

HAMAZOR

PUBLICATION OF WORLD ZOROASTRIAN ORGANIZATION

Within the struggle to rebuild the world lie seeds of meaning and the bittersweet promise of beauty. As we rebuild our sense of community at all scales, we can leverage this current period of disruption to usher in a new era of positive transformation — one that ensures a more inclusive society where everyone benefits. Join us as we take the first steps in reimagining what this looks for us as a global and local community.



REBUILDING FOR THE FUTURE



The World Zoroastrian Organisation

(Globally supporting Zoroastrianism, its people and traditions)

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Editor's Note

From exploring our identities as individuals to understanding the collective needs of our future generations, this issue looks at the ways in which Zoroastrians come together and look towards the road ahead in Hamazor ("of the same strength")

At a time when our community and the world at large is bouncing back from a period of accelerated uncertainty, we at the World Zoroastrian Organization are taking a hard look at the role we can play in reforming and rebuilding for a future grounded in our principles of ***Humata, Hukhta and Huvarashta***.



As we embark on this journey, it is crucial we look back in order to look forward. To acknowledge the hard work and dedication of members of our community without whom we would not be where we are today. We carry forward their legacy with the intention of continuing to build on the impact they initiated. At such a turning point, we may not have many answers at our fingertips in regards to what the future holds, but some of the questions that can help us guide our way forward come to mind.

What if we recognized this moment as a possibility to reconfigure life towards the world we want to co-create as one community? What kinds of new questions would we ask, what kinds of pathways to life would we re-imagine?

This issue of Hamazor brings together stories from community members from across the globe, about how they are choosing to navigate their lives during this moment of change.

SHIRIN MEHRI
Vice-President, WZO
Guest Editor, Hamazor

The Journey of the Parsees in the “Land of the Long White Cloud”

By Rashna Tata

The first Parsee family came to the ‘Land of the Long White Cloud’ - New Zealand in the mid 60’s from Bombay. The migration trickle started slowly & it led to more families braving settlement in a faraway country, few had even heard of in those days. It was often said if you are in New Zealand & you walk any further you will fall off the globe!! New Zealand in those days, was considered a country, where there were more sheep than people.

Gradually more Parsee families started arriving from India, the Middle East and South East Asia. New Zealand was known as a very clean, green country with a laid back lifestyle, where an Indian store or an Indian restaurant were unheard of. Supermarkets & life outside your 4 walls shut down at 5pm.

The Parsee’s were here for one purpose alone. Better opportunities for their children and themselves. Life was initially hard in a new cold, wet & windy land, but being optimistic people there was enough hope for all. Parsee’s with their strong community spirit even in those early days, had their regular Potluck’s, Saturday prayer classes for the young & they celebrated festivals and religious events together. They were very eager to welcome every new Parsee migrant into their fold.

Their ‘do or die’ spirit made them boldly

seek jobs in a work culture, where Kiwis had hardly heard the term Indian & even less likely the word Parsee. According to Census 2010 there were about 2000 persons of Zoroastrian origin, mostly in Auckland with a few in other parts of NZ, making our community among the smallest in the country. Today we would have well reached the 3500 + mark, with many young Parsees even coming alone as international students from India and the Middle East. The main migratory influx was between 1990 & 2014, when our numbers increased significantly. Most Parsees live in East Auckland areas, in the suburbs of Howick, Pakuranga, Dannemora and Flat Bush. In fact Pakuranga is often referred to as ‘Parsee - Ranga.’

My generation & others like me were “first generation migrants”, in New Zealand and like many other migrant communities, we see the wisdom in drawing a fine line between our past, present and future. We consider our heritage as priceless, a monumental value system of infinite wisdom. We also understand the need to adopt well to change, adjust to new challenges in new cultures, yet preserve and cherish our unique identity.

It is our ardent desire that our children imbibe this legacy and transfer it to ensuing generations, thereby ensuring continuance of our faith and values.

The Journey of the Parsees in the “Land of the Long White Cloud”



Yet do it in a pragmatic manner, with the freedom to make conscious choices and decisions based on individual circumstances. Parsees are today what one would term well - settled, having bought their own homes & doing extremely well in their job situations, in all types of industries many holding senior positions.

Our youth are constantly achieving educational and professional excellence in every field & top positions at work. They have made their mark in sports and other activities too. The community is extremely proud of them. A number of them have even moved to the UK & Australia on work visas.

The establishment of our association “The Zarathushtrian Association of New Zealand”, has allowed the community to stay together as members of one large family. The Association organizes social, religious and cultural activities & most importantly provides a platform for our community to intermingle and bond within the community. Today we hold a respected and recognized standing with the Members of Parliament and other New Zealand communities.

I still recollect with some amusement, being asked to provide a detailed brief on who we Parsee’s were, when I invited a Member of Parliament to address our association members for the very first time in 2004. They had absolutely no clue who we were! The entrepreneurial spirit of the community continues to flourish, with many Parsees owning their own businesses & startups & making a name for themselves. Our ‘Parsipano’ comes from our quaint mannerisms, values, linguistic closeness and an omnipresent sense of honesty, fair play and righteousness.

Our “Darb-e- Meher”, in Auckland, provides the community a place for worship. Serious efforts are also underway to establish a permanent Community Centre with the formation of the “Zoroastrian Community Trust of New Zealand.” We celebrate festivals together, hold religious and cultural evenings, conduct prayer classes for the children in the community, host events for seniors and organize sporting activities. We come together in time of joy and offer comfort and solace in times of grief. We are literally one big family. We are invited by the Government to Community Events and hold our own.

