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A month ago the *Jam-e-Jamshed* published a heartwarming article by Prof. Khurshed C. Sheriar (my old friend and co-founder of the Y.C.Z.A.) entitled "The Y.C.Z.A. Story and its Contribution to Communal Welfare." He dealt with the foundation of the Young Collegians' Zoroastrian Association in 1952, and briefly reviewed its past 50 years' history.

The Y.C.Z.A. story is a mini-story of how our community has tried to keep together, to survive and to succeed. God willing, this will be a "Story without an End."

In youth we learn, in age we understand. Let me try and tell you what we have learnt / understood from the past 50 years. Let me also try to chart a course for the next 50!

A Community Must Commune

50 years' experience in the Y.C.Z.A. has made us realise first and foremost that for the future welfare of our community there is a very real need for us to provide the infrastructure for bringing our young people into continuous contact with each other on a regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis.

When young people meet constantly, they come to know each other. As they come to know each other, Nature does its own work. Given the opportunity, many of them form friendships and attachments. Liking develops into love. Love matures into marriages. Therefore, as my friend Prof. Sheriar wrote, over the years the marriage list of Y.C.Z.A. members has been a long and, on the whole, a happy one.

In Mumbai today, to encourage such continuous, close contacts between Parsi Zoroastrian young people is not easy. The pressure of college studies and tuition classes and other courses is heavy. Everyone's time and energies have their limits. Travel problems and distances need to be overcome. Central locations where the young can meet on a free and carefree basis are not easy to find.

Roses In December

50 years ago in the Y.C.Z.A. a few of us bonded together to enjoy our togetherness. Without even realising it, we were preserving our "Parsipanoo".

Over the years the number of our annually renewed memberships have run into thousands. Our ex-members are now spread all over India and the world. They are now businessmen, professionals, service people - "all sorts" - as they

say in the Customs Tariff. You name them, we have had them all!

Over the years by periodic functions we have tried to keep the youth of the community together by continuously arranging a wide variety of functions for them and managed by themselves. Of the youth, for the youth and by the youth has been our basis for growth. "In its chosen field, Y.C.Z.A. must lead, not follow" - has been our Motto.

On an average we have had about 50 functions / activities per year. Multiply 50 x 50 and you have a record any Association may be proud of! Shahmama Recitals, Religious Talks and Discussions, Jashans, Gahambars, Debates, Drama Competitions, Public Speaking Classes, Picnics, Socials, Dances, Parties, Popular and Classical Musical Evenings, Eastern and Western Film Shows, Treasure Hunts, Hiking, Trekking, Out-of-Bombay Trips, Eight Atash Behram Tours - and so on and on: Old Y.C.Z.A.-ites understand more than most why the Poet has said that God gave us memories so that we may have ROSES IN DECEMBER.

Charity With A Human Face

Financially, we started with zero. Today, with the Grace of God, every year we are in position to give Rs. 3 to 4 Lacs to deserving students. We hope to double this before the year is out.

For years we have loaned out books to Arts, Commerce, Law, Science, Medical and Engineering students.

We have always believed in and practised "charity with a human face". The Trustees have personally met and interacted with each one of the many applicants to whom help has been extended.

Many young people who have worked sincerely and selflessly for the Y.C.Z.A. have themselves benefitted in terms of personal growth and leadership qualities to a gratifying extent. For them, the joy of doing good work has been its own reward.

Set Youth - To Get Youth

Additionally, we have also learnt many valuable lessons about our young people. We have learnt - (what the older generations always find difficult to accept) - that the principal way by which youth generally mould their minds or adapt their approaches or attitudes to life is by opposing the accepted opinions of the older generation! This is the main cause of the so-called

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by Nadir Ardeshir Modi

generation gap - and the friction, born of a lack of understanding.

Youth generally wants to go its own way. Young boys and girls often tend to regard - or shall I more correctly, say, disregard - their elders as senile or outdated. It was ever so. But a lot of our people are worried. They say: "God knows what is going to become of the younger generation." My reaction has always been: "The younger generation is going to grow up and start in their time worrying about their younger generation! So quit worrying. Worry has never solved any problems. Work has."

Winston Churchill once wrote:

"When I look back on all my worries in life, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which never happened" - So it is with us.

50 years with our younger generation has made me increasingly realise that they are by, and in the large, a fine and sound generation. We need to enthuse them to contribute their time and energy (to the maximum extent that they can spare of both) for the progress and welfare of the community. When youth works with dedication for youth, the future progress and welfare of the community is assured.

The Need To Be Needed

We need to realise that our young ones need to be needed. Essentially, they want to be wanted. They love to be loved without insincere sentimental mush. In our time did we not? In the essentials of life things have not changed.

We have learnt that youth need to be enthused more than to be informed. Young

people are not vases to be filled. They are fires to be lit.

We know that youth has never been very good at listening to the elders, but they have never failed to imitate them in whatever they admire.

