

Responsibility towerds "FARZANDS"

Let's face it. Life for Parsees has been very successful in India but haven't we in present at one time or another, (when disappointed with our children), felt like saying "What are we doing?" Aren't our kids missing something very essential in their training for life as future Zoroastrians? We all wish our offsprings would grow up as good Zoroastrians and remain so all their lives. But then we push aside this thought as something far fetched.

It is with those parents, and the parents whose children are yet very young and impressionable, that I wish to share some lessons that I have learned the hard way, through toil and tears; so that mistakes are not repeated and many will be spared the agony of loosing their sons and daughters to a Society - in which false standards pridominate the human minds, in which a free-wheeling generation casts off old restraints and where the distinctions between right and wrong not only change but blur and disappear.

I do not profess to know it all for I may have failed often....but then I have learned.....after a deep study, careful consideration and practical experience of the problems that confront us, I dare to point out for the benefit of confused and helpless parants, the oasis in the desert. With constant efforts, sacrifices and changes in our attitudes and lifestyles we can attain what seems to be impossible. The question is: how willing are we to pay the exorbitant price for earning this valued prize? How conditioned are we to take up this Herculean challenge? How anxious/concerned are we for our religion, the future

of our children and the future of our community?

Now then, if you are prepared to consider my suggestions, please read on and ponder.....

The nine major factors involved in bringing up a Zoroastrian child in the World are :

1) KNOW YOUR RELIGION AND HAVE FAITH (ACCEPT) IN YOUR RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES.

Zoroastrianism is not just a Religion. It is the way of life.

It is time we took a long hard look at ourselves and what we ourselves are doing to our Religion! Our attitudes have

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changed dramatically. Since last few decades. We have started to frown upon our age-old practices, we question and doubt the great spiritual ideas underlying our tenets just because they are beyond our understanding. In short we have taken the beautiful flower of our religion and have pulled it to bits, by dissection, arguments and experiments.

So the very first step is to study the Religion deeply and thoroughly, or have full faith in the teachings of our beloved Prophet. No doubt, it is very difficult in this age to observe all the tenets of Religion in everyday life or to profess Zoroastrianism as it was given by our dear Asho Zarathushtra originally. But Religion is for all times, all places, and it lies in the hands of the few careful anxious staunch followers of the faith to adapt their circumstances to make them converge towards the principles of their Daena. Even if we cannot observe and practice, it is very important to know the dictates—the ideal. The whole object of our life consists in our incessant attempts to adapt ourselves to the ideal and to ultimately reach the same. It is therefore the duty of every Zoroastrian mother to hold up these ideals and constantly try to instill these in her children and thus bless them.

In the older days, people were not perfect, but they did not have serious problems as we do now.... there was no question of disregarding the Laws of Religion. Today these laws are under attack. We not only make our own deductions but we set up our own structures of morality. Do we profess to know more than the Divine Being (The Messenger) who brought the message from Almighty God?

It is a grave mistake on the part of some who try to twist and turn our principles to suit their Life Style. If we are graduates of modern universities, it is ridiculous to profess we are masters of all branches of knowledge and then evaluate the doctrines and principles of the Religion with the yardstick of logic and learning. If we move about bareheaded, it does not follow that Asho Zarathustra had not enjoined us to cover our heads. If observing the menstrual practices is impossible now, it does not follow that women should keep polluting anything and everything if they can help it. If some consider wearing sudreh Kushti as a nuisance, it does not mean that we did not make a covenant at the time of our Navjote with Asho Zarathushtra to wear it all our lives. It is very necessary to place before our children the ideal teachings of Zoroastrianism, and teach them to try to observe as much as they can and then pass some sincere thoughts of repentance for things we cannot do "O Holy Zarathushtra. I am thankful for your laws and commandments which I believe are good for me, but I can observe only so much. Do give me better circumstances so I may progress further and further in my spiritual journey during this sojourn on earth". Your attitude will be observed by your children and your enthusiasm and faith will be contagious.

Once you do this, there will be no cry for changes. Once we can envisage our goal, we could work our way slowly and steadily toward it. Once there is a beginning, many will follow to produce a younger generation of staunch and faithful followers.

It pains me to observe that many of us are ashamed of our language, our dress, our eating habits, the food we eat and so on. Many of our children do not speak or understand Gujarati, they are embarrassed by what their parents wear. What is wrong with our ways? What makes one think the Western ways are superior? Why are we disowning our heritage and chasing what others wish to discard? Does the country force us to change? Will other Communities lower us in their esteem if we be and act ourselves? Is there any law which forbids us to discard our sudreh kushti or say our prayers in Avesta? India is a great country A land of opportunities...in spiritual experiences. Here, one can choose one's lifestyle, and one's friends. We have resources, facilities, freedom and access to all kinds of knowledge. What we can not have, we can create.