The Journey of the Parsees in the “Land of the Long White Cloud”

It is extremely gratifying that our Auckland based Zoroastrian Youth of New Zealand, were given the opportunity and organized the very successful “Sixth World Zoroastrian Youth Congress” in Auckland in December 2016. The six-day global event saw 245 youth, aged up to 35 years of age, participate from all corners of the globe.

The Congress was a resounding success & after the Congress, the participants extended their stay in New Zealand & were put up by our host families. They went exploring various parts of this wonderfully scenic country & returned back home with wonderful memories.

One of our main sponsors of the Congress was the “World Zoroastrian Organization”, who took a keen interest in the Congress & guided our Youth MG. Committee, offering valuable suggestions and inputs.

WZO pledged \$10,000 towards the Congress. They also arranged to send out two excellent Youth speakers, Jimmy Madon of the UK and Jimmy Antia of the USA. These speakers resonated well with the Congress Youth & left making lifelong friends.

The objectives of the Congress was to create a global platform with the core theme being ‘Embrace, Enhance and Evolve.’

As young Kiwis, our youth also adopted the ‘Green Initiative’ reflecting the clean and ecologically strong image of New Zealand. One of the most joyful outcomes of the Youth Congress, which was delightful for us all, were the 7 weddings that came about between our youth participants at the Congress.

Zoroastrianism is recognized as an environmentally conscious religion aiming to safeguard nature and all natural elements. The Zoroastrian community is dedicated to the preservation of New Zealand’s legacy. The Parsees of New Zealand are here to stay grow, prosper & flourish & make a name for themselves and the community.



Young Zoroastrians at the community prayer class Christmas Party

Rashna Tata lives with her husband Dorab in Auckland. Her son Piran currently works & lives in the UK. Along with Darius Mistry, she is also Co-Trustee for the World Zoroastrian Association in New Zealand.

Re-envisioning – Not Just Rebuilding – A Resilient Future For Our Kids by Mahshad Khosraviani

Dear Friends,

The last two years have been eventful to say the least – so uncomfortable, so painful, so raw – that it shook me out of complacency and forced me to grow. A year that screamed so loud, finally awakening us all from our ignorant slumber. The pandemic taught me more gratitude than I could have ever felt; appreciating the little things in life, distinguishing my needs from my wants, investing in my self-growth, and overindulging in family time. As strange as it may sound, I am grateful for the lockdown; I am only able to say this now as I reflect on the year that made us all pause (2020) for it gifted me with so much uninterrupted time with my family; a blessing I would cherish the year after.

Even with all the uncertainty that the pandemic showered us with, I was certain about one thing, that I wanted to spend the rest of my days with F.T. and despite Covid-19 halting our original plans, we had the most magical wedding day with our dearest and nearest.

With a heart full of love and the realization that my future kids will grow up in a mixed household (my husband is Parsi), I accepted

and welcomed the need for change, to envision and build a resilient future for a fluid Zoroastrian community where we are loved and accepted despite our differences. To band together, instead of pushing each other further apart. We are often so desperate to be understood, that we forget to be understanding.

My life changed so dramatically during the pandemic, that I can hardly believe it myself. I lost many of my loved ones to Covid, including my sweet Grandfather. An unbearable pain that my heart still carries. However, I was able to attend his prayers in Tehran, Iran via Video – something that was not practiced a few years ago! The covid-19 pandemic distanced us all physically, but somehow our borders seemed to disappear, and we managed to visit each other's home easier than before (via zoom, Teams, etc.), an unfamiliar notion pre-pandemic. All our religious events and classes were conducted online too, allowing our community members from all around the globe to join and participate; truly incredible, indeed.

I found myself presenting in New York, Washington, London, California, and Tehran.

Re-envisioning – Not Just Rebuilding – A Resilient Future For Our Kids

I had the joy of meeting numerous kind souls within our community through the online events/platforms that I may never have had the opportunity to meet if we hadn't adapted to the changing times.

As a future parent to Irani-Parsi kids, I want them to have the best of both worlds. For many years, my brother and I challenged our local Zoroastrian communities to host events with both Irani and Parsi communities. We had to decide to either attend the Irani event and miss out on seeing our Parsi friends or attend the Parsi functions and lose out on quality time with our Iranian family and friends. NO MORE! We have been separated long enough!

Our religion and faith is rooted at home, the words and deeds that we display at home today will have a ripple effect on our kids' future; we can ensure a fruitful tomorrow by teaching our youngsters the true meaning of our beautiful religion, by encouraging them to define and implement the very essence of Zoroastrianism in their everyday lives – without placing focus on our Irani/Parsi differences – and generate a new lifestyle in order to ensure a better chance at preserving this beautiful religion & prevent it from falling into the records of religious history.

I am excited to learn more about my husband's culture whilst teaching him about all the glories of the Irani traditions and I look forward to celebrating Roj-Birthdays (uncommon within the Irani traditions) and two Nowrouzs with my family (double the gifts yay!)

Once life is back to normal (whatever that may look like), let's not forget how we all came together; let's carry all the good that the pandemic brought forth and build the world we want out of this disruption.

We can only grow from the seeds of honest conversation. One value that I believe should guide such conversations is love – much deeper and broader than a romantic sentiment – a courageous acknowledgment of interdependence, even obligation, to one another as fellow Zoroastrians. So, let's get started with hard conversations, together. Because whether you consider yourself an Iranian or Parsi, the path forward will be hard and steep for years to come. Let's at least make sure we are headed in a direction that rebuilds a future of hope, value, and possibility (for our kids). By embracing this vision, I hoped that we can meet in a brand new place where we can together enjoy a cup of Chai with our Sali Boti and Koobideh.

