

A Teaching for all Mankind.

A noted legal luminary, Oliver Wendell Holmes,¹ perceptively observed:

"A very common phenomenon, and one very familiar to the students of history, is this. The customs, beliefs, or needs of a time establish a rule or formula. In the course of centuries the custom, belief or necessity disappears, but the rule remains. The reason which gave rise to the rule has been forgotten, and ingenious minds set themselves to inquire how it is to be accounted for. Some ground of policy is thought of, which seems to explain it and reconcile it with the present state of things; and then the rule adapts itself to the new reasons which have been found for it, and enters on a new career."²

This observation hits the nail on the head, with regard to one of the most controversial 'rules' of Zoroastrianism as it is practiced by orthodox Zoroastrians today. It is the prohibition of accepting into the religion, anyone who is not born of Zoroastrian parents (both parents).

This custom did not exist in Zoroastrian communities prior to the Arab invasion of Iran. During the centuries that followed, Zoroastrians in Iran were subjected to intense persecution which was both life-threatening, and also economic. And while Islam welcomed, and indeed coerced conversions by Zoroastrians to Islam, it was a one-way street ~ any conversions from Islam to Zoroastrianism (or any other religion) resulted in death and destruction for all concerned, and adversely affected the Zoroastrian community. It therefore was understandable that under these circumstances, the Zoroastrian religious authorities of that time took the public (but not private)³ position that the religion would not accept converts.

After the Arab invasion of Iran, if the daughter of a Zoroastrian married a Muslim, the government's laws of inheritance automatically made the Muslim son-in-law of the Zoroastrian parents, their sole heir, cutting out all their other children. Not surprisingly, Zoroastrian communities developed a tradition discouraging such intermarriage.

The desecration of places of worship, as a form of sport by local rowdies or fanatics, or as a form of insult by Zoroastrians who had converted to Islam and were required to show that their conversion was genuine, resulted in a rule that non-Zoroastrians could not enter Zoroastrian places of worship.

These rules were survival mechanisms. Survival was the original necessity that generated non-acceptance, and other exclusionary practices.

During the centuries after the Arab invasion, waves of Zoroastrians migrated to India ~ some perhaps to trade, but many others to escape economic or religious or life-threatening persecution. These immigrants also were confronted by the problem of survival. In India, the tolerant Hindus did not persecute Zoroastrians. But Zoroastrians, mindful of their experiences in Iran, did not wish to antagonize their host communities by accepting converts from the host society with its then rigidly structured caste system, which created social stability in Hindu communities, but which were not a part of Zoroastrian beliefs.⁴ Nor did these Zoroastrian immigrants want to lose their identity by being absorbed into these host communities, which might have occurred through inter-marriage. So the necessity underlying the rule against accepting converts, and against inter-marriage in Iran, changed somewhat in India, but survival was still the dominating and underlying reason for these rules.

During the British occupation of India, there were many large and prosperous Zoroastrian communities in India. From that time period, through to the present time, the threat of persecution or desecration of places of worship did not exist, and do not exist today. The reasons for the rule against marrying out, or accepting non-Zoroastrians, were largely forgotten, but the rule itself was firmly established, and (as Mr. Justice Holmes observed, in a different context) ingenious minds have set about creating new reasons for the rule's existence. We will examine some of these new reasons in this chapter.

But before we do so, we first need to ask: Is this rule against conversion and acceptance a part of Zarathushtra's teachings? Was it practiced in Zoroastrian communities before the Arab invasion of Iran?

Opinions abound, pro and con. But opinions, including mine, aren't worth much. The question is: What does the evidence show. I would like to show you a few highlights of:

- * The evidence of Zarathushtra's own words in the Gathas,
- * The evidence of other ancient texts and prayers written over a period of time that spanned more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra,
- * The evidence of formal opinions given by ancient (and some modern) religious authorities, and
- * The evidence of ancient traditions and customs.

All of this evidence tells us that Zoroastrianism is indeed a universal religion, open to anyone who may wish to become a Zoroastrian. In fact, no proponent of exclusion has been able to come up with any evidence to the contrary in any ancient Zoroastrian text.

There are those who say that we must accept non-Zoroastrians into the religion, if we wish to survive. With respect, I do not agree. The Ashem Vohu prayer teaches us that we should do what is right because it is the right thing to do. In my view, we should practice acceptance ~ not to "survive", but because it is the right thing to do. On the other hand, it pleases me that our ancient texts wholeheartedly support acceptance as the right thing to do. Let us consider the evidence.⁵

Acceptance in the Gathas.

There are many verses in the Gathas which show that Zarathushtra considered his religion to be a universal one, and hoped that all the living would come to believe in it. Here are a few examples. There are many more. In Y31:3 Zarathushtra says: "... that commandment which is for Thy adherents ~ speak, Wise One, ... in order for us to know (all) that by means of which I might convert all the living." Y31:3, Insler 1975.

Some Zoroastrians who advocate exclusion, argue that this translation by Professor Insler is incorrect. But a review of many translations by major scholars, both 'eastern' and 'western', consistently shows that in this verse, Zarathushtra expresses the wish to convert all the living to the belief system which in his view, came to his mind from the Divine, from Wisdom personified (*mazdā-*). I will discuss here just 4 translations, but I have footnoted the linguistics of the operative words, and ten additional translations,⁶ for those who are interested.