(2) Explain Spirituality and Purpose of Life

“A remarkable change is taking place in the intellectual climate of our time. The holistic world view is penetrating our consciousness and superceding the rational materialism”.

We need to explain to our children that we as human beings are intimately and inextricably part of the whole of Nature.

We are free spiritual beings and belong to the Spiritual World. We are sojourning on earth of gravity for a brief period of education and experience.

Sir George Trevelyan in one of his books, compares the human body to a diving suit. When a diver wishes to

explore the ocean floor, he has to don a special suit, be held down by leaden boots and look through his visor. Similarly the spiritual being Man descends from a subtler plane to assume a body (which is discarded when worn out) for earthly experiences and to overcome his lower self.

The diver may become so absorbed by those marvels under water, that he forgets, for a time, the two tubes which, by providing him with oxygen, keep him alive and link him with the world on earth, Similarly if we, like underseadivers, remove our helmets (cast off our spirituality) we loose our link with the spiritual world to which we must return. Like divers, we become so entangled and absorbed in what lies underneath, (materialistic morass) that we forget which world we belong to.

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It is vital that we realize this and provide sound spiritual guidance, and train our children not only physically and mentally but train them for Life...guide them in the spiritual aspects of life, things that determine our values, ethics and morals.

3) BOTH PARENTS MUST HAVE SIMILAR ATTITUDES AND SHARE THE SAME GOAL.

The husband and wife relationship which believes and practices the concept of ONENESS, is the most basic, enduring and important of all human society. They should feel as one, commit as one, communicate as one and teach as one. Unless both of them agree and have a definite code of behaviour for their children, there will be confusion in the minds of the kids, and a tendency to disobey.

Although both are required to work as a team, we must not mix up their complementary roles. Mothers must be mothers and fathers must be fathers. Ideally, the woman's role is working together with her husband and giving time and attention to the children at home. The father too has lot of responsibilities and duties in child-rearing, besides those of earning the bread. Do they both have a burning desire to accept this great challenge for the sake of their children?

4) BRING BACK OLD VALUES

"Parsee, thy name is Charity" is a common phrase and our fore-fathers really earned their charitable reputation. Even today we are proud possessors of this great quality, to some extent. But "Charity begins at home". So we have to

look to the needs of our community first and then help the others. Our ancestors built schools, colleges, hospitals and several other charitable institutions even for non-Zoroastrians. But then there was not a single parsee beggar at that time. Our community was self-sufficient. Now there are quite a number of very poor parsees in Bombay and in the villages of India. It would be good idea for the children to seem them - to help them to ignite the community feeling and oneness with our less fortunate brethren. Encourage the children to set aside a small amount from their pocket money for charitable purposes. This will water the seeds of CHARITY that are already ingrained in them.

There was a time when virtues like OBEDIENCE, RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY AND ELDERS were instilled into the child, right from his early years. Now these are 'half and half'! Disobedience and rebellion are the root causes of Man's misery. We tolerate this fault in our children and keep tolerating till! it grows into a moral disease - Permissiveness. If a child is allowed to have his way most of the time he will not have opportunities to practise SELF-CONTROL. Some wants what they want at any cost. If they cannot, they may use any means or go to any extremes.....

Are we not moving in the direction of doing the 'in thing to do'? And what about our third or the fourth generation? If we do not watch out now and do not turn back to our good old ways, can we guarantee the quality of our great grand children?

We also need to emphasize and teach that "CONTENTMENT is natural wealth"

in today's society which reduces values to crude numerals in Rupees ?

Attainment of wealth or eminence is not the only measure of success. These are O. K. if the price paid is not too high or achieved at the expenses of one's family duties or religious principles. Quite a number of parsee ladies (not girls any more) are unmarried because they cannot find males who can match their financial standards.

MODESTY AND HUMILITY be it in dress behaviour, disposition, manners- are somewhat 'absent' in our youth especially the affluente ones. They think they know it all! Some swollen egoism can be observed in some youths who do not know anything about Religion and who do not practice even they very basic tenets, to doubt and question the teachings of the great Prophet who brought down the message of Ahura Mazda. It boils down to a futile exercise in intellectual intoxication. Foolish! In order to find out the vast complex crystal of truth, we smash the crystal itself. It is a sure 'Sign of the Times' some one has surely said: "We are an Ahrimanic civilization.....And his influences is all - pervasive....."

The three basic things the early Iranian Zoroastrians taught their children were : a) To speak the truth b) To use an arrow (archery) c) To ride a horse. Now of course we cannot teach Truthfulness as we ourselves offer poor examples and grab 'lies' in lame excuses such as "white lies". "Diplomacy", "tactfulness" "as long as it dosent hurt anyone" and so on. So TRUTHFULNESS for the sake of truthfulness suffers and we think it is impossible to always tell the truth.