My Identity Is Not A Multiple-Choice Question

By Anushe Engineer

I think one of the biggest issues students face when they go abroad for college is the massive identity crisis that looms over them. They become the Other, the kid who's "not from here", the guy with an accent, the exotic girl. A large part of my experience at college in the U.S. has revolved around the topics of identity, what it means to now be in the minority at college, how to navigate microaggressions and outright racism when you finally experience it.

While the well-meaning affinity groups for non-white and/or international students are helpful in making students feel less alienated at college, it's not the first time I've been in the minority. It's not the first time I've had to explain my identity to someone and see them barely masking their confusion or embarrassment. My whole life I've been a religious minority in Pakistan and have had to explain who I am, even what I am, because someone else's ignorance and oblivion is my responsibility to elucidate, even if their comments and reactions are particularly hurtful.

My issue is not with having to explain that I am a Parsi living in Pakistan.

My issue is with people's assumptions that I am automatically Muslim if I am from Pakistan, and that I'm "not really" Pakistani if I'm Parsi.

Yes, I'm from Pakistan. No, I'm not Muslim. And yes, I'm still 100 percent Pakistani. Let me explain my identities: I follow Zoroastrianism, the oldest monotheistic religion in the world; ethnically I'm Parsi, the term for Zoroastrians who specifically live in the Indian subcontinent; and my nationality is Pakistani.

I'm just as much Pakistani as any Muslim or other non-Muslim born in Pakistan. I knew that since I was old enough to understand what religion I was born into. But others seem to not fully grasp that concept, and while any average Pakistani will tell you that non-Muslims are "definitely Pakistani, very much so!", I've experienced a plethora of deprecating remarks and encounters that have made me feel like I'm not truly Pakistani.

While people have never outright told me that my minority status in Pakistan absolves me of Pakistani identity, much of the way people speak to me or about me indicates just that.

My Identity Is Not A Multiple-Choice Question

There is a fine line between celebrating different cultures that folks belonging to minority communities immerse themselves in, but it is another matter altogether when those cultural practices become an automatic statement of being markedly different from the typical Pakistani narrative.

As a Parsi almost everything I do is different than the average Pakistani; I speak English differently (in a “typical Parsi way of speaking”, I’m told); My mother tongue is Gujarati, not Urdu; I’ve never celebrated Eid in a religious sense but I do celebrate Navroze. I don’t call my father’s sister my phuppo because I call her fui, the Gujarati word for father’s sister.

I am not ashamed of any of the differences and traits I’ve explained above. I’m not ashamed of my culture, my heritage, my ancestry, my language. But when people relegate certain physical attributes and experiences to the Pakistani identity, it makes me, as a non-Muslim, feel terribly out of place, especially because none of those traits resonate with me.

There is nothing wrong with embracing your ethnicity more than your nationality when the time comes, but to grow up with a national narrative that focuses exclusively on one religion invariable makes me question whether I’m truly Pakistani or not.

It’s frustrating when people at college assume that I’m Muslim because I’m from Pakistan, not because I don’t want to be associated with Islam but because I have an identity of my own that I’m proud of. It’s even more hurtful when people dismiss my Pakistani nationality because I told them I’m not Muslim.

It is equally frustrating when Pakistanis assume that all non-Muslims in Pakistan are either Christian or Hindu. There are a handful of other religions in Pakistan besides those, even if they constitute less than 1 percent of the population. For perspective, there are currently less than one thousand Parsis in Pakistan — 0.000004 percent of the total population.

We are not, however, a mere statistic. Our strength in numbers should not determine how much respect we do or do not deserve. We are limited in number, but we’re no less deserving of a Pakistani identity.

As a country we may officially be the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, but that isn’t synonymous with all Pakistani citizens following Islam. The white strip on the Pakistani flag symbolizes the non-Muslims of Pakistan.

What I am and what I am not will always confuse people. My identity is not a multiple-choice question. There isn’t a choice between Parsi or Pakistani. I am Parsi and Pakistani.

Gen Z and Beyond

By Nazneen Engineer, Sarah Stewart, & Joe
Turtle

Over the past two decades, interest in Zoroastrian studies has been growing steadily both within and outside the community.

Within the community, Zoroastrians learn about their history, culture and religion through activities and classes held by community associations around the world. There are children's dharamagyan classes, camps, and lectures in community halls. The Zoroastrian Return to Roots programme, founded to reconnect Zoroastrians in the diaspora with their origins in India and Iran, takes young people from around the world, including USA, Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan and UAE, to India. There, they embark on a two-week trip to all the Zoroastrian centres including fire temples, Doongerwadis, and other Parsi places of interest to explore their religious, social and cultural heritage.

Outside the community (though in many cases supported by the community) the study of Zoroastrianism takes place in several major institutions in the world. At SOAS, University of London, courses in Zoroastrianism and its associated languages both ancient (Avestan and Pahlavi) and modern (Gujarati and Persian) have long been taught. A major exhibition, The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination, mounted by SOAS first in London (Brunei Gallery 2013) and then in Delhi (National Museum 2016) brought attention to the subject on a global scale. A major donation to SOAS by Mr Shapoor Mistry enabled the establishment of the SOAS Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies in 2018 – the first such Institute dedicated to teaching and research of Zoroastrianism in the world with a new post, the SSP Lecturer in Zoroastrianism, a scholarship fund and part-time administrator. Thanks to the Zartoshty Brothers, Meherbahn and Feridoun, SOAS was already the beneficiary of a philanthropic donation that supports the Zartoshty Brother Chair in Zoroastrianism. In addition, the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) have given generously to SOAS over the years, funding scholarships and making a substantial donation towards The Everlasting Flame exhibition.

