

Chapter LXI

MY FAITH IN DEVOTIONAL PRAYERS

SHAMS-UL-ULAMA
DASTUR DR. MANECKJI NUSSERWANJI DHALLA

From his book: THE SAGA OF A SOUL
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

From the ebook by Joseph Peterson in website:

<http://www.avesta.org/dhalla/saga.htm>

Christians use the 'Prayer Book' in their churches and recite the prayers contained therein composed by different people in comprehensible languages. Together with this they use the 'Hymnal' and sing the hymns composed by various musicians to the accompaniment of the organ. The Rehnumai Mazdayasnan Society had taken the lead to initiate such a reform when the learned Ervad Sheriarji Bharucha was delivering his sermons. At first the assembly would rise and recite in unison a verse or two from the Avesta and thereafter sing the substance of that verse in Gujarati, accompanied by the harmonium. There was an uproar from orthodox circles against such prayer set to music and this practice was abandoned in time.

Later, in all sections of the community, public religious meetings commenced with the congregation reciting such

devotional prayers. The audience recited passages of the Avesta followed by readings of the translation in Gujarati. This custom prevails to the present day. However complete a translation may be, it is bound to be drab and dry. Devotional songs and hymns that can regale the mind and heart are best suited to such congregational gatherings.

The followers of all the major religions of the world possess devotional literature that would suffice to satisfy its devotees. In this respect we are sadly lagging behind others. Knowledge and devotion ought to be entwined in religious literature. To the sensitive devotee literature that is replete with knowledge but lacking in devotion seems insipid, unresponsive and uninspiring. The devout worshipper needs God's grace and love in his daily life more than he needs knowledge of God. He needs [\[641\]](#) prayers, devotional: songs and benedictions that can bring radiance into the darkness of his life and hope to his despairing heart, assuage his wounds, wipe away his tears and drown his sorrows. He yearns for songs that can soothe and stir the innermost recesses of his being, that can enkindle the flame of divine love in his heart so that it bursts into songs in praise of the Almighty. Listening to such prayer, he is inspired to lay down his life at the feet of the Master and his spirit takes wings and floats

in the realms of imagination. They lend joy, sweetness, serenity and inspiration to living.

In 1909, just as I became the High Priest, the Young Men's Zoroastrian Association was founded. Under its auspices the community had taken the lead to meet at the Fire Temple for prayers and sermons on every Hamkara day. On these occasions before the lecture, we recited one or two verses from the Avesta and then we recited poems befitting those verses which I had composed in Gujarati.

During the days of the Zoroastrian Conference, Sir and Lady Hormusji Wadia requested me to give five public lectures at Bombay. At the commencement of those talks I used to pray a verse from the Avesta and recite its meaning in Gujarati in verse form. Thereafter they urged me to compose inspirational benedictory songs in English and Gujarati;

In the years that followed, four substantial books, each containing 400 to 525 pages, were being published, hence the above work could not be taken in hand. In 1938, on my way back from New York, I began this work on the Atlantic Ocean and continued it across the Mediterranean and the Arabian Sea. On reaching Bombay I composed quite a few devotional and inspirational prayers in English. [\[642\]](#) Mr. Pirojshah Nusserwanji

Mehta, a patron of literature and the person who was maintaining the model Parsi School at Nasik, once asked me what I was engaged in writing. When I told him, he at once remarked that as soon as such material was ready it should be forwarded to him so that he could publish them personally and distribute them free of charge. Thus he distributed thousands of copies of 'Homage unto Ahura Mazda' and later its Gujarati interpretation, 'Ahura Mazda ni Nemaj,'

On receiving and utilising these, many coreligionists wrote to me stating that, despite all their honest efforts, when they had simply failed to have any desire to pray in Avesta, which they could not understand, they had turned in despair to Christian prayers. But now that they had found Zoroastrian prayers in a comprehensible language they had started using them every day.

The learned author of many books on varied erudite subjects, Mr. Doongersi Dharamsi, appealed to the Trustees of the Karachi Parsi Anjoman for permission to translate 'Homage unto Ahura Mazda' into Gujarati and to have it printed at his own expense and to distribute one thousand copies free of cost. But as a very large section of the community was of the opinion that the book be translated in 'Parsi Gujarati', his very generous offer

was rejected with real regret. A Hindu scholar from abroad wrote to me that 'Homage unto Ahura Mazda' was not meant for Parsis only. A Swamiji stated that he replaces the nomenclature of Ahura Mazda by Shri Krishna and uses many of the prayers contained therein together with the Bhagvad Gita. Muslims and Christians alike, in a very open and generous spirit, did not fail to send congratulatory messages. [643]

At present thanks to Pirojshah's generosity, a second volume comprising of sixty four additional prayers in English and Gujarati has been published and, God willing, on completion of the books in hand, a third volume may also be placed at the service of the community.

In this manner my resolution made forty years ago while I was studying at Columbia University to compose in Gujarati devotional and benedictory prayers for daily use and for congregational purposes is at last being fulfilled by the grace of God.

[644]