

Charity & Hard Work

ZOROASTRIANS are told in the Gathas that laziness and sloth are frowned on. It is our duty to toil, so that life may be enjoyed when relaxing after effort and when the bounty of our hard work produces results. The work ethic is a strong hallmark of the community in which wealth in itself is not regarded as undesirable. However, Zoroastrians are exhorted to do good deeds and among these is the promotion of a charitable disposition which inclines them to part with a little of what would otherwise be just for themselves.

In more industrial communities and among more affluent families, it is commonplace to find a person endowing a hospital, a home for the aged, an orphanage or a school, all institutions for which Parsees are particularly renowned. Nowadays, endowments are also made for communities to meet at the local centre for a meal together after prayers of thanksgiving and remembrance.

However in communities where agriculture is the principal source of income, (the case for the majority of Zoroastrians in Iran until about 60 years ago), memorial feasts, "gahambar", in remembrance of the person who endowed the feast, are held annually (in one of the 6 designated 5 day periods) and bread and dried fruits are distributed to the whole community, who are all expected to participate. Occasionally the feasts are bolstered by the distribution of a savoury snack incorporating chick peas, onions and coriander. These feasts are normally funded by an endowment of land, whereby its produce is sold to provide the income for the feast. In the rural communities that characterised Zoroastrian society, it was also a very frequent event to find charity stews being cooked on the street corner or passers-by being handed fried bread, sweetened and spiced, by groups of people cooking over fires outside their homes or at the crossroads.

Candles would also sometimes appear in niches at street corners, all of these being acts of charity benefitting the community in differing measure according to the means of the person in question and offered as an act of thanksgiving for a piece of good fortune or an earlier imprecation being fulfilled.

It should also be mentioned that it was often menfolk in the community who were the chief cooks, fire-stokers and handlers of the vast cauldrons which had to be used to prepare community charity stews, while the women and children did the preparatory work.

Charitable endeavours help to ensure that the person in question will be able to leave this world with a clear conscience and pass "lightly, fulfilled and happy" (as per our Tandarosti prayers) over the Chinvat bridge and on to the Abode of Everlasting Song and Light. In our Ashem Vohu prayer we are told that purity (of thought word and DEED) brings happiness, and this is a self fulfilling dictat since service to others brings in its wake, great satisfaction and joy to the doer. In our tradition, it is the ultimate goal to leave this world as a NIKNAM – someone whose name will live on because of his/her virtue

WZO would not exist were it not for the initial charitable endowment of the now deceased Goli and Mehraban Farhangi. Since then many generous people have remembered WZO in their wills, entrusting substantial sums as charitable contributions so that we can further the wellbeing of our global Zoroastrian community. . To be able to continue and expand our work to reach more people, we are constantly in need of more funding.