Gen Z and Beyond

Zoroastrian ancient languages are studied in Iran at the Universities of Kerman and Tehran, where interest remains strong. Recently, a major fundraising initiative has established the FEZANA Professorship of Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto.

So what does all this mean? Is this education of benefit to the Zoroastrian community and is it sufficiently accessible?

In conversations between participants of a new MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), launched by the SSPISZ on the FutureLearn digital education platform, some non-Zoroastrian participants expressed surprise that Zoroastrians were taking an 'Introduction to Zoroastrianism' course. There are many reasons why this might be the case. For example, there is no established Zoroastrian catechism. Moreover, only a small corpus of religious texts survived the Arab conquest of Iran in 651 CE and these had been in oral transmission for many centuries.

Such knowledge as Zoroastrians have about their religion is diverse, with varied beliefs and opinions concerning doctrines, observance and belief.

During the course of 1400 years under Islamic rule in Iran and a thousand years in Hindu-majority India - 250 of those under British corporate or government control - a variety of syncretic practices and beliefs have come to be accepted as Zoroastrian.

So what does it mean to be a Zoroastrian in today's ever-changing world? Gen Z and Beyond Survey will provide answers to this question.

On a micro-level, the survey covers demographics, religious practices and attitudes. For example, where people live, how they practice their faith, what beliefs and opinions they have about the religion, what their experiences are of interacting with other Zoroastrians as well as their attitudes towards community and inter-generational issues.

But Zoroastrians also face many challenges at a macro-level: population figures are in decline, there are high infertility rates, many traditional customs and rituals are no longer performed and there is an ever-decreasing number of full-time priests. In Iran, the villages are gradually being reclaimed by the desert as people move to the cities and emigrate abroad.

Gen Z and Beyond

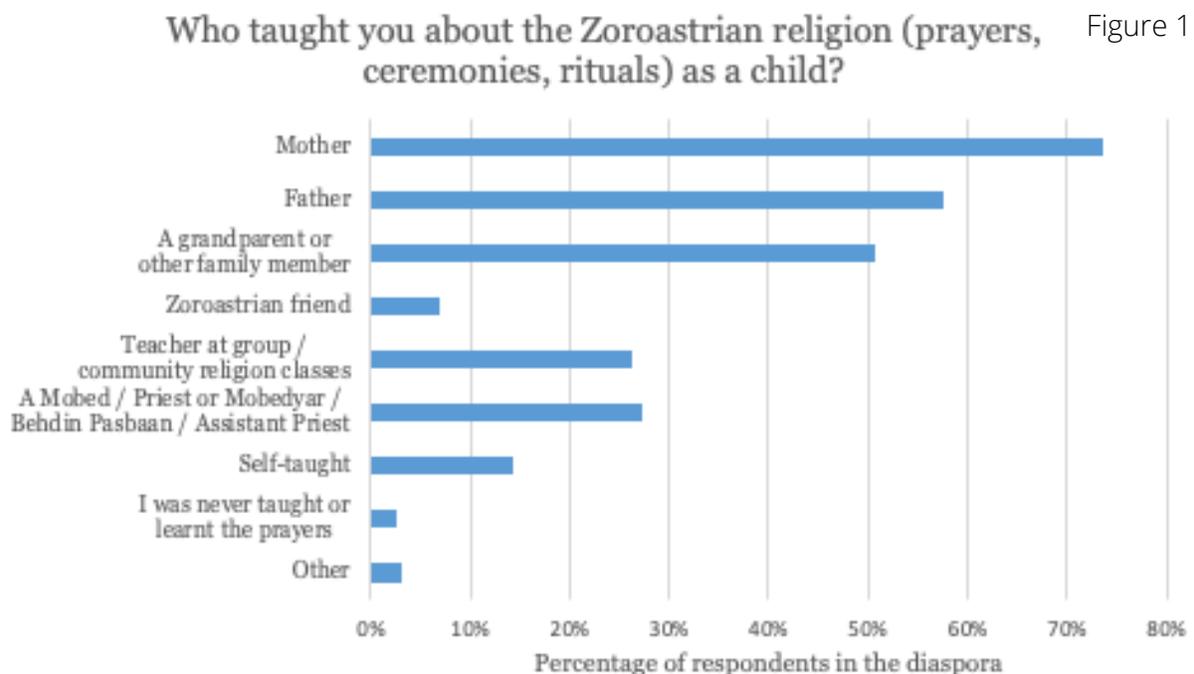
The Dari language once spoken exclusively by Zoroastrians in Iran is under threat. These are issues that the global community needs to quantify, verify and examine.

Gen Z and Beyond Survey is an opportunity to assess these factors, on both a micro and macro level. Through accurate statistics and better knowledge of the different Zoroastrian communities, Gen Z and Beyond will tackle the important questions: why is this happening? Where is this happening? Can these trends be reversed?

The idea of a survey on the global Zoroastrian community was first brought to Dr Sarah Stewart, the Shapoorji Pallonji Senior Lecturer in Zoroastrianism at the SSPISZ, at the start of 2019. With a history of knowledge about the subject and links to the global Zoroastrian community, SOAS offered a neutral platform from which to tackle a project which is truly the first of its kind.