The oldest 'translation' of the Gathas that we have today, is the Pahlavi translation/explanation, which in many manuscripts, interlines the Avestan, sentence by sentence. Referring to Wisdom's teachings, it translates this verse (Y31:3) as follows: "...declare it, that we teach all living the Faith."⁷

The next oldest translation is Neriosangh Dhaval's Sanskrit translation. Neriosangh Dhaval was a Zoroastrian priest who lived in India around the 1400s CE.⁸ He translated a number of Avestan texts into

Sanskrit. An English version of his Sanskrit translation of this verse, Y31:3, is as follows. Referring to the Lord Wisdom's teachings, he says: "... which wisdom is enlightening or awaking all the living."⁹

So we see that the two oldest translations of this verse support the notion that Zarathushtra's teachings are for all the living.

At the turn of the 19th and early 20th centuries, one of the finest Avestan scholars was Bartholomae. Taraporewala was one of his students. According to Bartholomae's translation of this verse, Y31:3, Zarathushtra asks Wisdom to instruct him: "...that I may convert all living men."¹⁰

More recently, we have the translation of the late Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb who was the President of the Council of Mobeds of Teheran ~ the highest Zoroastrian priest in all of Iran. His translation reads as follows: "... so that I may convert all the people into the right path."¹¹

There are those who argue that this verse, Y31:3, should be interpreted as pertaining to the choice between good and evil, and that there is nothing in the Gathas about choosing the religion. This argument is partly correct, but it ignores the evidence of the context of this verse,¹² and indeed, the evidence of the rest of the Gathas. Zarathushtra describes Wisdom's message as "... that word which is to be heard as the best [*yahišta*- 'most good'] for men..." Y45:5 ~ not as the 'most good' for any particular tribe, or clan, or race, but as the 'most good' for mankind. And he himself makes the choice ~ choosing the Lord's teachings. He says:

"... I choose (only) Thy teachings, Lord." Y46:3, Insler 1975.

Zarathushtra makes no mention of restricting his teachings to those whose parents were Zoroastrian, for the simple reason that before Zarathushtra, no one's parents were 'Zoroastrian'.

There are those who argue that Zarathushtra did not convert anyone. He merely reformed the existing religion. But once again, the evidence is to the contrary.¹³ In the Gathas, Zarathushtra condemns, not just the local priests, but their gods (plural) stating that these gods, as well as those who worship them, have afflicted mankind.¹⁴ He does not say anywhere, that the teachings of Wisdom had been perverted, or were not being practiced correctly and needed to be reformed.

No one knows today whether Zarathushtra's original homeland was in the north, south, east or west of the Iranian steppes and mountains, which in pre-Achaemenian times consisted of a number of different nations¹⁵ (as indeed they do today). There is much speculation on this subject, but no direct evidence. We do know, from his own words, that he was persecuted and ostracized for speaking out against the tyranny of priests and rulers, and had to flee from the region in which he was born. ("To what land to flee? Where shall I go to flee? They exclude me from my family and from my clan..." Y46:1, Insler 1975). Zarathushtra eventually came to the kingdom of King Vishtaspa, and was successful in converting the royal family and the people of that land to his vision of religion.

As Zarathushtra won more people over to his envisionment, his prayers reflect a deep desire to spread the Word. He says:

"... We shall be Thy envoys forever." Y49:8, Insler 1975;

"At my insistence ... the family, the community together with the clan [*airyamnā*], entreated for the grace of Him, the Wise Lord, (saying:) 'Let us be Thy messengers,...' " Y32:1, Insler 1975.

Notice, it is the whole community and clan who entreat to be the Lord Wisdom's messengers. What therefore could Zarathushtra have meant by this prayer, other than to have the whole community and clan

spread Wisdom's teachings to people who did not belong to their clan. Indeed, he makes it clear that the 'lineage' he cares most about is not a tribal lineage, but our lineage with truth and Wisdom's other aspects. Referring to a person of *ārmaiti*- (i.e. one who embodies truth with his thoughts, words and actions), he says: ["...Any such person of \[ārmaiti-\] is of the \(same\) good lineage with truth and all those \(other forces\) existing under Thy rule, Lord."](#) Y49:5, Insler 1975.

Other Ancient Texts and Prayers:

Yasna 42 is a Younger Avestan supplement to the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*. We know from its linguistics that it is not as old as the Gathas, but older than some of the other Yasnas, which are in the Younger Avestan language.¹⁶ By the time YHapt. 42 was composed, the religion had become institutionalized, and had established priests and rituals. This section speaks of reverencing the athravans (fire-priests) who returned after spreading the religion in far off places. It says we reverence "... the Fire-priests, as they approach us from afar, and seek to gain the provinces, and spread the ritual lore ..." Yy42:6, Mills' translation.¹⁷ This section is clear evidence that the religion was not restricted, and that indeed, efforts were made to spread knowledge of it.

The Ahuna Vairya (the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer) is not a part of the Gathas, but it is in Old Avestan (as are the Gathas), and in the same meter as the first Gatha. Many scholars believe that it was composed by Zarathushtra himself.¹⁸ It is one of three foundational Zoroastrian prayers. One of the earliest (surviving) commentaries on this prayer appears in Yy19:6, a later Avestan text written in the YAv. language, several centuries after Zarathushtra. This commentary has Ahura Mazda making the following promise to everyone in the entire world:

"And whoever in this world of mine which is corporeal shall mentally recall ... a portion of the Ahuna-vairya, and ... shall then utter it aloud, shall worship thus ... I will bring his soul over the Bridge of Chinvat, I who am Ahura Mazda,..." Yy19:6, Mills' translation.¹⁹

So we see from this Avestan commentary, that ancient Zoroastrians believed that it was the Lord Wisdom's wish that this prayer be used by every person in the entire world.

