

DEVOTION - THE MISSING INGREDIENT IN ZARTHUSTRIAN LIFE

Friends,

The undermentioned article had appeared in Jame about three years back written by my friend Mehlli Bhagalía. We can see that, with lots of midnight burning of oil and with sincere effort he has poured out his heart and is speaking from his heart. That is why it is a pleasure to read his article which will only augment devotion and be of inspiration to many of our youngsters, who are spiritually thirsty for the right knowledge.

He laments that devotion which is main ingredient and building block of faith is missing from many of our Zarathustis life. I remember Late Cursetji Patel's (editor of Dini Avaz) words of wisdom in one of his lectures that the shining Silver Rupee coin of faith that was dropped by traitors of Iran which led to its downfall, that coin was picked up by Muslims with Allah in their heart they were ready to go to any extent to preserve their faith. But than that was done more in excess and any thing in excess or vicaversa that is lacking in, is bad and harmful. What is required here is to strike a balance known as "**Putman**".

When the scale of balance gets tilted to deficiencies called as "**Aevi-Bud**" than Tamasic passions like inner lowness, jealousy, avarice, backbiting, cowardice are aggravated, where as if scales of balance is tilted to excesses called as "**Fre-Bud**" than other kind of Tamasic passions like anger, war mongering, murderous, looting others, extramarital affairs, physical sex abuse and raping of women are aggravated..... . **Ref. (1)**

Similarly one extreme of faith tilting to over excess culminates to Fanatism, whilst the other extreme of faith showing deficiency which translates to disbelief of scriptures and traditions, Kriyas or arrogance culminating to becoming an Atheist or Agnostic. Both are extremes and deficiencies surpassing it limits. What we are supposed to tread upon and to remain in limit or "Putman" having a balanced outlook and moderation in every way. Not too much in excess and not too much in deficiency but always leading a balanced life.

So fanaticism and agnotism are both out of balance. What we are are supposed to strike upon is the balance on Patha Tarikat. Doing as much Druj Parhej Tarikaats as we can afford to do it with ease and not to over do it thereby making a show of it causing disturbance to others.

Let us learn to see only the good points of others and ignore the bad that we see of others. In that way we will learn a lot and be a much better human being.

Why waste our time on ugliness when there is so much beauty to be admired around us.

Kind regards,

Firdosh K Sukhia

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By Mehlli Nariman Bhagalia

A Zarthustrian from the USA

The Power of Devotion

One looks with profound admiration at the devotion shown by the Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews and the Sikhs to their religion. What gives them such devotion? Such is their devotion that no one dares insult either their Prophet, their religious leaders or their religious institutions in any way. What is their secret?

The answer is simple. **Devotion.**

They have discovered the secret that was once the cornerstone of our own mighty ancient Iranian Empire. Zarthustis have to reclaim their birthright of Devotion to our religion, which they have surrendered for too long.

Lessons to Learn

Our Iranian ancestors rode the ancient world like giants, because they had the same devotion to our religion, as the other communities have to theirs, today. Iran was confident in Ahuramazda's protection and guidance. All this divine grace and power remained for 6000 years, until the devotion that upheld the Empire began to fade from the Royal families. As a lesson to the Zarthustrian Royalty, disaster first came in the form of Alexander the Accursed, as he is known in Iran even to this day. When that lesson was not well learnt, a final and fatal blow was struck by the Arab, from which the Empire never recovered.

The Answer is clear.

The full glory of our most pristine religion will only return to us when we can recapture the four pillars on which the Empire stood - a strong devotion for our Prophet Asho Zarathustra, devotion to the tenets of His religion, respect for our religious institutions, and respect for our priests, who have been the Guardians of our religion for centuries.

How can Zarthusrians bring the old fire back into their hearts?

Follow the examples of other religious communities, who have

A - educated their people in the glorious history of their race and about their Scriptures.

B - declared that it is heretical to allow any "Tom, Dick and Harry" to give any interpretations of their scriptures as these are

considered divine. Made anyone found tampering, changing or editing their scriptures face severe retribution. .

C- given the highest respect to their religious leaders and their priesthood

D- educated their people about the value of their religious institutions which have made them defend and protect these from

desecration.

Zarthusrians therefore have the prescription. from other communities. It is now time to act. Let us begin.

