

“The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence...our consciousness of the world, merely as the sum total of things that exist, and as governed by laws, is imperfect... the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realizing our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves...”

(Rabindranath Tagore, founder of Visva Bharati at Santiniketan)

“The old Lakota was wise...he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans, too...Knowledge was inherent in all things. The world was a library and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that shared, alike with us, the storms and blessings of earth. We learned to do what only the student of nature learns, and that was to feel beauty.”

(Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Oglala Lakota Sioux)

“Any justice, that’s only justice, soon degenerates into something that’s less than justice! Justice must be rescued by something grander and deeper than justice...subversive love, militant hope!”

(Dr. Cornell West quoting Reinhold Niebuhr)

ba nām i ʔāzād i baxshāyaūdeh i baxshāyashgar i meherbān!

**Asha Vahishta Initiative (AVI) Conference:
May 5 May 26* Aug 18* Aug 19** 2018.**

Re-Imagining Faith, Re-Claiming Fellowship, in Diaspora

To promote an understanding for the requirement of a diasporic ‘mission statement’ and ‘operating system’ for Daena Mazdayasni, in conjunction with the core vision-document 101 Inspirations. Non-Zoroastrian guests/faith leaders share insights regarding how their activities and communities keep spirituality relevant in the 21st century.

The AVI is dedicated to the memory of Arbab Rustam Guiv (1888-1980). The magnitude of his generosity was for fulfillment of a vision, that faith and fellowship would become vibrant, dynamic, relevant, and rooted within diaspora. Faith is a constant re-imagining of fellowship, not a mummification of attitudes under the guise of preservation.

The AVI acknowledges the work of Dr. Kaikhosrow Irani (1922-2017).

His diasporic re-imagining of faith began to reconceptualise a ‘Mission Statement’ for an anjuman centred ‘Zoroastrian Operating System’.

The AVI is aware that North American Zoroastrians are guests of First Nations Peoples, and must act accordingly.



Guest Panelists (May 5):

*Dr. Ana Maria Bidegain (Historian, Latin American Religion, Florida International University)

*Dr. Randy Woodley (Acadia U, Intercultural/Indigenous Studies at George Fox U-Portland Seminary)

*Dr. Romila Thapar (Historian of South Asia, Jawaharlal Nehru University-JNU New Delhi)

*Reverend Dr. Daniel Kanter (Senior Minister, First Unitarian Church, Dallas Texas)

Guest Panelists (May 26):

*Hamid Rahmanian (Iranian Creator/Director: Feathers of Fire, global tour www.kingorama.com)

*Zerbanoo Gifford (creator: ASHA for Education, London)

*Farrukh Dhondy (novelist, social critic, activist, postcolonial theorist, London)

*Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov (Comparative Development Education at OISE-UofT, Aga Khan University Karachi)

*Dr. Martin Schwartz (Gathas, Professor Emeritus at Berkeley)

*Dr. Enrico Raffaelli (Apocalyptic Zoroastrian literature, University of Toronto)

*Astad Clubwala (ZAGNY, President, New York)

*Ervad Farhan Panthaki (Mobed, California)

Guest Panelists (August 18):

*Homi Gandhi (President of FEZANA, Honorary President of Religions for Peace, California).

*Dr. Dolly Dastoor (Editor, FEZANA Journal, Dept. of Psychiatry McGill University, Montreal)

*Astad Clubwala (ZAGNY, President, New York)

Programme (Aug. 19): What is to be Done?

Main Theme: Sessions will discuss impressions and insights gained from the conference: how to re-imagine Faith and reclaim Fellowship. Strategic discussions pertaining to third phase AVI, its concretization.

Session 1 (Tentative) 10:00am-11:00am:

Living Faith Tradition in Diaspora (Insights from Reform Judaism)

(Negotiating and mediating faith and fellowship in diaspora, so as not to partake in polarization between 'authenticity' and 'blasphemy').

Session 2 (Tentative) 12:00pm-1:00pm:

Spiritually Informed and Relevant: A Psychosocial Pastoral Model to Decipher the Contemporary.

(End of Life, Grieving, Coping, Meaning-Making, requires a modality through which faith can serve as a lens for secular contemporary life).