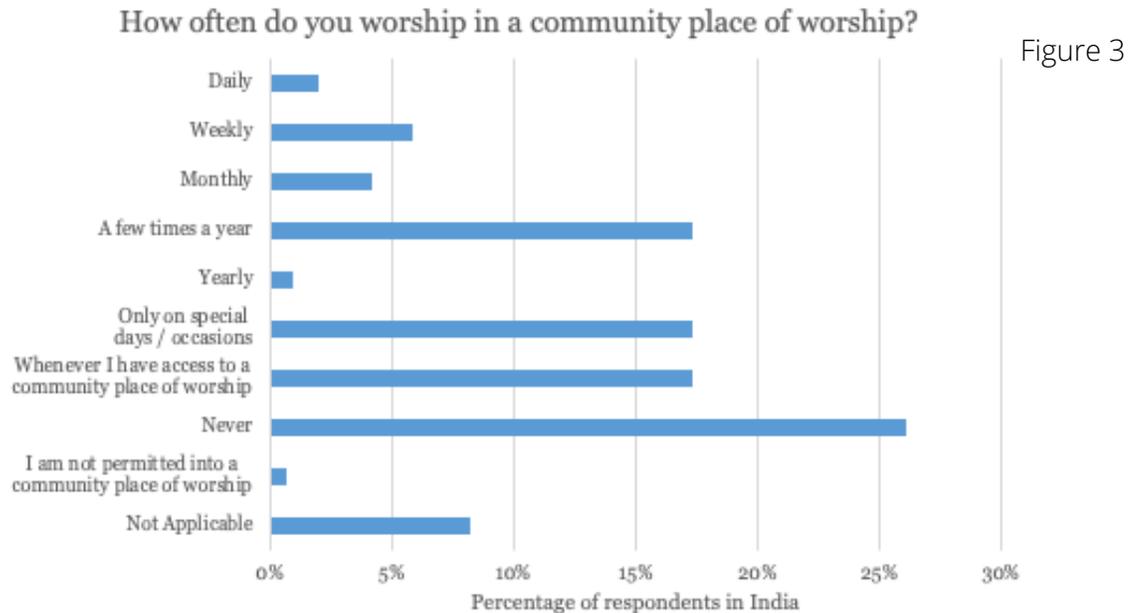
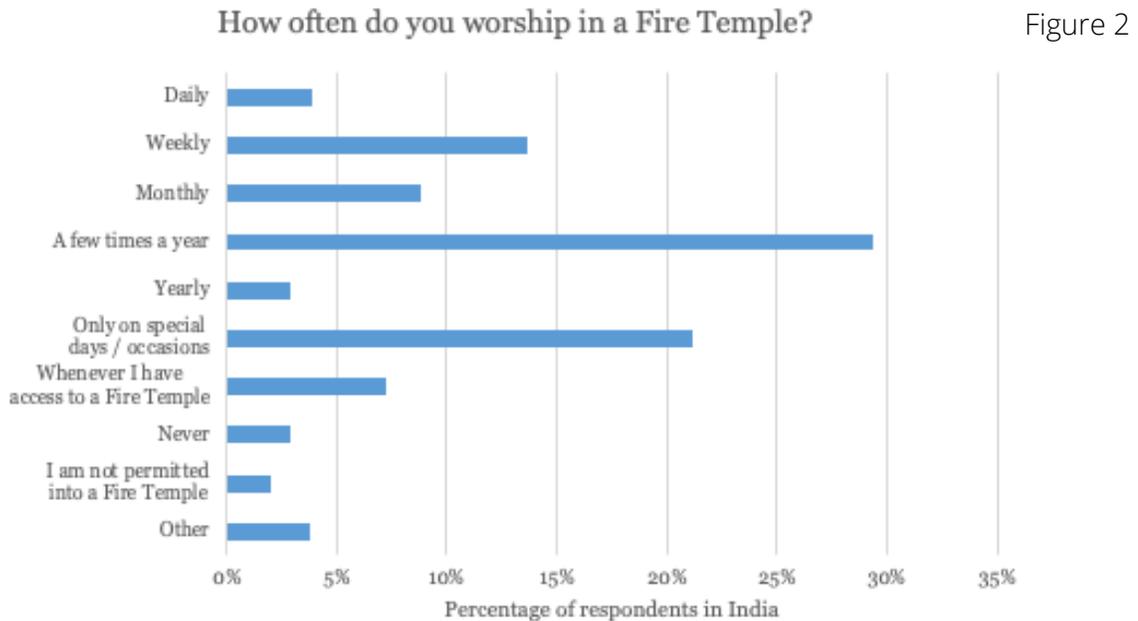
Gen Z and Beyond Survey is unique. Until now, surveys and studies on the Zoroastrian community have been focused on a particular region or subject. In contrast, the Gen Z and Beyond Survey is global, examines a wide range of topics, and is entirely online.

We understand that Zoroastrians in different parts of the world face different challenges. Generally speaking, those in the diaspora are highly educated and financially secure, but struggle with cultivating and passing down a Zoroastrian identity to their children and grandchildren. Our preliminary data, presented in the chart below, shows that only a small percentage of those in the diaspora receive religious teaching from people other than their family.



Gen Z and Beyond

On the other hand, an ageing population in India has meant that many once bustling *agiaries* and community spaces are seldom used or in a state of disrepair. The charts below show that only a percentage of our respondents in India visit a Fire Temple or community place of worship on a regular basis.



The Gen Z and Beyond Survey will connect Zoroastrians across the globe, leading to a better understanding of how to tackle the challenges they face in their respective communities.

The purpose of the survey is to quantify these and other issues and present them in a way that can help the community overcome its challenges.

By signing up for and completing the survey, you are adding your voice and your experiences to a global conversation.

Zoroastrianism: An Environmentally Sensitive Philosophy?

By Shahin Bekhradnia

Finally the world has woken up to the reality that the earth cannot be exploited indefinitely. Everyone is getting on the bandwagon now, including some of our own Z co-religionists.

Where were these Johnny Come Lately people before COP26 began to make the headlines this year?

