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Presidents Message:

NAMC's 2015 Annual General Meeting was held at the newly opened The Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington, Inc. from May 16 to May 17/2015. I would personally like to thank the President & his team for organizing such an excellent event. I would personally also like to Thank Ervad Brigadier Behram Panthaki for making our AGM possible.

Ervad Kobad Zarolia

The Simplicity of Zoroastrian Religion ***By Soli Bamji***

Zoroastrian religion can be termed as 'natural', which is the innate capacity of humans to apply reason and experience in order to arrive at a belief in the existence of a supreme being. Natural religion has not compared favorably with the supernatural religions that deem mystical union with the divine. Zoroastrian religion is liberal, comforting, egalitarian and contemplative, and encourages reliance on personal responsibility.

A Zoroastrian cannot achieve deliverance either through states of trance, dreams, visions and healings, or through special signs and miracles, mystical experiences, offerings and sacrifices, purification and penance. In some religions, possession of the human body by a mystical entity is a form of interchange with the spiritual world. However, for every Zoroastrian, relationship with God can only be expressed in terms of moral behavior because each individual has the capability to contribute and improve the quality of human life and thus renew this world.

More than 3000 years ago, Zarathushtra revealed to mankind that there is only One God whom he referred to as *Ahura Mazda*, literally meaning, “A Being having Super-Wisdom”. Prior to Zarathushtra the Gods and Goddesses of the Indo-Iranians were known for their power and strength while Zarathushtra laid the stress on Ahura Mazda's wisdom and creative ability. By using the term Ahura Mazda, a compound of a male and female name, Zarathushtra conveyed the equality of male and female before the Creator and, also, the fact that the deity was beyond one particular sexual designation. Many western scholars have translated Ahura Mazda as Lord of Wisdom.

According to Zarathushtra, Ahura Mazda created the universe in space and time through his creative faculty Spenta Mainyu (Best Mentality). Ahura Mazda not only let the universe evolve into inanimate objects such as the sun, moon, stars and planets but also into living species such as the plants, animals and human beings. The physical laws, such as the principles of gravity and electromagnetism came into existence, and natural selection which can weed out potentially dangerous genetic mutations govern the evolution of the universe to this day.

The Gathas, composed by Zarathushtra, refer to Ahura Mazda as “*Tashô*” (Yasna 31-11), which signifies a designer and conveys the idea of improvement, progress and evolution [Dhalla]. Ahura Mazda is not only the creator but also the maintainer and promoter of his creations. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra also describes other attributes of Ahura Mazda. These are Vohu Manah (intelligent and good thinking), Asha (truth and righteousness), Khshathra (benevolent power and rule of goodness), Armaiti (tranquility and serenity), Haurvatat (perfection and completeness) and Ameretat (immortality).

Zarathushtra introduced the unique idea that the purpose for human life is to emulate the attributes of Ahura Mazda and help move His creation towards perfection. Ahura Mazda is intelligent and full of wisdom and has vouchsafed every human being with a mind so that we can think and discern what is good and bad, and rationally choose our own path in life. The human mind is the best gift that has been bestowed on us by Ahura Mazda and we are the only species in this world that can of rationally assess and discriminate good from evil. By employing our mind we can be creative, constructive and progressive or unimaginative, destructive and ignorant. The freedom to choose between, good and evil is the underlying principle of Zarathushtra's religion:

2. Sraotaa geush aaish vahishtaa

avaênataa suchaa mananghaa.

Aa vare naao vichithahyaa

narem narem khakhyaai tanuye. (Yasna 30.2)

Hear with your ears the Highest Truth I Preach. And with illumined minds weigh them with care, before you choose which of the two Paths to tread, deciding man by man, each one for each.

[English translation by Dr. Irach J. S. Taraporewala]

We should make our choices only after listening and reflecting and not make decisions based on popularity or because we are coerced to do so. Humans are co-workers of Ahura Mazda, but not his

slaves because Zarathushtra does not implore blind faith but a reflective philosophy based on knowledge and learning.