Session 3 (2:00pm-3:00pm):

AVI Conference Synopses and Insights

Session 4 (4:00pm-5:00pm):

AVI Phase II Reflections. Phase III Forecast (AVI Working Committee, Pledge 101 Campaign, I Am Anjuman Campaign, AVI Pastorship-Preach)

Session 5 (3:30pm-4:30pm):

Insights for Introspection and Taking Action in Diaspora: Sikh Social Justice.

(Self-reflection is painful, embarrassing, and necessary! It is the truest test of Faith, Fellowship, adherence, and courage).

Session 6 (5:00pm-6:00pm):

Insights for Decolonization of Mind and Spirit: Indigenous Recovery by Re-imagining Faith.

(Re-orienting Zoroastrianism as Creation-centred, to re-discover Daena Mazdayasni).

Session 7 (6:30pm-7:30pm):

Insights for Living History in the Now: The Anglican ‘Middle-Way’.

(Why does there have to be a choice between respecting Zoroastrian history and continuing Zoroastrian evolution? Categories such as ‘Liberal, Orthodox, Progressive’ are nonsensical to a lived Zoroastrianism).

Session 8 (8:00pm-9:00pm):

Organic Institutions and Anjuman Autonomy: From Federation to Confederation.

(Self-governing Faith/Fellowship. What’s stopping the majority of disenfranchised congregations from creating reform?).

*Ms. Shahin Bekhrandnia (WZO, Jt. Hon. Secretary and Religious Coordinator, London)

*Father Jeff Stone (Minister, St. Jude’s Anglican Church, Brampton)

*Dr. Ruth Hayhoe (Department of Leadership, Higher & Adult Education (LHAE), OISE-U of Toronto)

*Father Susai Jesu OMI (Sacred Heart of the First Nations (Sandy Narrows- Cree, Saskatchewan)

*Sun Bear aka: Cat Mark Criger (University of Toronto at Mississauga, Cayuga Six Nations elder)

*Baldev Mutta (CEO Brampton Punjabi Community Health Services)

*Reverend (Ph.D.- ABD) Christine Smaller M.P.S., M.Div. (Birchcliff Bluffs United Church Scarborough)

Guest Panelists August 19 (tentative):

*Rabbi Michal Shekel (Har Tikval Synagogue. Exec Director Toronto Board Rabbis)

*Prof. Olga Louchakov-Schwartz M.D., Ph.D. (Comparative Religion, Transpersonal Psychology. School of Medicine, Univ. California-Davis)

Guest Panelists Representing OZCF and local Zoroastrians:

*Dr. Neville Panthaki (Chair, AVI Conference, AVI creator/director)

*Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli (OZCF Mobed, NAMC member, FEZANA contributor, President WZO Canada)

*Cyrus Gazdar (OZCF, President)

*Phil Sidhwa (Organizer of the OZCF Atash Kadeh project)

*Mobedyar Gool Austin (London-Ontario)

*Khushnuma Doctor (OZCF Director)

*Armaity Homavazir (Speaker, Educator, Organizer)

*Mahiyar Panthaki (OZCF member)

*Ervad Kamran Panthaki (OZCF ‘this-gen’ Mobed)

*Ervad Armaan Panthaki (OZCF ‘this-gen’ Mobed)

*Ervad Mehad Dastur (active Mobed in the community)

RSVP (indicate days): Ervad Nozer Kotwal nskotwal1@gmail.com

Conference Plan: Dr. Neville Gustad Panthaki npanthaki@sympatico.ca

Follow [OZCF website](#) for updates and [session times](#)

AVI Mission Statement:

To invest the anjuman with a faith and fellowship ethos that is articulate, sustainable, and serves as the 'mission statement' and 'operating system' for a covenant(al) relationship, diasporic Daena Mazdayasni.

Note: From the perspective of the AVI, "the anjuman" is considered the individuals who compose the local congregants, within each faith-organization (community, house of worship, congregation centre, and locality). The "anjuman" does not represent any and all status-quo bodies in existence, which are currently a subject matter of the AVI.