There are many later texts and prayers which echo Gatha verses regarding the universality of the religion. For example, in the Gathas Zarathushtra expresses the wish to spread the Lord's teachings across the earth. ["Lord, let wisdom come in the company of truth across the earth!..."](#) Y50:5, Insler 1975. The *Farvardin Yasht* ²⁰ echoes this thought. It says in § 94:

"...and there will the good Law of the worshippers of Mazda come and spread through all the seven Karshvares of the earth." Yt.13:94, Darmesteter translation.²¹

This wish (that the religion will spread all over the world), is found in many of the Khordeh Avesta prayers, (some of which contain quotations from Avestan prayers and texts). The Khordeh Avesta prayers were composed during Sasanian times (or possibly later), more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra.

For example: the Meher Niyaesh says:

"May the knowledge, extent and fame of the commandments of the most excellent Mazda worshipping religion ever increase over the world, over all the seven regions, so may it be."²² Sethna translation. Almost identical words are also found in at least eight other prayers.²³

The *Doa Nam Setayeshne* (a prayer composed in Sasanian times)²⁴ says:

"Homage to the all knowing tolerator, who sent through Zarathushtra Spitman ... teachings of religion for the people of the world so that they may have friendship, inculcate faith and inner wisdom and knowledge gained from hearing. For the information and guidance of all men who are, who were, and who will be hereafter ..." Sethna translation.²⁵

This prayer reflects a rather lovely perception of the religion – as being one which promotes friendship, knowledge, and wisdom for all mankind, and yet is a religion of tolerance, whose Divinity is addressed here as the "all knowing tolerator" (i.e. 'the all knowing Tolerant One').

The *Din-no-Kalmo* (Pazand) prayer speaks of

"...The good, righteous and complete religion which God has sent for the world..."²⁶

The *Doa Tandarosti* (Pazand) prayer asks:

"... May the religion of Zarathushtra be a source of glory unto all mortals..."²⁷

Zoroastrians are famed for their honesty. One cannot help but wonder how anyone can truthfully and sincerely say these prayers daily, or weekly, or perhaps just on good occasions, and yet insist that the religion prohibits the admission of non-Zoroastrians.

Zarathushtra does not teach aggressive proselytizing. On the contrary, he teaches that each person should make choices for himself, after reflecting with a clear mind (Y30:2). This teaching requires the exercise of tolerance, and respect for other people's choices of religion. By the same logic, this teaching also requires respect for the choice of a person who wishes to take Zarathushtra's path as a way to live and relate to the Divine and all the living.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra implies that the Divine is immanent (present) in all things.²⁸ A later Avestan text, Yy17:11, and the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* (even though written after the Arab invasion of Iran), expresses this beautiful thought by speaking of the fire in all things ~ in man, in animals, in plants, in waters, in the world itself.²⁹

The Farvardin Yasht (a YAv. text) also expresses this thought by reverencing the fravashi in all things. The word 'fravashi' does not appear in the Gathas. In certain later texts, the fravashi is the divine within. As applied to different human races, the *Farvardin Yasht*, in § 143 reverences the fravashis of good men and women in various enumerated countries ~ Turanian, Sairimyan (which a footnote explains is Europe and Western Asia), Saini (which a footnote explains is China), and the section concludes with reverence for the fravashis of good men and women "... in all countries ..." Yt.13:143, Darmesteter translation.³⁰

If the Divine is immanent (present) in all men and women, of what relevance is ethnicity to religion? Can we reject any person without rejecting the Divine which is immanent (present), within such a person?

Those who favor exclusion contend that this rule is not a question of rejecting anyone. Rather, it is a question of obeying God's will. They argue that it is God's will that each person should remain in the religion into which God caused him to be born, and that to change one's birth religion is an act of defiance against God's will.

Well, God caused us to be born naked. Is it His will that we not wear clothes? He caused us to be born ignorant. Is it an act of defiance against God to get an education? Some babies are born sick, or with birth defects. Is it His will that such babies not be given medical treatment to save their lives? What if one's parents are atheists? Is it an act of defiance against God to want to believe in Him? What if one's parents

are religious fanatics? Is it God's will that the child of such parents must be a religious fanatic also, and must massacre or torture people as his parents did?

If Mazda (Wisdom personified) is the 'God' of the Universe, how can anyone shrink His relevance to only 100,000 born Zoroastrians on this planet of several billion people?

The religions of Zarathushtra's cultural heritage (which was Indo-European) were indeed tribal ~ each having its own named gods and goddesses. We see evidence of this in the deities worshipped by the Scandnavians, Greeks, Romans, and Arya peoples ~ all of whose cultural heritage was Indo-European. One of the great spiritual innovations which Zarathushtra made was his envisionment (*daēnā*-) of a deity who is universal ~ a deity for all that exists. This idea is reflected in a later Avestan text which, commenting on the Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo) says,

"... this utterance is a thing of such a nature, that if all the corporeal and living world should learn it, and learning hold fast to it, they would be redeemed from their mortality!" Yy19:10, Mills' translation.³¹

Those who advocate exclusion,³² have reduced Zarathushtra's magnificent, universal concept of Divinity to that of a tribal god of limited relevance. How did we sink from the high nobility of Zarathushtra's thought to such a narrow view? *That*, is the tragedy of our times. The sacrifice of the Divine on the altar of ethnicity (read tribalism).