The dualism reflected in the Gathas is not cosmic but moral; for good and evil are confined to the human mind, and thoughts, when translated into words and actions can produce good or bad results. Zoroastrianism is an ethical religion and teaches that mortals can achieve spiritual completeness by fighting evil with Humata, Hukhta and Hvarshtra (good thoughts, good words and good deeds).

According to Zarathushtra the universe is regulated through Asha the law of "truth and precision". At the physical level Asha represents the laws in the universe and scientists try to understand these laws of physics, chemistry and biology. On the psychological level Asha is the powerful force of truth while at the spiritual level Asha is the fusion of order and truth leading us to the path of righteousness. Goodness, benevolence and knowledge are an integral part of what is right, and Asha represents not only law and social order but also scientific, philosophical and spiritual truth. Asha is doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right place with the right means to achieve the right purpose [Dhalla]. The Ashem Vohu prayer declares that happiness comes to the one who is virtuous and performs good deeds for the sake of virtue:

**Ashem Vohu Vahishtem asti,
Ushtaa asti,
Ushtaa ahmaai,
Hyat ashaai Vahishtaai ashem.**

Virtue is good; it is the best!

It is everlasting happiness!

Everlasting happiness comes to him who is virtuous for the sake of virtue, which is the best!

[English translation by Rustomjee].

Ahura Mazda is in accord with Asha and he wants us to promote this path of righteousness, which stands for order, evolution and progress. According to this law good deeds produce good rewards and evil deeds have bad consequences. Zarathushtra emphasized respect for the elements of nature, such as, fire, earth, water, and the seasons. If we do not live in harmony with nature it would lead to catastrophic consequences; but by following the path of Asha we can make this world a better place, not only for this generation but for the generations to come.

Zoroastrians do not believe that good things in life are detrimental to the spiritual life or that we should denigrate the material world. For a Zoroastrian life has to be lived to its fullest by making the right choices in order to bring about *Frashokereti*, the final renovation of the world. Zarathushtra did not promote the ideas of repudiation, celibacy and withdrawal of any form, because life is a true celebration to be lived with honesty in order to bring happiness and fulfillment both within oneself and to others. Humans are ultimately responsible for their choices and reap the consequences of their actions. The law of consequences is fashioned and delivered with wisdom and benevolence, and is not intended to punish but to deliver enlightenment and understanding for what is true and right. Evil can be eliminated by making the wrongful become righteous, and by changing their minds through knowledge and understanding.

Zarathustra described Ahura Mazda's attribute, Khshathra Vairya, as the rule of goodness, the divine power that guides all creations towards Asha. People who are wise and sincere can establish an ideal state that promotes physical, material and spiritual progress of the world towards Frashokereti. Aarmaiti is Ahura Mazda's devotion to all his creations. It also represents harmony that exists in nature. Each person can strive to bring serenity to this world to promote happiness. If we live our lives with goodness towards all creations, then it can also influence others to goodness, and this in turn would set in motion a cycle of good deeds that goes on forever. Haurvataat, perfection, and Ameretaat, immortality, are the rewards of a righteous life. Khshathra and Aarmaiti can lead human beings to live in eternal bliss, the ultimate goal of the Zoroastrian doctrine.

Zoroastrian religion is simple because it is positive and life affirming, and the Zoroastrian way of life can be led by moral perception and decision. The religion does not demand blind belief but reason and action on the part of every individual. It is not a prescriptive ethic, based on obedience and fear, but rather an ethic of personal responsibility. The Gathas provide guidance for human beings to reflect upon and act using their own good mind and clear conscience. Each person has an inherent right as well as responsibility to choose the path of Asha, for Zoroastrians do not believe in predestination that God has decreed everything that will happen. The freedom to act goes hand in hand with responsibility for the consequences of such actions. The mind of human beings can accept to follow Asha, and through good thoughts, good words and good deeds, create bliss or deviate from it and create havoc. Those who follow the path of Asha walk on the path of righteousness and goodness, out of which comes happiness.

Each and every one of us can resist evil, follow the path of righteousness and enlightenment and help to lead this world to Frashokereti. Zarathustra says in Yasna 30.9 of the Gathas:

9. Atchaa tôi vaêm khyamaa yôi im frashem kêrenaon ahum.

May we be like those making the world progress towards perfection! [English Translation by Irani].

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