Disclaimer: The AVI, is an advocacy attempting to be transformative. It rejects the notion of building new paradigms to replace old ones, because paradigms by their nature are finite and defy the nature of a fluid, dynamic, intimate, and lived faith. Paradigms easily become dogmatic. Paradigms tend to become procedural legalist applications. If anything, the AVI is an 'anti-paradigm'. Hence, it is to be understood that the AVI Mission Statement and Objectives may not be employed as argument to defeat either the conceptual framework or legitimacy of the AVI. This is because the AVI does not consider itself bound (meaning it admits and expects revision), enclosed, limited, by a Mission Statement and Objectives statement that are created in the context of specific time/location and conditions of urgency. No Call to Action which is what the AVI represents, can be reduced to and entirely understood by a single document/statement. The AVI is indeed, attempting to transform notions within contemporary Zoroastrian practise/governance that apply such logic.

An Anjuman transformational-education project, has forms the basis of the AVI. It is the AVSS (Asha Vahishta Seminar Series). Phase I has mainly been Educative-Informative (interrogating identity, faith, fellowship, diaspora, rationale for religious expression); Phase II has been Resolution-Building (vision, character, 'mission statement', 'operating system' for 21st diasporic faith/fellowship). AVSS synopses can be found at: <http://www.ozcf.com/page-1172991>

Programme Aug 18:

Conceptual Re-imagining of Faith to Re-claim Fellowship

Main Theme: Fellowship requires constant re-imagining for Faith to remain relevant (A Systems Perspective). The opening address will explain how the AVI attempts to lay the basis for transformed/new institutions of faith and fellowship. Subsequent sessions will reflect on the various elements of institutional rethinking that are necessary, to sustain faith and fellowship in diaspora in the 21st century.

Keynote Address (8:00am-9:00am):

The AVI as a Psychosocial Ethos to Direct Diasporic Faith: "101 Inspirations" as Axioms, Epistemology, Cosmivision and Covenant. (Eliminating the contest of 'authorities'...text, tradition, scholars, priests etc, a mandate for anjuman autonomy).

Session 1 (9:30am-10:30am):

Broadening Faith by Broadening Fellowship Identity: From Parsis to People.

(Inclusive Faith and Fellowship. Linking Zoroastrian faith and its fellowship to cosmopolitanism and global justice).

Session 2 (11:00am-12:00pm):

Spiritual Formation and Scaffolding Faith: Nurturing Clergy and Congregations.

(Tradition vs. Reform. How to sustain diasporic Faith and Fellowship).

Session 3 (12:30pm-1:30pm):

Insights for Re-imagining: Catholicism After Vatican II, Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples.

(Local expression and identity while retaining a universal vision of salvation).

Session 4 (2:00-3:00pm):

Insights for Intercultural Literacy: Christian-Buddhist-Daoist-Confucian Encounters.

(Interfaith encounters enrich faith and fellowship. Comparative theology as the only way of doing theology).

Session 5 (3:30pm-4:30pm):

A History of God(s) in Zoroastrianism.

(Do terms like "monotheism"/"dualism" apply to the Gathas? An overview of historical Zoroastrian worship and belief provides context).

Session 6 (5:00pm-6:00pm):

Diaspora as Re-Discovery: Legitimate Expressions of Self and Location.

(Fellowship as a local expression of Faith. Respecting the past doesn't mean denying the present).

Session 7 (6:30pm-7:30pm):

Finding Mashyane in Diasporic Faith and Fellowship: Women in Daena Mazdayasni.

(Making women prominent in Faith and Fellowship. Citing historic episodes and enlightened text is insufficient).

Session 8 (8:00pm-9:00pm):

From Out-sourced Zoroastrianism to Dynamic Daena Mazdayasni: Youth Engagement.

(Home-grown youth expression of lived faith and fellowship, not out-sourced Zoroastrianism).

Session 9 (9:30pm-10:30pm):

From Mobed to Mage: Re-conceptualizing Clergy as Pastors of Faith and Fellowship

(Vibrant/dynamic faith requires communicators of inspiration, not detached managers of status-quo religion to their congregations).



