

WZO & ZANZ - New Zealand

Report sent by Rashna Dorab Tata, President, The Zarathustrian Association of New Zealand

WZO in collaboration with the Zarathustrian Association of New Zealand (ZANZ), organized a two day Seminar & Lecture series on the 5th & 6th of May in Auckland, New Zealand. Dina McIntyre and Farrokh Vajifdar, both knowledgeable Zoroastrian scholars and reputable speakers, were invited to conduct the lectures on the Zoroastrian Religion, History and Culture.

A diverse range of topics were covered over



R: Dina McIntyre, Farrokh Vajifdar, Darius Mistry (WZO, NZ), Rashna Tata

eight sessions encompassing various aspects of the religion. Topics of general interest such as, "The Significance and meaning of the Yatha

Ahu Vairyo Prayer", "Harmony in Paradox", "The Application of the Gathas in Today's World" and "Zarathushtra's Puzzles" were well balanced with issues of controversy such as "Conversion & Acceptance", "Death & Disposal of the Dead" and "The Future of Zoroastrianism".

Both Dina and Farrokh belong to a rapidly growing group of rational thinkers and educated scholars who are fluent in the scriptures, written texts, ancient languages and their dialects. Their presentations rely on hard evidences, references and quotes from ancient texts, the Gathas, Yasnas, Yashts , Niyaeshes, Rivayats; and various texts spanning a time frame of a 1000 years and also include references from later day research, as opposed to relying on rabid prejudices and misconceived notions based on hearsay which is often mistaken for "tradition".

Dina a retired attorney from Pittsburg, has been a student of the teachings of Zarathustra since the early 1980's and was

the Editor of a 12-lesson course on the Gathas called "An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra". Her writings have appeared in various Zoroastrian Journals and websites. She is a much sought after speaker and has lectured at various seminars and conferences all over the world.

Farrokh Vajifdar converted from Parsiism to Zoroastrianism at the age of 19 and has not ceased studying Indo-Iranian civilizations since. He specializes in the history, languages, literatures and religions of Ancient Iran. He categorizes himself as an independent researcher and has collaborated with noted non-Zoroastrian and aspiring Parsi authors on translations, articles and books. Farrokh is a Fellow (and former Vice-President) and (Fellow-in-Council) of the Royal Asiatic Society and a review contributor to its journal.

The immense wealth of knowledge that these two speakers collectively brought with them, promised the people of Auckland an exhilarating and enriching two days.

What was absolutely remarkable was that the intent and purpose of both the speakers was to put forth information that was derived through long years of diligent and scholarly analyses and it was for the listener to absorb it, weigh it and balance it against existing preconceived fallacies and finally arrive at their own conclusion. They most certainly were not fanatical preachers raving from the pulpits!

Dina in her soft and gentle manner cited chapter and verse, to present and prove that "Zarathushtra's Zoroastrianism" was meant for all mankind.

Her thorough and detailed study of the Gathas brought to life the *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* prayer. The depth of meaning and significance behind every word of the prayer was unfolded with such simplicity that it left the audience feeling humbled, by the intensity of this basic prayer known to every Zoroastrian of every age. "The *Yatha Ahu Vairyo*, sets you on the path of Truth and Good Thinking. This prayer is a mantra, a nugget of wisdom the purpose of which is to remind us of certain truths as we recite it". "Good thinking is the key to accessing the factual truths of our universe. It is the key to understanding the truths of the mind



ZANZ managing committee with Dina & Farrokh

and spirit, it is the key to accessing the divine and good thinking, which according to Zarathushtra requires that we think for ourselves ... not blindly follow or accept what others tell us to. After all even Zarathushtra when asking for Mazda's guidance, requests that it be given through good thinking".

Zarathushtra says "... instruct through good thinking (the course) of my direction, in order to be the charioteer of my will and my tongue". Y50.6 [Inslar translation].

"When we create light, the darkness ceases to exist. We create light by bringing the divine to life with our choices. Our choices of who and what we worship our choices in thought, word and action stemming form an understanding of Asha".

"Zoroastrianism today ... but what of its future?" was Farrokh's earnest plea to the people of New Zealand. The sincerity and passion with which he spoke was missed by none. "If you do not think of a future you most assuredly will not have one. To forecast the future of our wonderful religion we need to take into account its current circumstances. Each land of our new Zoroastrian Diaspora,

forms for us it's own special circumstances and challenges. The myth of ritual being everything is slowly but surely receding.

"Divisions between the so called reformists and orthodox sections of our diminutive community have led to disillusionment and even desertion. The common perception about us amongst our youth, is one of incessant and pointless quarrel".

How true his words were ... Sadly enough a majority of the community, the world over, see themselves as belonging to two categories " Traditional" or "Modern". There is a thick grey line that separates the two and there is no "in-between". Have we

lost the will to erase this line? Do we really need to classify ourselves as one or the other?

Unfortunately this same scenario also exists in New Zealand today ... and in spite of the best efforts of many to erase this division. Amongst such a small group of people, most of whom are still first generation migrants, we already have irreconcilable differences. Two Zoroastrian associations, who cannot even come together on the basic definition of a "Zarathushti".

Dina very rightly stated, "unless we start teaching Zarathushtra's original teachings we will loose our kids, as we are living in a society today where our kids will question everything". Zarathushtra's teachings are so relevant to life, we won't have any problems keeping our kids. In the Gathas lies the "key to our survival".