Modern and Ancient Religious Opinions.

Most if not all high priests in India today, have expressed the opinion that conversion is forbidden by the religion. But the fact that they say so, does not make it so. They have to cite chapter and verse, and this, to date, they have not been able to do ~ not a single ancient text, or prayer, or law, or tradition.

A corollary to the practice of non-acceptance is the treatment of Zoroastrian women who have married non-Zoroastrians. According to certain high priests of India, they are no longer considered Zoroastrians. They cannot enter a fire temple. And their children cannot be admitted to the religion. In support of this practice, some priests have cited Chapter 18, § 62 of the *Videvdāt* (popularly called the *Vendidad*) which (according to them) "prohibits union between a Mazdayasni and non-Mazdayasni."³³ However, this section does not refer to interfaith marriages at all. Sections 61 and 62 state that Ahura Mazda is caused grief by a courtesan (Jahi), regardless of whether she sleeps with a Mazda worshipper or with one who is not a Mazda worshipper.³⁴ The Pahlavi commentary on this section, translates the word "Jahe" as an adulteress.³⁵ An adulteress is a married woman who sleeps with someone who is not her husband. So whether we look to the Avestan or the Pahlavi versions of this text, this section has nothing to do with interfaith marriages. It speaks against prostitution (according to the Avestan text) and against adultery (according to the Pahlavi commentary). With one-sided justice, this text (which post-dates the fall of the Achaemenian Empire),³⁶ makes no mention of the fellows who enjoy the woman's favors. But that is another story.

The Council of Mobeds of Teheran in Iran, have expressed a very different opinion from that of the high priests of India. In the early 1980s, an American, Joseph Peterson,³⁷ after long study, first by himself and then under a Zoroastrian priest, concluded that he wanted to become a Zoroastrian, and wished to have his initiation ceremony (navjote) done. An Iranian Mobed, Bahram Shahzadi of the United States, a luminous soul, wrote a letter to the Council of Mobeds of Tehran, requesting guidance. In an official written opinion (No. 466 issued in May of 1983), the Council responded. Referring to Mobed Shahzadi's letter, the Council's Opinion states: (in English translation):

"... The Council discussed the contents of your letter at an official meeting."

"You have, in your detailed letter, asked the opinion of the Council regarding the acceptance of people into Zoroastrianism. Let us glimpse through Zoroastrian scriptures and find an answer to it."

The Council's Opinion first quotes verses from the Gathas, and concludes:

"The above stanzas show that Asho Zarathushtra does not advocate force to spread the religion, but has kept it open for all ... He has never reserved it for the Aryans, or for a particular caste of people. Yasna 46.12 shows that the religion had spread into the Turanian lands during Asho Zarathushtra's lifetime. Because he praises Friyana a Turanian Chief who supported Mazdayasna."

The Council's Opinion next gives references to later texts and concludes:

"The above citations show that the propagation and promotion of the religion is a meritorious deed ... If we Zoroastrians believe that our religion is one of the great living religions of the world and that it is beneficial to all the peoples of the world, we ... must accept persons who want to embrace the Zoroastrian religion."

This 1983 Opinion of the Council of Mobeds of Tehran is indeed a shining example of integrity, courage, learning, and civility.

There is an ancient text called the *Aerpatastan and Nirangastan*, which is described (according to S. J. Bulsara's translation) as "being portions of the great Husparam Nask". The text covers many aspects of the practice and administration of the religion in the society of that day. It takes for granted the right of a non-Zoroastrian to convert to Zoroastrianism, and focuses on prohibiting the forced conversion of the wife of a man who has converted. It states that a man who converts to the Zoroastrian religion should not force his wife to convert. He should not strike her, or stop supporting her, or "forsake her treacherously", nor does she "pass from the condition of being his wife", because she refuses to convert.³⁸ This text was one of the authorities cited by the Council of Mobeds of Teheran, in its 1983 Opinion, which concluded that the religion is universal and open to all who wish to join it, but should not be forced on anyone.

In the centuries that followed the migrations of some Zoroastrians to India, disputes arose among the priests in India about what the religion allowed and did not allow. On various occasions over the course of a few centuries, Zoroastrian priests in India sent emissaries to the Zoroastrian priests of Iran to get answers to their questions. These questions and answers were in written form, and have been preserved in texts called the *Rivayats*. I do not have copies of most of the *Rivayats*, and the following information and quotations from the *Rivayats* are taken from an excellent article by Professor K. D. Irani, and Farrokh J. Vajifdar.³⁹

In 1478 CE, one such *Rivayat* was given in response to questions taken to Iran by Nariman Hoshang. In one of their answers, the Iranian mobeds gave the opinion that slave⁴⁰ boys and girls in Zoroastrian houses in India could be initiated into the religion with sudreh and kusti, and when they became intelligent, attentive and steadfast in the religion should be given barashnum (the cleansing ritual).