How tragic that not enough people who had the power to make a difference on a national or global level were listening to the messages emerging back in the 70's. At that time ordinary people, mainly young, were beginning to beat the drum about pollution, acid rain, waste disposal, the hole in the ozone layer, deforestation, overfishing, farming policies, overpopulation and other urgent environmental concerns.

In fact both Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were founded in 1971 as a culmination of Flower Power, or the Hippy movement. These sardonic terms for the informal movement of young people who saw the beauty and vulnerability of the world around them were used to demean them. They were not simply befuddled idealists as portrayed by the media and politicians: in fact there were among them educated rational individuals who upset the establishment by challenging inherited societal values. Their style and rhetoric represented a rebellion against the relentless consumerism that was propelling "progress". Intelligent minds were questioning the wisdom of dependence on fossil fuels, not necessarily because of the carbon dioxide emissions that came with them, but because of the potential exhaustion of these sources of energy, and the inability to deal with the waste side products. They pointed to renewable sources of energy like wind, wave and solar, but the politicians did not want to know - because of the power of the fossil fuel lobbyists.



Zoroastrianism: An Environmentally Sensitive Philosophy?



There were also extremely talented musicians, writers and artists who questioned the status quo which every generation had respected until the social revolution of the 1960's. Parents and figures of authority were not used to being scrutinised, held to task, and their hypocrisy being pointed out. It felt like a generation war and it is adults of today who were the youth of the 60's & 70's like myself who feel the frustration of not having been listened to when something SHOULD have been done.

In addition to the importance of the era in which I grew up, my environmental consciousness was raised by my father who was only too well aware of how dependent mankind is on the forces of nature. He used to tell me about the extreme poverty he experienced because of his own agricultural background. When you live in the desert and try to provide your own food through basic subsistence farming, you become aware of the importance of water. Your cereals crops, your vegetables, your fruit and your animal fodder will fail if you cant provide enough water for them. And these are the basic food stuffs of life.

The villages in which Iranian Zoroastrians used to live depended on the ancient qanat underground water channels which crisscrossed the desert bringing fresh snow melt water from the high desert snow covered plateau, and the channels led to and surfaced where the local residents settled and needed the water. The communities appointed their own water headman who would regulate the share of water flow for land irrigation to different landowners by means of blocking/unblocking the direction of the water by means of simple earth barriers.

Zoroastrianism: An Environmentally Sensitive Philosophy?

Of course farmers would need to make a financial contribution towards the availability of the water which was calculated according to how long you wanted the water to flow over your land (timed by a water clock). The maintenance of the channels is a laborious task but unless the specialists (muqanni) kept the underground channels clear, irrigation would not have been possible.

Fortunately much of the land in Iran is very susceptible to cultivation and it is no coincidence that the simple act of putting a wall round some ground, putting plants in and watering them can result in delicious fruit, vegetables, flowers and grasses. Such an enclosure is today known as a bagh, but in ancient times the enclosure was called a pairi daeza or paradise or Ferdows.

So today the renowned paradise gardens of Iran reflected in Persian carpets, will normally have the soothing tinkle of flowing water, and produce beautiful fragrant flowers whose scent is such an olfactory treat, with a wide variety of luscious fruits and nut trees providing shade for rest and meditation, while herbs and vegetables for the kitchen offer great culinary opportunities. Alfalfa for the domestic animals which provide milk for cheese, butter and cream etc are also essential crops within these areas..

Hearing such tales from my parents made me realise how far removed westernized urban life is from nature, and how little most people appreciate the processes that bring food to our tables. For this reason the special Nowruz table of Haftshin/Haftsins is very important to maintain. It displays all the life affirming substances on which we depend for a healthy happy life: we have wheat shoots, and bread, we have milk and cheese, we set out wine, medicinal berries and herbs, we have

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wheat shoots, and bread, we have milk and cheese, we set out wine, medicinal berries and herbs, we have sweets, sherbet and rose water, we set out potted fragrant flowers growing in the earth, and fruit. And of course we have the light and warmth of fire with the candles. The presence of earth, water and fire are the key elements which we need to sustain plants providing the joy and pleasure of life symbolized in these items on the Nowruz table.

Creating customs and traditions that pass down generations is the way that we have preserved some of the knowledge and wisdom held by our Zoroastrian forefathers.. For example the birth of a child required the planting of a bountiful tree such as a nut or fruit tree, while with the death of a family member it was customary to plant an evergreen, whose longevity would ensure that the memory of the deceased would continue with the presence of the tree. Noone would have said in the past when this was a living tradition, that planting trees as we are now promising to do in their millions would absorb the carbon dioxide but it was recognised as a meritorious thing to do. Similarly the tradition of 6 gahambar periods of 5 day endowed by the more prosperous members of a community ensured the distribution of fruits and nuts with bread to the whole community so that the less well-off would benefit from these occasions when the fruits of the earth were shared. It was meritorious for everyone to attend and participate

Pollutants in the earth, air and water are now understood to cause harm but it was already understood by our ancient communities who developed societal behaviours to minimise such pollutants. As an example Zoroastrians should not wash in flowing water such as streams, but should draw off the water to be used away from the water source, as others further downstream are likely to use the flowing water in their turn.



Zoroastrianism: An Environmentally Sensitive Philosophy?



But today we only have to turn on our taps and out pours the water without many of us thinking of the effort that has to go to getting it to us, nor that we should not waste this precious resource. Our appreciation of water is reflected in our Jashne Tirgan.