A. Education about our the Ancient History of our race and religion

Our Hindu and Jewish brothers and sisters, have religions which began in antiquity, like our own. The Hindus with great devotion, regard the Mahabharat and the Ramayan as the source of their glorious ancient religious history. The Jews have the same strong feelings about the Old Testament. These contain their heroes and their spiritual giants. The Muslims and the Christians have their own epic histories.

We Zarthusrians have a very similar ancient history, most beautifully written in the Shahname of Firdausi which we have to the bookshelves of fables. Zarthusis, let us now bring out our copies of the Shahname and read them again. We have here the mother lode of our ancient history Firdausi himself wrote in the 8th chapter, "Do not regard some of the things mentioned in the Shahname as falsehoods or fables, because circumstances and conditions vary from age to age."

The greatness of our ancient Spiritual Kings, Jamsheed, Faredoon and others, and the works and deeds of our great Paladins like Rustom, Sohrab, Aspandiar, Shiawak and Nariman bring pride to a Zarthusti heart. This is the stuff from which fiery **Devotion** is born.

Zarthusti Parents, Grand Parents and community – Their Duty.

If Zarthustrian parents or we in small groups, could spare one hour every day or even every week, to sit with our children to read the Shahname and our prayers with them, we will have enlightened future generations. It will give them pride in their religion and ethnicity and our ancient heroes and heroines. We could, in truth, tell them that the blood of these warriors and heroes still run in our veins and we are indeed distant descendants of those great warrior souls. This is the stuff Devotion is made from.

Zarthustis have to learn the truth about our Scriptures.

Devotion springs through right knowledge and removal of ignorance. Let us remove the misunderstandings about our Scriptures, which has given rise to a loss of interest and lack of devotion. The words of two eminent scholars will remove all doubts about the divine origin and vast extent of our scriptures.

Dr. Dhalla writes in *The Zarthustrian Theology*, as follows:

“The greatest of all the spells, the word par excellence, of the Zarthustrian theology which is constantly on the tongue of the faithful, is the Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo). It is made up of 21 words, every one of which corresponds to one of the 21 Nasks, which make up the complete holy writ of the Zoroastrians. It is the quintessence of the entire scripture...”

Quoting Prof. Darmesteter (SBE series, vol. 4):

“We are no longer in the dark as to the character and contents of that large literature of which our Avesta is a remnant; that literature is known to us in its general outline through a Pehlavi analysis The history of the formation of the Avesta may be summed up thus - the 21 Nasks were formed by Ahura Mazda himself out of the 21 words of the Ahunuvairya. They were brought by Zarathustra to King Vistasp. Two copies of the complete scriptures by the order of the king; one was deposited in the treasury at Shapigan, the other in the record office.”

Yasna prayers, Ritual ceremonies and the Gathas.

These are mentioned by Asho Zarathustra himself in the twenty-one Nasks. At times Yasna ceremonies are mentioned in the same Nasks where the Gathas are mentioned. The two are inseparable.

The present Khorde Avesta, the Gathas and all the Yasna rituals, are parts of the Zoroastrian scriptures, which a thousand generations of Zarthustis have sworn and lived by. It was and is the basis of the Zoroastrian community. It was their fervent and fiery devotion to our Prophet Asho Zarathustra, His scriptures, rules, religious laws, that made Parsi Zarthustis come away from Iran to India some 1300 years ago, to save their religion. Because of this same great past devotion, Zarthustrians have been and are today respected in India, Pakistan and all over the world, far beyond the call of our numbers. Let us value the past devotion of our ancestors.

All Scriptures are in the form of metaphor and allegory.

Also that Scriptures have been miraculously prepared in layers, to suit the different levels of understanding of each reader and for different times in his life, and that of each race. Understanding Scripture may therefore begin at first as an exercise in philology, but its deeper understanding makes it a spiritual journey into Faith and Devotion!

Some understanding of our Scripture to inspire Devotion.

Avesta, one of the languages of our scripture, is a language of Manthras like Sanskrit or Aramaic and never a written language. Literal translations of passages from our scripture therefore, either make no sense or give the false impressions, which engender no feelings of devotion in the reader.

