This gives a child a lot of responsibility, "Because God says to use good words, I will not call this person stupid," "Because mom and dad said that I should do good things, I'll share my candy-bar," etc. This



The Parsi Press



sense of responsibility for one's own thoughts, words, and actions allows people to take control of their life. With this responsibility comes certain independence because soon the "good" tendencies become habitual and subconscious. Independence and self-reliance are also qualities of a good Zoroastrian according to the Avesta. Soon they will be sharing and complimenting without even needing to think about why. This independence to think and do for themselves without being told will spill over into other aspects of life. Instead of sharing a candy-bar, later in life they will be doing charity work, which is another Zoroastrian principle listed in the Avesta. Actually, many non-Zoroastrians note upon meeting a Zoroastrian that their generosity and charity are the main attributes that they noticed. It has also been observed that Zoroastrians are "diligent, conscientious, and skillful in their work ethic" (John Ovington 1689). That hard work comes from the fact that Zoroastrians know that they are in control of their life. This gives them the foresight to know that a good education and hard work will allow them to be successful in the future, "If I do not study now, I may not be a (insert profession here) later. And God has given me the responsibility over my own life." So every thought, word, and action that a Zoroastrian thinks, says, or does, is dictated by the person, not by God.

So where does God come into all of this? Why do we pray if God really does not control our life? Well, there are some things that are out of human control: disease, weather, accidents, etc. If a person has practiced for months to make the basketball team, she can still pray to get on the team because there are

infinitely many circumstances that are beyond her control. She could slip on the court, the coach may not be watching her the moment she does something spectacular, or she could get injured. There are always situations that people cannot control. If a person does his or her absolute best, then the rest is either someone else's decision or God's. So be the best person you can be every day, make good choices, because no one controls you but you.

Navroze Celebration

On March 16th, 2013, the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan held their annual Navroze function. The Jashan was scheduled to start at 5:30, but people were invited to come at 5:00 to help set up. The Jashan went well, with Mobed Sidhwa performing the rituals. After the Jashan was over, all the attendees stood and said two Ashem Vohus and 2 Yatha Ahu Vairyos. Then each family went up to pay respect to the fire and said some prayers thanking God for everything.

Soon after, snacks were served, and everybody headed downstairs to fill their stomachs. The snacks consisted of chips, spicy chicken, heart shaped cutlets, bhaniloo ravo and nuts, and multiple soft drinks. Everybody had their fill and talked among themselves for a while. Soon after, all the people headed back upstairs to attend a brief discussion about the Cylinder of Cyrus.

The cylinder of Cyrus is an ancient documentation of the rights that Cyrus the Great granted to the people of his empire. The cylinder was inscribed in 538 B.C. It consists of two



The Parsi Press



parts: a cylindrical shaped piece of stone and another slab of stone. Both these pieces have been inscribed upon, at the order of Cyrus the Great, in Akkadian cuneiform, the most common form of writing at the time. Cyrus ordered that this list of human rights be written right after he conquered Babylon and set all the Jewish slaves free. The cylinder noted the many rights and freedoms that Cyrus granted to his subjects, including the freedom of religion, language, and culture. These rights were given to every person living within his empire, including slaves. This declaration of human rights was the template that the United Nations used when it issued its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is now accepted throughout the world.

The Cylinder of Cyrus and its counterpart are on tour in the US during the year of 2013. The cylinder will stop at 5 cities across the nation, including Washington D.C., New York, Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The cylinder will then return to its permanent residence in the British Museum in London, England. However, there is a replica of the cylinder on permanent display at the UN World Headquarters in New York City.

After the discussion was complete, the Association held its AGM, or Annual General Meeting. This went on for a while as the members discussed the association's future and how to raise more funds. Then dinner was served. It was catered from Rangoli and consisted of various types of biryani, chicken, and other Indian delicacies. Everybody dove in and went back for seconds or even thirds.

Soon after dinner, dessert was put out. As there were a few birthdays to celebrate, dessert consisted of several cakes as well as gulab jamun and ravo. Thus the party began to wind down. What a sweet way to end our fabulous New Year celebrations.