CHASTITY AND SHYNESS have become old-fashion and outdated. Blame and guilt have become irrational. Moral principles are changing. There is always an excuse or justification for every wrong action "So instead of hearing about wrong or right to-day, we hear about right and liberated. What used to be self indulgence is now self-fulfillment. What we used to call living in sin is now a meaningful relationship. What was once discipline is now unhealthy repression". (This is an observation of the present day American Society given by an American himself.) We need not wear the cap, but surely each of us has to pause a while and watch ourself pass by and ask "How much of all this is coming into my life, affecting my family?"

Deep in our hearts, we may know all this but we brush it aside as "Times are changing-we can't help it". BUT WE CAN! Most of us give up even before trying. If we are dissapointed with our children, we wonder what went wrong. How did that happen? The answer is PERMISSIVENESS collective permissiveness - to a greater or lesser degree- and trying to keep up with the Joneses (not in the material sense) and now trying to keep with the Billimorias or the Dasturs or the the Iranis! Yes our own people.

The result is confussion. We grope for the answers like blind, inspite of the eyesight; like at night time, inspite of the broad daylight and float with the current, lest we get branded as 'old fashioned' or 'orthodox'. That leads us to examine :

POSITIVE PARENTING

SET LIMITS- BE KIND BUT FIRM- AVOID EXPOSURE TO NON-

ZOROASTRIAN PRACTICES AND CONCEPTS. TEACH THEM TO BE TRUE TO OUR SOUND RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS AND NOT YIELD TO PEER PRESSURE- DO THEM A GOOD TURN.

The word 'training' includes the concept of discipline, warm loving paren- accompanied by restrictions. Do not for a moment nurture any feeling of 'guilt' in doing so. You are the parent and you have every right to guide your child's footsteps. This is your moral duty.

"....bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord"....." "Train up a child in the way he should go and even when he is old, he will not depart from it"....."he who loves him, disciplines him promptly."

It is time we turn our attention to many such similar quotations from the scriptures - not only from Bible, but also from other such sacred revelations and heed them. These principles have been proven for thousands of years. If they have stood the test of time, why will they not work now?

Parents would do well to teach constantly the standards even in God's revealed Work with love and undersranging and then maiatain them by correction if necessary. This is better said than done. It takes lot of time, effort and sacrifice on our part; even if the price you pay is very high, just visualize the prize!

6) PROVIDE A POSITIVE ZOROASTRIAN ENVIRONMENT: Like what ? If you ask me, I shall dream.....of a Zoroastrian household. The early hours of Dawn breaking into another day the

uplifting scent of sandalwood and loban Avesta chanting echo the rooms, the clank of the pots and pans in the kitchen the ever burning fire crackling in the hearth, the aroma of the home-cooked, whole some food..... family members sitting together at meal times-breaking bread with the name of the Lord on their lips Children calm and collected women ever in service of their husbands and children pottering around the house heads covered always there when needed-spotlessly clean house 'Chok' and toran at the doorstep Zarathushtra's picture in every room and also those of the dear departed of course, this is only 'airy idealism' but here are a few suggestions:

(A) Keep our calendar (in English) and every morning announce what 'roj' it is. Teach what 'unrojas' are, (Bahman, Mohor, Gosh, and Ram) what 'Hamkaras' are (Hormuzd, Ardibehest, Adar, Sarosh, and Behram). Mark the Gahambars, Zarathoshtno Deeso, Kooka daru's baj, the Parabs and other such events. Remember to pray for our dear ones who have passed on, on their 'roj's. Talk and discuss about Ameshesponds, Yazads, Dae, Mino, Farrokh, Farvardin.

(B) Introduce the performance of kushti rituals at least morning and night if not in every gah or after visiting the bathroom. Then motivate them to pray from Gujarati or English Khordeh Avesta. Explain and discuss the translation and the meaning of the Prayers.

(C) Set aside a time in the evenings for a discussion and explanation period. Listen to cassettes. Teach Gujarati. Have questions-answers sessions. Give an opportunity to voice their grievances. Set up a quiz or a puzzle or a contest

occasionally and top it off with small rewards. Train them to influence their Zoroastrian friends. Give examples from our history and constantly talk about our glorious age of the past in India and in Iran.

(D) Have a little corner in the house as a place of worship-an ever-burning 'deevo'. Give them duties to clean, etc. Let them develop a habit of covering their heads, at least at meal time/visiting the bathroom.

(E) Take your child's help to keep the house clean. Teach girls household duties and cooking.

(F) Avoid eating out. As far as possible consume simple wholesome home made food. This is very important because the thought vibrations of the person who cooks are caught in the food we eat.