It is only when one realizes that in a Manthric language, it is the sound vibrations and colors emanating from the Manthras that matters instead of the words themselves that one begins to understand ancient scripture. Ask a Hindu about the Gayatri Mantra for instance, and he will tell you the same. Pehlvi, the other language of our prayers, is a greater enigma, as each letter in any word written, can give seven to nine different meanings to the word. With this realization will come a revelation to Zarthustis, that there can be no real literal translation of our scriptures and that our prayers are not meant to be only recited for their effect and not translated and understood philologically!

How many of us know, that our most magnificent scriptures (prayers), as handed down to us, have been perfectly composed and arranged by our Prophet Asho Zarathustra and by succeeding High Spirits- Rainidars and Soshyants, under His authority. They have been prepared to suit the special needs of countless succeeding generations as they arrive on earth.. Because of this divine perfection, we, lay Zarthustis, need not concern ourselves with

the meanings of Scriptures, as whatever meanings we assign to them in our ignorance, are probably wrong..

The mere utterance of the Manthras brings universal beneficence throughout the Universe. That is the real meaning of Universality of our pristine religion. It is also the highest form of Charity, as less than 1/10th of the benefits from our prayers belong to and are received by the reciter. The rest 9/10th goes to the entire Universe. Such is the power and beneficence of our Manthras. This itself is an inspiration for devotion

Zarthusrians looking for proofs of this, to fortify their devotion, will find many in our scriptures. For instance in the **Hormazd Yast**, Ahuramazda advises us that the only thing we have to do to seek his help, is to recite His names, the names of the Amheshaspands and the Manthravani prayers. **Karda (Paragraph) 3: “ ahmakem namaYat Ameshanam Spentanam. Tat asti Manthrahe spentahe”**. Also, in every prayer there is the word **“Yazamaide”** after the names of the Yazads or a propitious spiritual entity in the Spiritual world. It means "attunement" . The recitation of this word automatically attunes us with that particular Spiritual entity and puts us in tune with the celestial music of Ahuramazda.

What more do we want ?

But that is not all.

Asho Zarathustra and the great Dastur-e-Dasturans who followed Him, under His authority, thousands of years after Him, had perfect foresight about our conditions today. They knew that Zarthusri would be in extremely difficult times after the Empire days, as we are in today. That we would be caught up in the coils of our own Karma.

They, therefore framed an automatic confession of our sins in some of our most fundamental prayers. Every Kusti prayer and Sarosh Baj (which even the least practicing Zarthusri presumably recites), and every Nyaesh has this passage: **“Az hama gunah patet pashemanum”**. This is an automatic confessional. How can any Zarthusri, with the blood of our ancestors running in his/her veins, and having suckled milk from a Zarthusri mother's breast, not have tears of faith and devotion in his/her eyes, at the immense love and care bestowed on us, after knowing all this?

Many Zarthusrians today are unaware, that our own Manthravani Prayers in the Khorde Avesta and the Gathas are replete on every page with the most powerful Maha-manthras in existence. They are just waiting for Zarthusri to recite them in the sequence prescribed, in order to take them on their journey to Farshogard. Manthras of each religion are very powerful, but compatible only for the persons of each religion, as persons of each religion

have a "different" type of divine fire burning within each of us. All true spiritual teachers "Guru Devs" of every religion will give this truth, if one takes the trouble to find them.

B. To bring Devotion into their lives, Zarthustrians should be proud of their religion and not associate with any one or anything, that belittles our Prophet, our religion or our institutions.

Think upon this! No religious community allows anyone or anything that belittles the divine nature of their Prophet, their institutions or their scriptures, to be welcome in their communities. They know that such people and things are faith-destroying and should not be associated with. Zarthustis should have the mental discipline to do the same.

On Page 209 of the Zoroastrian Theology, Dr. Dhalla gives the definition of a heretic as mentioned in the Dinkard as under:

“Whosoever, teaches, speaks or acts, respecting the beliefs and practices of the national faith (Zoroastrian religion) differently from that which the ancients have done, is a heretic. Heretics are of three kinds; the deceiver, the deceived, and the opinionated, all of these misrepresent the teachings of the elders, and pervert the sacred writings.”

This is so much in line with what all other religious communities believe and which inspires their Devotion. Therefore, if Zarthustrians want to develop Devotion, there should be no ambiguity in Zarthustrian minds, as to what our scriptures are. It is the Holy writ of Pegumbar Asho Zarathustra Spitama.