In 1599 CE, the *Kaus Mahyar Rivayat* gave the opinion that even non-Zoroastrians who performed burials and cremations, should be allowed into the religion, provided that they were steadfast and occasioned no harm to the faith.

Finally, in 1773, we have the *Itthoter Rivayat*. Here, 78 questions were prepared by the priests of Broach and Surat in India, and taken to Iran by a priest, Kaus Jalal. The replies to these questions were given in

writing, signed by nine Iranian high priests (dasturs), and nine religiously knowledgeable lay persons (behdins). One of the questions asks whether the religion allows the remains of deceased boys and girls who were servants, and who had been converted to Zoroastrianism, to be placed in the structure for disposal of the dead (dakhma).⁴¹

In their unanimous answer, the nine Iranian High Priests and the nine religiously knowledgeable lay Zarathushtis, replied that it was indeed allowed. And their response included a clear denunciation of those who advocated exclusionary practices. This *Rivayat* says:

"Here we have heard from ... the dasturzade Dastur Kaus, worthy successor of the deceased Dastur Rostam, that several dasturs [high priests], mobeds [priests] and behdins [lay persons] across most of the country [India] stand in the way ... and have agreed not to teach those youngsters the Avesta and not to convert them to the din-i beh-i mazdayasnan [the wisdom-worshipping religion of goodness]. This is unreasonable and alien to the tradition. May the Beloved ones prosper! In the second fargard of the Jud-div-dad⁴² the Creator of the righteous material world has ordered the honourable Zaratusht Esfantaman anushe-ravan to lead all men to the Din-i Beh-i, to the Main Path, to edify His joy, His glory, and His honour ... It is a very great merit and a righteous good deed ... those who hinder this and are against it are not even aware of the Origin and of the other world."⁴³

One can only feel deep respect, admiration, and affection, for these nine high priests and nine lay-persons of 18th century Iran, who lived with the danger of persecution, and yet signed their names to this document expressing opinions which could have earned them death, but which were nevertheless true to the teachings of Zarathushtra, and the traditions of the religion.

Ancient Traditions, Laws, and Practices:

Any student of history (or linguistics!) knows that Zoroastrians are a part of the Indo-European family of races (which anthropologists believe originated in Africa). One has only to look around a room full of Parsis to appreciate that we could not possibly have come from one racial stock. In skin color, hair, bone structure, and physiognomy, we are too diverse. The same racial diversity is apparent in the friezes at Persepolis and Susa, and hundreds of years after Zarathushtra, in the traditions of the *Aerpatastan* and *Nirangastan* where, for example, it is written:

"When a slave professing any other creed comes over to the Good Religion he then becomes a direct subject of the King of Kings who shall give his price ..."⁴⁴

In those (post-Achaemenian) days, slaves were often people from other nations who were not Iranian. At first thought, this practice might seem to be a crass incentive to persuade slaves to convert. On the other hand, it may have been to enable the slave to be free to make choices, which is a foundational teaching of Zarathushtra.

While the Shahnameh may be more legend than history, some of pre-Islamic Iran's most famous ancestral heroes were the children of 'mixed' marriages. The saintly warrior king Kai-Khosrov's mother was a foreigner, as was Rudabeh, the mother of Rostam, the quintessential Persian champion.⁴⁵ Those who favor exclusionary rules argue that such rules have always been a part of our tradition. If this were true, then King Kai-Khosrov and Rostam (among others) could not have belonged to the community.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, whether we look to Zarathushtra's own words in the Gathas, or to other ancient texts and prayers written over a period of more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra, or to ancient traditions, laws, customs, religious opinions, and legends, all the available evidence supports the conclusion that the religion of Zarathushtra is universal, and open to all who may wish to join it. There is no evidence to the contrary before the Arab invasion of Iran. And much evidence even after the Arab invasion, in support of acceptance.

The proponents of exclusion have either ignored all this evidence, or they are not aware of it.

The late and much beloved Dastur N. D. Minochehr Homji of Bombay, once said, in his Chicago lectures: A person who withholds the light from others will be the first to stumble in the dark. How true.

* * * * *

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes' legal career culminated with his service for many years as a Justice of the United States Supreme Court. I always feel a bit uncomfortable when I praise him (such as saying he "perceptively observed") because of what he once said. By way of background, a 'Law Review' is a legal journal published by the students of a given law school. Mr. Justice Holmes is reputed to have said of the (student) editors of the Harvard Law Review, that he did not mind so much when they said he was wrong. It was when they said he was right that he found them insufferable.

² Holmes (1881), *The Common Law*, (Little, Brown & Co., from its forty-ninth reprinting), p. 5.

³ Although this was the official position, many Zoroastrian priests in Iran did indeed continue to accept converts, but quietly, without publicity or fanfare. We know that this was so, not only because of an oral tradition in Irani Zoroastrian communities, but also through certain later texts called *Rivayats*, which are discussed in this chapter. Indeed, the idea that Zarathushtra's teachings were intended for all mankind is mentioned in a Pahlavi text *Selections of Zâd-spâram*, who was Dastur (high priest) of Sîrkân (near Kirman) in 881 CE, (after the Arab invasion) SBE 47, p. 133. Zâd-spâram's writings attempted to preserve ancient knowledge and also ancient stories, one of which is was about Zarathushtra's birth. In this story, we are told that one of the five priestly brothers, (Karaps), who were enemies of Zarathushtra when he was a baby, looked intently at the child, and also above, below and all around him, and when Zarathushtra's father asked what he saw, the Karap said (among other things),

"... when I looked on all sides, I saw that the words of this one will extend through the whole earth; ..." *Selections of Zâd-spâram*, Ch. 17, § 5, E. W. West translation, SBE 47, p. 148;

indicating that the universality of Zarathushtra's teachings was an ancient tenet of the religion, which was recognized (although not perhaps openly practiced) even after the Arab invasion of Iran.

