

# STRATEGIC VISION TO CARRY US THROUGH TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

BY PERVIN J. MISTRY

As for developing a strategic vision to carry us through to the year 2000 and beyond, we must first identify who we are. We are calling ourselves the Zarthusti community. As such, we are a religious community and we want to preserve our religious identity in order to survive as a religious group. Therefore, **preservation of religion should be our primary goal and specific vision for 2000 and beyond.**

We are not just any ethnic community. In Greek, "ethos" means nation, and "ethnic" means a group of people having common national or cultural traditions. If our ancestors wanted to preserve this national or cultural identity alone, they would have converted to Islam (which would have been so easy in the days of persecution), and would have remained "Iranis" as a national or "ethnic" group. Obviously, "ethnic" identity is not what they wanted to preserve! It was their **religion and religious identity** they wanted to perpetuate.

Please, let us all remember and appreciate the fact that our ancestors did not give up their lives, and some, their native homeland of Iran, in order to preserve just the "ethnic" or "racial" identity. Our ancestors sealed their fate in blood and some gave up their beloved Iran to seek sanctity elsewhere for their religion and the survival of their religious identity.

We can survive as a religious community only if we adhere to our religious mandates, rituals, traditions and follow the teachings of our Prophet Asho Zarathushtra.

Is it just the words: Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds which distinguish us as Zarthustis from the followers of other religions? Does ANY religion propagate bad conduct? Good thoughts, words and deeds are taught by ALL the Prophets. Many non-Zarthustis DO religiously practise these three important virtues which are **universal**. If it was only the good thoughts, words, deeds our ancestors wanted to preserve, they

could have done that even by assimilating with the Islamic religion and culture.

But, as a religious group, our ancestors wanted to preserve the distinct rituals and traditions, and above all, continue to practise the most important spiritual discipline which is "boonyad-pasbaani" or preservation of the seed: "tokham".

It was for the preservation of "boonyad-pasbaani" that some Zarthustis came to the shores of India and because they practised the "closed-door" policy, we survived in India as **practising Zarthustis!** Our ancestors came to India to live and exist and die as true Zarthustis. The Zarthustis in Iran also lived "boonyad pasbaan" until recently and perhaps even now.

We are not unique in practising "closed-door" policy. The Hassidic Jews, Shinto Japanese, Ukrainians of North Alberta, Mennonites, Orthodox Christians, Amish and many other communities practice the "closed door" policy by prohibiting intermarriage to ensure their survival.

Once we break the religious injunction of "boonyad pasbaani", in order to accommodate the views of the Juddin spouses and our own disobedience to our religious mandates, we then compromise on other injunctions and traditions as well. Therefore, to keep our traditions, rituals, prayers intact, FEZANA needs to define a Zarthusti as the traditional definition dictates.

A Zarthusti is one who is born of both Mazdayasni Zarthusti parents, who has been traditionally initiated by an ordained priest; and one who wears the Sudreh-Kusti as mandatory after Navjote.

Some Irani Zarthustis oppose this traditional definition by claiming that due to persecution, many have not had their navjotes performed and many do not wear the sudreh-kusti. However, it is a fact that the Pahlavi scriptures were written in Iran during the worst days of persecution and

yet, they unanimously declare that sudreh-kusti are incumbent on all Zarthushtis and navjote must be performed. Therefore, the question arises: if our ancestors gave up their lives to preserve our religion in Iran during the days of persecution, why are their descendants not donning the sudreh-kusti now, in North America and elsewhere where there is no persecution? Is it because the past one or two generations stopped wearing the sudreh-kusti, the current generation now considers this injunction to be obsolete? When any ritual or tradition is discarded by one generation, it is probably lost to the succeeding generations.

Today, many Irani Zarthushtis consider sudreh-kusti to be optional and unnecessary. When the sudreh-kusti are abandoned, the basic fundamental "kusti-padyaab" and other obligatory prayers are also neglected. We need to re-claim sudreh-kusti and navjote as incumbent but we do not need to perform navjotes of Zarthushti individuals who are over fifteen years of age. FEZANA is not obligated or delegated to facilitate the performance of navjotes of those Zarthushtis who are over fifteen years. FEZANA must be additionally vigilant that navjotes are not performed to convert Irani Muslims or any Juddins to

Zarthushtis. Many Muslim Iranis may claim past Zarthushti lineage (some for political and other reasons), but the traditional definition safeguards our religion by not accepting conversion and intermarriage, thereby also protecting it from being weakened by dilution. Because we do not convert nor accept intermarriage, we are at peace with all other communities. The recent hostilities in Bosnia are a prime example of the enmity created due to conversion and intermarriage.

We cannot define a Zarthushti as one who simply agrees with the teachings of Asho Zarthushtra. Asho Zarthushtra's teachings are universal because they are based on Truth. Truth is the universal foundation of all religions.

Juddin navjotes are a mockery of one of our most sacred and fundamental rituals. The ritual of navjote is performed only of children born of both Mazdayasni Zarthushti parents who affirm at this ritual to obey and follow the tenets of the Religion, and to propagate the Mazdayasni Zarthushti religion through unbroken lineage, till Frashogard. Children born of both Mazdayasni Zarthushti parents are permitted to enter all agiaries, atash-behrams and are entitled to dokhmenashini even before their navjote is

performed. Therefore, navjote is not a ceremony, or a notarised document to make a juddin a Zarthushti.

Our community in North America would do well to learnt from past history which **proves** that groups of Zarthushtis who left Iran after the Arab conquest to settle in Europe and Asia (except for India) **perished**, through their "open-door" policy of intermarriage and conversion. These Zarthushti communities ceased to exist because in time, they were absorbed into the ethnic and racial identity of the larger host communities. There are NO living, practising Zarthushti descendants of these groups in existence today. Only some archaeological evidence stands as mute testimony to the annihilation of the Zarthushti communities who intermarried, proselytized and perished!

Some Zarthushtis would like to adopt harmful strategies simply because intermarriage is becoming a common occurrence. Intermarrriage has increased in all the other religious communities and they too, especially the Jews, are alarmed that most children today grow up without any religion, resulting in the diminution of all religious faiths. Should we, as suggested by some, accept detrimental trends which are harmful to our survival and, as a religious group, conform to such

destructive societal changes? About the societal change as opposed to the Laws of Asha, the Pahlavi text Dadistan-i-Dinik (SBE, Vol. 18 pg. 109, Footnote 1) says that "heterodoxy, 'the most mischievous weapon' of the fiend, must fail in the end, because, like other revolutions, it relies on constant change, which implies want of permanency."

If FEZANA is sincere in trying to find a solution, it must follow the strategy which our ancestors adopted in India, thereby surviving for the past 1300 years. It was only the "closed-door" policy which has guaranteed our survival in India and consequentially succeeded in promoting faith and obedience to the Laws of the Religion.

We are not just any community; we are a religious community. Please let us not destroy the vision for which our ancestors sealed their fate in blood. Let us keep their vision in our hearts and in sight. **What we need is a new strategy to perpetuate the old vision which guaranteed our survival since millenia and will guarantee our future survival for the next millenium.**

I pray that Ahura Mazda will preserve our religion for posterity.

Pervin J. Mistry

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