(G) Insist on children washing hands at least, if cannot do Kushti after visiting the bathroom. Pray 5 Yatha, 3 Ashem if cannot 'do' kushti.

(H) Try and follow as much as possible of Zarthushte Din.

(I) Observe the laws of purity-as much as you can.

(J) Familiarize the kids with our sacred books and Shanameh characters.

(K) Speak in Gujarati. Make a beginning. Teach them to read and write in Gujarati.

7) **Promote Religious Activities** - Attend Religious lecturers, organize study groups, listen to religious cassettes, encourage performance of jashans, gahambars and other ceremonies (should be done in a proper

manner) 'hambandagi' (group prayer). Concentrate more on the prayers and devotional aspect. Once a few like-minded families form a little group of their own and try to stick to those and move in those circles as much as possible, the kids will not get any outside negative influence. Choose your friends wisely and never hesitate to lay down your own family rules. Try to observe 'tarikah'.

8) **Visit from time to time** It is essential to visit Agiaris, Atashbehrans our Atesh Padshahs, our Iranshah (at Udwarda) as often as possible to recharge our spiritual batteries. This way our children get to learn our customs, ceremonies, meet relatives and appreciate life.

9) **Do Things Together** : "A family that prays together stays together". Every night before retiring, take your children with you and pray before a 'devo' Kusti prayers with Sasosh Baj, Devano Namaskar, 101 Names. If time permits, add Tandrosti and Deen-no-kalmo. On Mah Adar, roj Adar, (parab) recite Atesh Niyas together before a fire. (It is very easy to keep and maintain fire if you have a fire-place and can observe the Laws of Purity ... use an iron Barbeque SAGHRI and charcoal) If your children are fortunate, they will have their very own Dadgah!

Talk about anything and everything to your children and listen well and with interest. Spend maximum time together. Treat the teachings of the great Mazdeyanic Zoroastrian Daena as seriously as you would, their home work, or piano lessons or whatever. Do not spend evenings in front of the terrible Television. It may have some breadth, but has almost no depth. Plan "happy" simple and innocent recreational things to do together. Hiking in the woods, a picnic in the countryside, going to a Park, to the Zoo, museums, libraries, historical sites, concerts, plays and places of interest nearby or even short vacations. There are so many things to do that will bring parents and children into happy contact.

Years later, all this will be paid off and it will be these happy cherished moments that will be most remembered.

Before bed-time, read to them from the Shahnameh and other great epics. Plan carefully ahead-what you are going to present and how interesting you will make. Observe and discuss ideas with them-why things happen the way they do. Moralize every situation. Build up their confidence and play up their worth. Teach them never to be ashamed of being themselves and to stick to their convictions.

These are suggestions offered in general. Apply whatever suits you. Introduce one thing at a time and let the progress be very gradual but steady.

A very important point I wish to stress is working with children in these areas will be much easier and successful if more than one family decide to launch on this exciting endeavor. Parents could exchange and share ideas and tips; children feel encouraged to learn in groups. Consequently, many will follow and the children will no longer feel that our ways are strange, impractical or unusual. What is more, the parents too will benefit. In order to teach Religious concepts to their children, they will brush up their knowledge of Religion and re-learn the Avesta, correct pronunciation and all.

We are now going through a very dark period in the history of Zoroastrianism. The question of survival of the Religion will not rest upon our numbers, but upon the strength of its practice! Besides, a remarkable change is taking place in the spiritual climate of our time. We are approaching a crucial turning point; and our children, with the coming of our Shah Behram Varjavand and the New Age, will be involved in a great task. Hence a sense of urgency. We need the courage to see that we have a tremendous, responsibility upon us as parents to train our children so that they will be worthy of receiving our great Raenidar. Ustal sahib Behramshibji, has

predicted that there will be only about 11,000 practising and staunch Zoroastrians left before our Raenidar comes. Do we wish to be included in that number?

I beseech you dear Zoroastrians to act now. Light up your heart with the love of your Religion.....this will radiate outwards, and the light will unite with itself in others who are like-minded. When we humans take one step in the right direction. Nature pushes us 9 steps! You will meet the right person, recognition will ensure and groups will form, dedicated to the service of the Religion. A new society will form within the heart of the old. Perhaps it may build an Ark to keep us afloat through the deluge, thus armed with Love, Duty, and Wisdom we shall pray that Light may penetrate our childrens thinking, that they recover sense

of purpose and devotion in life and lead a life of harmony with the Divine Laws of Nature. Hark ye those with eyes to see and ears to hear let us arouse ourselves from sleep and prepare for the Great Arrival.

Awake, awake, too long have we slept
Ponder and prepare for promises must
be kept,
The starkest fight must still be fought,
To rid the mind of doubtful thought,
The most surprising songs be sung,
Before His Coming, We are still young!

Good Luck !

Silloo Mehta.