C. Respect and revival of the priesthood is central to our religion.

Our priesthood have developed through countless ages, the almost unbelievable, naturally cultivated mental retentive powers to memorize the entire Avesta and scriptures. This only happened as this knowledge was passed through succeeding generations. After the fall of our Empire all our scriptures would have been irretrievably lost. These were however handed down by oral tradition, from generation to generation.

The Parsi Zarthustrian priests of today, (whatever their human faults) the descendants of the great enlightened Dasturs of old, have been the only true Guardians and Protectors of our religion through the ages.

How Do We Make the Fabric of Our Priesthood Whole Again?

If the true knowledge of our Manthravani and the ability of Zarthustis to recite them correctly are to survive for future generations, then the status of the priesthood will have to be regenerated. Today the priesthood is not supported by the Royalty as in the Empire days. Today they are at the mercy of the civic authorities. . Some new strong, permanent support system has to be immediately developed, which provides total independence and financial security to full time priests and the Vada Dasturs. The aim of any system should be to encourage full time priesthood with income for life. With a strong and vibrant priesthood, headed by an independent group of Vada Dasturs of unimpeachable integrity, selected by the Anjumans and responsible only to them, Zarthustrian communities throughout the world, will witness a Renaissance, with increasing Faith and Devotion in our religion, unknown in the past two hundred years..

D. Revive Respect for Our Religious Institutions.

It is of the most vital importance that Zarthustrians understand, that for the spiritual regeneration of present day Zarthustrians and our future generations, our consecrated Fire temples, the Fires within them and our Dakhmas have to be kept sacrosanct.

Our Fire Temples and the Fire within are sacred. They have been consecrated over years and months with prayers and ceremonies, and the Fire is the “**Atash Puthra Ahurahe Mazdao**”, son or representative on earth of Ahura Mazda himself. Such Fire not only purifies the “Khoreh” of all Zarthustis, who enter in it’s presence, but also strengthens the bond between every Zarathusti in the world and joins them to the "Ghass" Divine spiritual Powerstation of our Pegumbar in the unseen world.. Hence we should enter our Agiaries and Atash Behrams with the highest veneration, respectfully clothed, having first washed ourselves and recited our Kusti prayer.

Do we also know that all beings living with a radius of 9 miles of our Fire temples receive spiritual protection. Zarthustis should learn about all our institutions. They will then understand that they are entering the home of great, sacred Yazatic energies and are in the presence of a Living Entity. Such knowledge will bring Devotion to Zarthustrian hearts.

Our consecrated Dakhmas, spiritually purify continuously all the pollution in the earth within a 100 miles around them. Ours is the most ecological manner of disposal of the dead, in an increasingly ecologically conscious world. All the above mentioned institutions are the last "wonders of the world" and the envy of western civilization. And yet, we Zoroastrian ourselves, do not adequately value them, because of our self imposed ignorance.

For over 13 centuries, all the religious communities of India and Pakistan, guided by the spiritual wisdom in their own various religions, have allowed Zarthustrians to protect these Holy Fires, their religious Institutions and ceremonies from desecration by outsiders. Such is the supreme honor bestowed on our religion by others. That itself should give us pride and devotion for our religion. These Fire temples and the Fires burning within them are unique. They are the stuff of Miracles and Devotion.

Conclusion:

In the very difficult days that are with us today, the strength of our devotion will be both our sword and our shield and it will be recognized and respected by all. Such devotion when felt in our very bones, heart and blood, engenders moral, spiritual and physical power to those who feel it. As we see in other religious communities, such power is endless and irresistible.

Let us pledge ourselves to be a true Zarthustis. To build our lives around our religion and not live only a life of convenience. To remember and be proud of our ancient heritage and ancestry. To have deep devotion for our divine Prophet Asho Zarathustra. To proudly wear our Sudra, Kusti and cover our head to protect the 1st Chakra of spiritual understanding. To find ways and means to learn about our religion and lovingly recite our prayers with small yet determined beginnings. To help other Zarthustis to understand our religion and not misguide them. To defend our Prophet Asho Zarathustra from all insults, and our religion against all enemies. To support and defend our priests who have been the true guardian of our religion through the centuries. To be brothers to all Zarthustis, and people of all religions.