⁴ See *Part Four: Castes and Heredity*.

⁵ The evidence cited here is not exhaustive. There is much, much more. See the following excellent articles: K.D.Irani and F.J. Vajifdar, *Conversion in Zoroastrianism, The Truth Behind the Trumpery*, as it appears in *Humata*, (Journal of the Center for Ancient Iranian Studies, Winter 1998 ~ 1999 issue) p. 8; A. J. Davar, *Zoroastrianism: A Universal Faith that Remained Regional?* published in several parts in various issues of *Humata*, *ibid*. C. P. Mehta, *The Religion of Zarathushtra is for All Mankind*. This work appears on Stephen Williamson's web site www.efn.org/ropal/acceptz.html at which site he has collected many good articles on acceptance and conversion in Zoroastrianism.

Dr. Kersey Antia, the kind, and courageous priest of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago (whom I greatly admire), has also written a thorough and knowledgeable article on conversion which I was fortunate to read some years ago. It was published privately as a monograph.

⁶ The operative words in Y31:3 are: *yā jvañtō vīspāñg vāurayā*. The last word *vāurayā* is a verb in first person sg. optative form, which comes from *var*, which according to Insler 1975 means 'to turn' 'to convert' (commenting under Y28:5, pp. 126 - 127). The word *yā* means 'through which' 'by which', *jvañtō* means 'the living' and *vīspāñg* means 'all'. The optative form of a verb is used to express a wish (among other things). So literally 'through which [*yā*] the living all [*jvañtō vīspāñg*] I may convert [*vāurayā*].' The verb in GAv. is often at the end of a sentence (as in German, and in Hindi ~ both in the Indo-European family of languages, as is Avestan).

Here are 10 other translations of the operative words in Y31:3 (alphabetically arranged). Taraporewala's is the most literal.

Bode & Nanavutty 1952 "... so that I may lead all the living to believe in the true faith." p. 52.

Humbach 1991: "... so that therewith I might receive all the living." Humbach (1991) Volume 1, page 127.

Irani 1924, "... Give it in Thy own inspired word that I may thereby bring its realization to all." p. 38.

Jafarey 1989, "... It will help me guide all the living to choose aright." p. 35.

Kanga 1997, ".....so that I cause all men to put faith in the Religion." p. 43.

Mills 1887 "... (that...) I may make all the living believers!" SBE 31, p. 41, and in ft. 8 Mills notes "...Observe that the religious system contemplated universal proselytism." p. 41.

Nanavutty 1999, "... Thus I will convince all the living (regarding the true faith)." p. 83.

Sethna 1978 reprint, "...that I may convince all the living to believe in the true path." p. 29.

Sidhva 1998 "... To convert all mortals to become Thine alone." p. 21.

Taraporewala 1951 "... so-that I-may-ever-convert all the living (into the Right Path)." p. 178.

⁷ This is Mills' free translation. Mills' literal translation of the Pahlavi translation reads thus: "(c) ... thus the living of all kinds believe..." Mills (1894) *Study*, p. 57, a work that includes an English translation of the Pahlavi translation, edited with collation of manuscripts from all known codices, as well as an English translation from a collation of five ancient texts of Neryosangh's Sanskrit translation (title page).

⁸ E. W. West on the title page of his work *The Book of the Mainyo-i-Khard*, identifies "Neriosengh Dhaval" as having lived (in India) in the "Fifteenth Century" (CE). But Mirza, Dastur H. K. (1974) *Outlines of Parsi History*, p. 248, estimates that this celebrated scholar lived in about 1166 CE.

⁹ Mills 1894 *Study*, p. 57.

¹⁰ Taraporewala 1951 p. 182.

¹¹ Firouz Azargoshasb 1988, p. 13.

¹² The context of the entire verse is as follows: "That satisfaction which Thou hast created for both factions [*rānōibyā*] together with Thy spirit [*mainyu-*] and hast promised (to them) through fire and truth, that commandment which is for Thy adherents ~ speak, Wise One, with the tongue of Thine own mouth, in order for us to know (all) that, by means of which I might convert all the living." Y31:3, Insler 1975.

The word *rānōibyā* has not yet been decoded, and translations of its stem *rāna-* vary widely. It is discussed in depth in *Part Six: Yasna 43:12*, where I give the opinions of many professional linguists, and explain why I prefer the translation 'for both types (of conduct)'. Thus, I would translate the first part of Y31:3 as, 'That satisfaction which Thou, together with Thy way of being [*mainyu-*] hast created for both types (of conduct), ...'.

¹³ See in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*, and *The Identity of the Divine* for a more detailed discussion of this question.

¹⁴ He says "The gods [*daēvācinā*] did not at all choose correctly between these two, ... Since they chose the worst thought, they then rushed into fury with which they have afflicted the world and mankind." Y30:6. The reference here is to the deities of Zarathushtra's culture, and the predatory practices committed in their names.