"Artist and Shaman
Between Two
Worlds". (Copper
Thunderbird, aka.
Norval Morrisseau

AVI Objectives:

To achieve the Mission Statement by continuing to revise and develop a curriculum and pedagogy towards:

- ❖ Development and adoption of the 101 Inspirations, to serve as the context for legitimacy and justification of the AVI Mission Statement.
- ❖ making the anjuman self-aware of its legitimacy as change-agent and executor of faith and fellowship.
- ❖ to make all external bodies/components (from the perspective of the anjuman) recognize the legitimacy of anjuman concerns, and for all institutional architecture to reflect upon their external nature in respect to anjuman faith and fellowship operation.
- ❖ to develop anjuman centred, anjuman driven, systems/bodies for the promotion of their vision of faith/fellowship.
- ❖ for an AVI Working Committee to be formed in order to expand AVI projects and objectives within (to) the anjuman, and as a body-representative in dialogue with all external status-quo bodies (eg. OZCF, NAMC, FEZANA, WZO...etc. Meaning, local-regional-global or guild bodies).
- ❖ for there to be an education, resolution-building, and conferencing/reflective, component to the AVI in all phases.
- ❖ for there to be a transformation of clergy, or the addition of clergy who serve as faith/fellowship pastors, holding the same rights and respect as officiants. For this endeavour to have anjuman input, support, and supervision.
- ❖ for the aforementioned to result in a decentralized, diasporic, Daena Mazdayasni.
- ❖ for the AVI Objectives and Mission Statement to be achieved in concert with the 101 Inspirations to justify, direct, and adjudicate, anjuman centred faith/fellowship.

Programme (May 5):
**The “101 Inspirations” as Liberation Theology: From
Priestly to Prophetic**

Main Theme: Faith/Fellowship are revitalized and kept relevant when they are expressions of social justice. The first session deals with AVI efforts to achieve this for Zoroastrianism. The second/third sessions relate the AVI to similar attempts by other faith/fellowship communities, their success, and what can be learned.

Session 1 (9:30am-10:30am):

Disproving ‘Authenticity’: Syncretic Cosmopolitanism as South Asian Identity.

(Parsi attempts to claim or ascertain ‘authentic’ Zoroastrianism are misguided. No such creature existed. The true development of faith is a history of intercultural learning.)

Session 2 (11:00am-12:00pm):

Seizing the Day and Claiming the Daena: Seeking Support, NOT Sanction, for Diasporic Re-Imagining.

(How to recover the ‘radical’ Zoroastrianism of Mehta-Naoroji-Cama, in diaspora.)

Session 3 (12:30pm-1:30pm):

Conversation in Faith—By the Light of the Flaming Chalice.

(Insights for reconciling tradition to a diasporic progressive commitment to social justice. Zoroastrianism in conversation with Unitarian-Universalism).

Session 4 (2:00pm-3:00pm):

Conversation In Faith—Radical Theology, as Pastoral Practical Theology.

(Insights of the Vatican II and Medellin Conferences. Zoroastrianism in conversation with revitalized Latin American Catholicism).

Session 5 (3:30pm-4:30pm):

Conversation in Faith—Shalom and the Community of Creation, The Harmony Way.

(Insights from First Nations. Zoroastrianism in conversation with revitalized Indigenous Faith).

Programme (May 26):
Institutional Re-imagining of Faith to Re-claim Fellowship

Main Theme: Faith requires constant re-imagining for Fellowship to be vibrant and dynamic (An Operational Perspective). The opening address will explain how the AVI re-imagines faith and fellowship in order to make it an authentic expression of Zoroastrianism in diaspora. Subsequent sessions will reflect on the various elements of re-imagining which are involved, why they are necessary, and how they can lead to stronger fellowship.

Keynote Address (8:00am-9:00am):

The AVI as Anti-Paradigm and Counter-Narrative to Hegemony.

(Replacing a mummification of attitudes and religious adjudicators, with a dynamic fellowship of Faith).

Session 1 (9:30am-10:30am):

Re-Imagining and Re-Claiming: Tajiks and Central Asians.

(How do populations identify and maintain a sense of belonging, despite remote history, and fractured sociocultural connections).

Session 2 (11:00am-12:00pm):

Curriculum and Communication: Ensuring Education is Transformative and Sustainable.

(Education as Faith/Fellowship messaging. Communicating ethos, not information. Ethos-directed institutions).

Session 3 (12:30pm-1:30pm):

Identity and Belonging: Constructing Histories, Choosing Narratives.

(Writing the history you want to live. Defining oneself, one’s faith, and one’s actions, through conscious selection).

Session 4 (2:00pm-3:00pm):

Bringing Simorgh to Life (SHE The Creator)! Re-Imagining, as Authentic, Intimate and a Subversive Expression of Emotional Wisdom.

(Art is important to maintain an active connection to Faith. Creative representation is education and involved Fellowship).