Our rituals surrounding the disposal of the dead also reflect an understanding of our relationship with the environment and with shifting desert sands, burial was both impractical and at times, unhygienic when diseases were more commonplace. So the removal of corpses to distant uninhabited high plateau areas with protective surrounding walls was a pragmatic solution to death, preserving the land for cultivation of food. And some of the specific practices associated with pollution via corpses and blood will have originated from environmental protections. Sadly some exponents of our philosophy distort the principles and speak of evil spirits, sin and punishments in this context, drawing on the Vendidad (derived from the older Videvdat - Against the Demons) rather than finding inspiration in the much older Gatha texts.

So back to today: what are we doing? In line with the adage “Think Globally, Act Locally” WZO has taken some small local initiatives in the hope of raising consciousness in the locality where we have a noticeable presence. Despite small numbers, we can project our Environmental awareness and hope to influence others. On World Earth Day in conjunction with the Zoroastrian Eco Group we launched a project: Plant a Tree for New Life and Remembrance: WZO will gift a bountiful tree or evergreen to anyone with a Zoroastrian background, however remote, who writes in to WZO. And on World Environment Day, WZO convened an Interfaith gathering and suggested the different faiths should collaborate on an environmental project to benefit the local area.

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The different faiths suggested various projects on which they all voted, and the first steps have now been taken towards creating a Sensory Garden (for meditation, and for the visually challenged, autistic etc) and a greening up of a commuter hub.

It's a good way to show that Zoroastrians have deep rooted and well-embedded environmental awareness - it's NOT what you say but what you DO that counts: Good Thoughts, (yes), Good Words (yes), Good DEEDS (yes, yes, yes!). Anyone can start an initiative locally with a few like minded people and with the current trend, there is a tremendous amount of goodwill to be harnessed to projects you could start after brain storming together. Why not fly the flag for Zoroastrianism while achieving something really positive?

It's very sad that we have had to wait till the catastrophic natural disasters of the past few years for state governments to decide that in the end they really have to do something - governments make laws and can bring about change by introducing effective policies. Most people today can see the speed of environmental changes which have happened frighteningly quickly. Disappearing animal/bird/fish species, plant species, the plastic in the oceans, the floods, droughts, forest fires - all these have to be regulated by central governments as leaving things to individual conscience has not worked. Sadly the majority of the world's population, either out of ignorance but mostly from sheer selfishness have not made the sacrifices necessary to counterbalance all the mistakes of the recent past decades. So now, let's see what COP 36 might produce. Meanwhile remember that when I stood for election as a candidate for the UK parliament in 1992 against the Foreign Minister of the day, a national newspaper commented that Zoroaster 3 millenia earlier was the first Green advocate and founder of the Environmental Movement that is vocal today.



Rebuilding For The Future With Mazdayasni

By Fariborz Rahnmoon

Slowly but steadily the world is moving away from superstition and moving towards the Truth. It is no longer blasphemous, to talk of Evolution or deny Adam and Eve. Heaven and Hell, the tooth-fairy and the flying reindeers are losing ground. Of course, organized religion does fight back, although discreetly, by engraving magic and miracles in young minds.

Today after 3759 years the world is at the same crossroad where King Vistasp was when he wisely accepted the teachings of Zarathushtra and decreed that in his Kingdom “Wisdom shall rule”.

Daidi Asha Tam Asim Van Gheush
Revelling Asha that results in a good life
Ayapta Managho
Gained through the mind
Daidi Tu Armaite
Gives truly righteousness
Vistaspai Isem Maibya ca
Vistasp desired for his people and
Daos Tu Mazda Xshaya Ca
Decreed that truly Wisdom shall rule and
Ya Ve Mantra Sravima Radaiv
That those words should be carried out by all compatriots
Zarathushtra – Gatha -Yasna Ha 28.7 (FR)

The teachings of Zarathustra led to the formation of the first ‘Benevolent Empire’ in the history of mankind. An empire that changed the paradigm, that had no slaves, that paid equal wages to equally qualified men and women and paid maternity leave to women [i]. That had women admirals lead the navy and had queens’ rule over the empire. That afforded freedom of religion to everyone even to the Deva worshipping Babylonians, because Zarathustra had said.

All religions can create happiness provided their followers use their Wisdom. That is why Cyrus the Great bowed to the Babylonian god Marduk and freed the Jews to go rebuilt their temple. At the same time, he imparted Wisdom among them, very soon the Babylonians

Rebuilding For The Future With Mazdayasni

Ahya Daeva Ma Hamoi Manoi

Even Deva worshipers with unified thought

Ahura hya Úrvazema Mazdao

Create also happiness with Wisdom

Zarathushtra – Gatha -Yasna Ha 32.1 (FR)

realized that the temple is the home of the priest and that their God is not confined to temples [ii], so of their free will they abandoned their temples, so also the Jews did not rebuild their temple for over two generations [iii].

Later the Persians introduced Wisdom through philosophy even among the Greeks, who were their enemies. Many of the Greek philosophers were born in the Persian Empire and moved to Athens after the Peace treaty of 449 BCE was signed by King Ardeshir know as the Treaty of Callias [iv].

Unfortunately, Aristotle one of those philosophers became the personal tutor to Alexander and instigated the destruction of what the Persian Empire stood for. He advised Alexander; “If you destroy the Persians, you will destroy one of the pillars of civilization and we will rule the world.” Alexander destroyed the Persian culture and laid the foundation of what later became the ‘Holy Roman Empire’ by adopting the very person they had crucified and still later became ‘The Holy See.’

Starting with Aristotle the ancient culture based on the teachings of Zarathushtra was destroyed and whenever there was a chance of its revival, forces went into action to distort it. Today, Zoroastrianism and even the Gathas [v] is what western scholars from 1800s have interpreted [vi].