"But ye gods [*daēvā*] ~ as well as the one who worships you ~ all of you are the offspring stemming from evil thinking, deceit and disrespect. Hateful, too, are your actions, by reason of which ye have become renowned in this seventh part of the earth." Y32:3. Clearly it is the local gods and their adherents who are condemned here (because of the ways in which the priests of Zarathushtra's culture projected them as punitive, cruel, violent, et cetera).

We know from Vedic parallels that *daēva-* was the term used for certain pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian deities. But (as so often happens in the history of religions) the ways of the priestly establishment became predatory, with the resulting violence, injustice and suffering that was so prevalent in Zarathushtra's society and against which he rebelled. For additional evidence regarding Zarathushtra's rejection of the religion(s) of his culture.

¹⁵ Many of these 'nations' are identified in the Behistan inscription of Darius I (the Great).

¹⁶ This Yasna 42 is not in the Old Avestan of the Gathas. Nor is it in Younger Avestan. It is in an earlier version of Younger Avestan and is sometimes called Archaic Younger Avestan. Humbach 1991 1, p. 7, ft. 9.

¹⁷ SBE 31, p. 291. The same idea is expressed in the YAv. *Din Yasht* Yt. 16:17, which speaks of "the Athravans [fire-priests] sent afar ... wishing a good memory to preach the law..." Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 268.

¹⁸ See *Part One: The Manthra of Choices, Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo)*.

¹⁹ SBE 31, p. 261.

²⁰ The YAv. *Farvardin Yasht* (Yt. 13) was composed several centuries after Zarathushtra. By the time it was written some of the old pre-Zarathushtrian deities had been syncretized with the religion of Zarathushtra, so the *Farvardin Yasht* differs from the teachings of the Gathas in some ways, but reflects them in other ways.

²¹ SBE 23, p. 202.

²² *Meher Niyaesh*, in Sethna's *Khordeh Avesta* 1980 reprint, p. 61. The *Khordeh Avesta* by Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga (translated from Gujarati into English by Ervad M.K. Kanga) sets forth a Nirang to be recited (3 times) after the recitation of each 'Neyayesh' and Yasht, which Nirang (not in Avestan) starts out as follows, (I have changed nothing and added nothing to the translation).

"This is (the religion) ~ good, true, and perfect which the Creator Hormazd sent for the people of this world, and which (the Prophet) Zartosht (himself) brought. (That) religion is the religion of Zartosht, (and the Religion of Hormazd; gave unto (Holy) Zartosht (that Religion) (for propagating into this world); (this fact is) without doubt and (unquestionable). ..."

"Din beh rast va dorost, ke khodae bar khalk ferastadeh, in hast ke Zartosht avordeh hast; Din dine Zartosht, dine Ahura Mazda, dadeh Zartosht, bishak va biguman, rast Dine Zartosht Spitaman. ..."

Kanga 1993 *Khordeh Avesta* pp. 403 - 404.

Ervad K. E. Kanga states in his 1880 Preface to his Gujarati translation, that "Words not occurring in the original, but necessary to complete the sense of the translation, are placed in parentheses." However, I am not sure to what extent the English translation of Ervad M.K. Kanga (translating the Gujarati into English) followed this procedure.

²³ Sethna *Khordeh Avesta*, (1980 reprint), ~ in the *Khorshed Niyaesh* p. 51; in the *Mah Bakhtar Niyaesh* pp. 71 ~ 73; in the *Arđvi Sur Niyaesh* p. 83; in the *Atash Niyaesh* p. 93; in the *Hormazd Yasht*, p. 111; in the *Ardibehesht Yasht* p. 123; in the *Sarosh Yasht Hadokht* p. 141; in the *Sraosh Yasht Wadi* p. 165.

²⁴ Ervad K. E. Kanga, in his *Khordeh Avesta* (1995 English reprint) p. 51 first asterisk ft., explains that this prayer is in Pazand, and that the original Pahlavi version of it is found in the *Dinkard*, a Pahlavi text. Pazand and Pahlavi were the language(s) of the Sasanians, and of Zoroastrians after the Arab invasion of Iran. Pazand is mostly the Pahlavi language written in Avestan script, with some ideograms et cetera.

²⁵ Sethna 1980 reprint, *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 63.

²⁶ Sethna, 1980 reprint, *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 169;

²⁷ Sethna, 1980 reprint, *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 173.

²⁸ See *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*; and also *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

²⁹ Yy17:11 Mills translation, SBE 31, p. 258; the *Bundahishn*, E. W. West's translation in SBE 5, pp 61 ~ 62; discussed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

³⁰ SBE 23, pp 226 ~ 227.

³¹ SBE 31, pp. 262 ~ 263.

³² At this time, a great many Zoroastrian communities and priests practice (or tolerate the expression and practice of) exclusionary practices, but there are indeed (and have been in the past as well) some courageous priests and communities who have returned to the original teachings of Zarathushtra in practicing universal acceptance (and have suffered cruelty and ostracism as a result). They have my sincere respect and admiration.

³³ Quoting from p. 2 of a letter dated August 22, 1990 from Dastur Kotwal to The Chairman & Trustees Bombay Parsi Punchayet, which letter is initialed on each page by Kotwal, and signed at the end with his full name and titles.