"The promise of Frashokereti is only as near as you can make it happen. There is strength in Good and there is strength in Harmony and together we can fulfill our aspirations and destinies", said Farrokh.

The recent bitter controversies surrounding "Death and Disposal of the dead" have torn

the very fabric of our community in India, going so far as to raise a stink in the cosmopolitan media. Yet don't we deal with the disposal of the dead in other parts of the world, where "dokhmenashini" does not prevail, in a sensible and pragmatic manner making use of alternate systems. Where "dokhmenashini" is simply not an option, have we not started new traditions based on the times and circumstances of our new homeland. Do these "Zarathushti souls", not find the peace they deserve simply because they did not die in India?

Farrokh laid bare the fears and ignorance that generations of gullible people have been susceptible to. He did this by presenting factual history, as opposed to so much of the fiction that unfortunately

prevails. Some of our so-called time honoured tradition, were in fact neither of great antiquity nor had they formed part of our "religious traditions". They were simply social phenomena which grew and faded with the passage of time. Change does not mean a break in continuity!

The most fruitful part of this entire

lecture tour, was the special Youth Session

that was organized for the youth of Auckland at my house. Again no efforts had been spared by the orthodox section, to ensure that the youth stayed away. However not only did the youth turn up in large numbers, they stayed talking with Farrokh and Dina till late at night, totally immersed in a most thought provoking and captivating debate, on various topics of interest to them. The energy and interaction that night was simply amazing.

Both Farrokh and Dina had nothing but praise for the high level of awareness and interest and thirst for knowledge, exhibited by our youth in New Zealand. They went so far as to mention, "The future of Zoroastrianism is in safe hands in New Zealand".

My question to all those judgmental individuals, all over the world has always been, why do you have so little faith in our youth, to do the right thing in taking our religion forward? Our youth have an inquisitive, intelligent and enquiring mind. It is in the interest of the community to keep this curiosity in the religion an open, accountable and answerable dialogue. Let them ask the questions and let there be a healthy debate on all issues that concern them.

For the ZANZ managing committee, these lectures were not meant to be an attempt to preach, convert or influence any one, but to provide a forum for our members to have a healthy debate on all matters that concern us as a community. We do not make any assumptions about the right of people to choose and adopt what they think is appropriate for them.

||||| Let their choices be made, after hearing from both the traditional and modern lobby.

||||| Let us assimilate and understand the information we get.

||||| Let each one of us be the judge of what is right and wrong.

||||| Let us be in touch with reality and yet never forget the essential core values of our religion.



Farrokh with the youth of NZ at the special youth session at Rashna's residence. Below: l to r - Farrokh, Dina, Rashna



|||| Allow each individual to make the right choices, as only then will they have strong convictions in their faith and beliefs.

|||| We are all members of an intelligent community that thrives on knowledge.

|||| We all stand to gain by learning and sharing our knowledge with each other.

|||| Let us make informed decisions and let our choices be based on facts and knowledge and not ones based on hearsay and fear of man-made consequences.

This lecture series and Dina and Farrokh personally, gave this and so much more to the people of Auckland. The feedback from the people who attended the lectures, was brilliantly positive and it made all our efforts worth while. The Q & A sessions after each lecture were intensely thought provoking and enriching. The fire within each one of us who were there has been ignited!

We sincerely appreciate the initiative taken by WZO, and their world wide efforts in creating awareness of our faith, enhancing the understanding between all Zoroastrians and reigniting our pride in our Zoroastrian identity and values.

May the Fire of Ahura Mazda's Truth prevail everywhere in the blessed New Homelands of our Zoroastrian Diaspora!



Rashna Tata with her family immigrated to New Zealand from India in 2001, to give better educational opportunities to their son. She presently lives in Auckland, working with The Aucklander a community newspaper, and also teaches English. Rashna comes from a priestly family, her father having served the community at Bombay for over 65 years. She is the current president of ZANZ having held this position since the last four years.



Zoroastrian Prayer Services offered by Dasturji Framroze Sorabji Mirza

[This advertisement appeared in the Jame of 25.03.07]

Four days and subsequent prayers for the departed, including for those opting for electric cremation or any other mode of disposal, at almost half of the cost incurred for ceremonies of Dokhmenashine of Doongerwadi.

Marriages, including intermarriages and navjotes, including navjotes of children of intermarried couples irrespective of male/female gender, will be carried out at a much less than the cost normally charged.

Prayers will be held at party's residence, halls or any other sites, anywhere in and out of Bombay. Facility of Prayer Hall is available in Bombay.

Res: 2363 6524 - Mob: 90214 21593 & 98217 36948
Email: fsmirza@rediffmail.com

Marzban Giara informs:

Government of India has appointed Dr Mehroo D Bengalee as Member, National Minorities Commission in the vacancy caused by the passing away of Lt Gen Adi Sethna. She has assumed charge effective April 11th 2007. She was the former Vice Chancellor of Mumbai University and former trustee of Bombay Parsee Panchayet.

Correction

The 3-part series written by Adi Davar in Hamazor Issues 3 & 4 of 2006 and Issue 1/07 :

World-wide and North American responses to ZAQ's Questionnaire after the Montreal Congress were reported to Los Angeles, not Houston, Congress. References to "FEZANA member associations" were intended as a shortcut to the words "North American associations" who subsequently formed FEZANA. Ed