Rebuilding For The Future With Mazdayasni

The surviving Pahlavi manuscripts are copies made during the Islamic era [vii] and produced under duress, trying to present themselves as “People of the Book”. The story of creation in the Bundahishn is exactly the opposite of Gatha 44.3 when correctly translated. But all this was necessary to survive the onslaught of Islam. Despite it, only 7,123 Zarathushtis survived in Iran by 1854 CE.

REBUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

It is time to put aside our preconceived theology our preconceived ideology and look at things as they are. Zarathustra in the Gathas says what he sees he does not imagine an unseen world. The Gathas is a guide to a happy blissful life on this heavenly Planet Earth by enjoying nature without damaging the environment. In Gatha 44.1 he says, words are not enough you need to back it up with action.



He has no interest in ‘After Life’ it is only the translators and theologians that project it otherwise. He talks of Urvan (Rvan in Persian) as something that flows. A part of the body that flows from one generation to another and has a memory that amasses information which it carries. What Ferdowsi calls Far-E-Izadi [viii]. Zarathustra shows how good memory can be created so that there is good advancement.

It is obvious that humans advance from generation to generation, so seek with your Wisdom Good Thoughts and understand Asha positively so that there is good advancement in the world. Zarathushtra not only talked of Evolution long before Darwin but he also showed the way to beneficial evolution. Zarathushtra was a realist he was above religion he showed how despite religion humans can live a happy life and progress if they use their WISDOM. (Ha32.1 above)

Ahura Mandiyai Ya Toi
Creation makes you ponder
Mazda Adishtish Ya Ca Vohu Ukhza Farashi
Wisdom teaches those Good words that one seeks
Manangha Ya Ca Asha Angheush Arem Vaedyai
And thoughts that Asha creates are correctly understood
Ka Ma Urva Vohu Urvakhshat Agemata
So that our URVAN's good advancement is achieved
ZARATHUSHTRA -GATHA YASNA 44.8 (FR)

The teachings of Zarathushtra when understood correctly can once again change the paradigm, save the environment and humans can live a happy life **irrespective of their religious beliefs**. All they need to do is learn to use their WISDOM (Mazda) and with their Good Mind (Vohu Mana) learn the best from Nature (Asha Vahista) based on it create Good Laws (Khash Atra Vairya) [ix]. This will lead to Lawful Desires (Spanta Armaiti) and as a consequence a righteous society wherein people can grow to their full potential and achieve Wholeness (Hurvata), perfection in their profession, leaving behind a legacy for which they will be remembered and become Immortal (Ameretat) in the memories of generations to come. No longer will billionaires be amassing wealth, what they will compete to amass is a Good Name to earn immortality.

[i] Persipolis tablets Chicago University

[ii] Herodotus mention the disuse of temples in Babylonia and also Callisthenes of Olynthus the historian who accompanied Alexander mentions that the first deed of Alexander was to refurbish the abandoned temples of Babylonian.

[iii] Bible Ezra 4:3 Ezra 6:1

[iv] Socrates (born 470 BCE) Plato (born 428 BC), Antisthenes (born 446 BC), Euclides (born 435 BC)

[v] Professor Martin Haug https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahura_Mazda proposed a new interpretation of Yasna 30.3 that subsequently influenced Zoroastrian doctrine to a significant extent

[vi] The arrival of the German orientalist and philologist Martin Haug led to a rallied defense of the faith through Haug's reinterpretation of the Avesta through Christianized translations

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism>

[vii] The oldest manuscript is from 1323CE <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avesta#Historiography>

[viii] A lost child of a king adopted by a farmer sits on rock like on a throne and order his friends around.

[ix] The first three are the gifts given to baby Jesus by the Magis and explained in Mathew and Luke chapter 4

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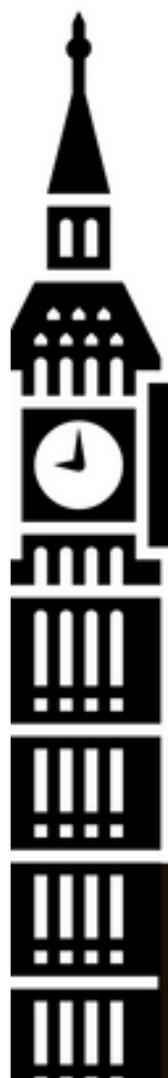


WHEN : July 2023

WHERE : Atrium Hotel,
Heathrow

EARLY BIRD PRICE : £500
(including accommodation)

The World Zoroastrian Youth Congress is held every four years and brings together hundreds of our global Zoroastrian youth between the ages of 18 to 35 to network, engage in fun social activities and actively participate in and be educated through inspirational discussions on the history and future of our Zoroastrian community.





The World Zoroastrian Organisation

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Charity No 1023334

Website www.w-z-o.org

Look what your support has achieved

Thanks to your support,
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- Make financial contributions, including scholarships, to students from around the world to study at universities and colleges of their choice

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- Assist other Zoroastrian trusts with their charitable activities
- Hold seminars on Zoroastrianism addressed by renowned speakers



- Hold cultural events to promote Zoroastrian traditions and practices for the community
- Work with Interfaith groups to promote a better awareness of the Zoroastrian faith and collaborate with them on environmental and local issues

- Support Zoroastrians to practice their faith
- Provide priestly services to all Zoroastrians in the UK including maintaining a Satayesh Gah at its Headquarters
- Maintain a community centre where Zoroastrians and the local community can come together at public and private events



With your continued support, we can do more, so please

- ✈ Consider becoming a member at www.w-z-o.org/member.
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WZO is a registered charity in the UK and has similar status in Canada, India and USA

To them, the Pure Mind, who is united in God,
through his power replied: associate closely with
Truth. Be good and unite with Right-Mindedness.
Hold fast unto them.

Yasna 32:2