³⁴ SBE 4, p. 200, and fts. 1 and 2, all as translated and noted by Darmesteter.

³⁵ Behramgore T. Anklesaria, 1949 Pahlavi Vendidad (Zand-i Jvit-Dev-Dat) pp. 365 ~ 366.

³⁶ See *Part Five: The Vendidad, An Overview*.

³⁷ Joseph Peterson's website may be viewed at www.avesta.org. This site is a compendious resource for Zoroastrian texts (in translations whose copyrights have expired) and other knowledge and information pertaining to the religion.

³⁸ S. J. Bulsara translation, *Aerpatastan and Nirangastan*, (published by the Trustees of the Parsee Punchayat Funds and Properties, Bombay, 1915), Book I, Chap. V, §§ 4 and 5, p. 40. It is only fair to note that this text also recommends that as long as the wife refuses to convert, the husband should not sleep with her. Whether such advice was taken by the converted husband is not known. At first, I was inclined to think (uncharitably) that this was a subtle, and unworthy, means of persuading the non-Zoroastrian wife to convert. But on reflection, it may well have been motivated by the thought that any children born after the man's conversion, would be less likely to be brought up understanding the Zoroastrian religion, if their mother was not interested in it.

³⁹ K.D.Irani and F.J. Vajifdar, *Conversion in Zoroastrianism, The Truth Behind the Trumpery*, as it appears in *Humata*, (Journal of the Center for Ancient Iranian Studies, Winter 1998 ~ 1999 issue).

⁴⁰ These 'slaves' may have been indentured servants. But the translation used by Irani and Vajifdar does indeed use the word 'slave'. And we do find the word 'slaves' in other (post-Achaemenian) texts, like the *Aerpatastan and Nirangastan*, quoted in the main part of this chapter.

However, we know that slavery was contrary to Zarathushtra's teachings for at least the following reasons.

1. The owning of slaves would have been contrary to a religion which holds as a foundational belief, the freedom to make choices in thought, word and action, which a slave would not be free to do, let alone the immanence of the Divine in all things. Core teachings of Zarathushtra (detailed in *Part One: The Freedom To Choose*; and in *Part Two: A Question Of Immanence*).

2. The first verse of the Gatha song Y29, is a cry to the Divine for help. And one of the many wrongs complained of, which were causes of suffering, is "bondage". "... (For) the cruelty of fury and violence, of bondage and might, holds me in captivity. I have no pastor other than you ... "Y29:1, Insler 1975. These were among the many societal wrongs which Zarathushtra's new good envisionment (*vañuhī daēnā-*) sought to change.

It is worth noting that the founder of the Achaemenian Empire Cyrus the Great conquered many lands, but (contrary to the customs of those times) did not make slaves of the conquered, (Max Mallowan, *Cyrus the Great (558 - 529 B.C.)*, CHI pp. 399, 405 - 409). In fact (as the Cyrus Cylinder makes clear) Cyrus freed all the enslaved peoples in Babylon, and allowed them to return to their countries, giving them funds from the Royal Treasury to rebuild the sanctuaries of their own deities, which had been destroyed by their Babylonian conquerors (among these were the Jews who had been enslaved in Babylon, and were freed to return to their own country with funds from Cyrus (and later additional funds from Darius I) to rebuild their temple). Detailed in *Part Four: Cyrus The Great, & Zarathushtra*; and *The Achaemenians & Zarathushtra*.

And in fact, the great Achaemenian palace of Persepolis, built by Darius I (also called 'the Great') was not built with slave labor (much to the surprise of the academic community which had long assumed the contrary, and sometimes still continue to do so). In the 20th century, archeologists discovered, buried in the ruins of that palace, hundreds of clay tablets (called today the Persepolis Fortification and Treasury Tablets) which contain detailed records of the wages paid to workers, skilled craftsmen and supervisors (men and women) who built and decorated the palace complex. Information about the Persepolis Fortification and Treasury Tablets, may be found on the website of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/>, and in Brosius 1996 *Women in Ancient Persia*. Conquered people were not enslaved during Achaemenian times. I do not know whether conquered peoples were enslaved during Sasanian times.

⁴¹ See *Part Four: Burial of the Dead*.

⁴² The text that is popularly called the *Vendidad* in the Zoroastrian community today, is called the *Jvit-dev-dat* in Pahlavi. Darmesteter informs us that the word *Vendidad* is a corruption of the YAv. *Vidaēvô-dâtem* 'the anti-demoniac law'. SBE 4, Intro. V, p. lxxxiii, ft. 3. This text exists today in 2 versions. One version which scholars today call the *Videvdat* is written in (grammatically faulty) Avestan, indicating that it was written long after Avestan times, when our priests were no longer fluent in Avestan. The 2d version is called the *Vendidat* and is a Pahlavi 'translation' of the (faulty) Avestan text.

⁴³ In quoting from this *Rivayat*, Irani and Vajifdar say that they have followed the Vitalone translation, with minor changes for ease of reading, and that the translation of Ervad Shehryarji Bharucha, is in accord.

⁴⁴ S. J. Bulsara translation 1915, *Aerpatastan and Nirangastan*, Ch. IV, § 29, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Bahman Sohrab Surti (1986), translation, *The Shah Namah of Firdaosi*, Vol. II, pp. 194 - 197, 252, 259; Vol. I, pp. 11, 43, 61-62.