Each One For Himself

Unfortunately, in this world of increasing pressures and competition, the time, money and energy of most Parsis goes into furthering their individual interests and welfare. In general it is each one for himself and the Devil take the hindmost!

Most of us (in our own different ways!) love the community. If we did not, I would not be writing this for the *Jam-e-Jamshed*; - Nor would you be *Jam-e-Jamshed* readers! - Nor would the Dhondy family have spent their lives in the service of and for continuing the existence of our community's only newspaper.

Granted that we love the community. The question remains: "What can each one of us do for our community?"

The Y.C.Z.A. as a group has tried in its own way to answer this question for 50 years. In the Y.C.Z.A. we have kept before us Albert Einstein's words:

"A hundred times a day I remind myself; that my inner and outer life depends upon the labours of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to live, in the same measure as I have received and am receiving."

The Problem Of Decline

Clearly, the main problem which the Parsi community is facing and is likely to face in the next 50 years, and which we need to tackle is one of DECLINE both (a) quantitative; and (b) qualitative.

Raising the quantitative and qualitative growth of



any group is a challenge which every large industry or business faces. In industry and business the financial rewards of success in raising quantitative or qualitative standards of the business or industry are glitteringly attractive. These benefits are tangible. Increasing the quantitative or qualitative standards of a community has no such glittering or attractive financial benefits. These benefits are intangible. The intangibles of life are more important than the tangibles but they often get overlooked / neglected. That is our real problem.

We must learn to tackle the business of survival, growth and welfare of our community as any great business or industrial company or group tackles its own problems.

We Ain't What We Was

Increasingly, there is a widespread awareness of the need to bestir ourselves. In Mumbai and elsewhere, we have Youth Groups, that of the excellent Mumbai Parsi Panchayet sponsored Holiday Programmes for Youth - a la Diana Marfatia.

As Martin Luther King Jr. once said:

"We ain't what we oughta be, we ain't what we wanta be, we ain't what we gonna be, but thank God we ain't what we was!"

Other communities have appeared, risen and disappeared into the mists of history. What about us? If, on the whole, an intelligent community is not to suffer extinction, more and more like-minded people must come together on a regular basis in Mumbai and all over India, synergise, establish Think Tanks and Action Groups. We must realise that every child that is born in the Parsi community comes with a clear message that God has

not yet given up His hopes for our Parsi community.

Start Right Here

So for the next 50 years, where and how do we start? President Theodore Roosevelt of U.S.A. gave the answer: "You start where you are, with what you have, and do all you can."

The W.Z.O., the Zoroastrian Studies Group, the Mumbai Parsi Panchayet's Holiday Programme for Youth, the Y.C.Z.A. and other such groups, each in their own way have been seeking to do what they can. The results have been beneficial - but they tend to be desultory and disjointed. The rays of the sun need to be focussed before a fire is lighted.

I, for one, pray and believe that our Panchayet Trustees and other communal leaders will pick up the challenge at a macro-level and implement it down the line.

Failing that, as we are told in the Bible, without vision the people will perish.

For counteracting and rolling back the continuous quantitative, and slow but insidious qualitative, decline, we all need to combine in order to conquer. We need to synergise and energise. Total communal survival and growth will require total communal involvement. We need to remind ourselves that even God does not help those who not help themselves.

Just as there are, and will be, more and more huge icebergs even as the polar ice caps dissolve and become extinct - so it is, and will be, with us. Individuals - and individual families will float away in their icy splendour. But the Communal Polar Ice Caps will keep dissolving. The result, God forbid, can be that in the course of time, not only the Polar Ice Caps but also all the individual icebergs will all dissolve into one vast watery grave.

We who are concerned need to come together and continue to think, speak, organise, plan and work for our communal survival and progress. There is still time to put out our lifeboats - and keep rowing away strenuously for survival. And, God willing, we will make it. For a just God ever helps those who help themselves.

And Do What?

In Youth Groups, like the Y.C.Z.A. for the future we need firstly to keep the group interacting together by regular activities. Secondly, such groups need to identify specific problems which they feel they can tackle and then proceed to do so.

These problems include the problems of the lack of Parsipanoo, more specifically the lack of religious and cultural knowledge, the problems of age-youth relationships, of our young people obtaining higher and better qualifications to meet the demand of an increasingly competitive world and, in general, the problems of identifying and doing whatever we can do to help the needy people of our own community.

These are recurring problems. They are problems without an end. Tackling them successfully should be a story without an end for Zoroastrian Social Welfare Groups.

This Y.C.Z.A. Regiment

We in the Y.C.Z.A. have been, and are, but a regiment in the line on the boundary of "Parsipanoo". For the next 50 years I hope our successors will continue to do their best to continue and build further on the successes of the past and remain in touch and commune with each other.

We and other like-minded organisations will protect the boundaries of our communal Kingdom. But this youthful army needs much financial support and wise and mature leadership at the centre.

In this our Golden Jubilee year we desire:

(a) to revive and keep up contacts between old members and well-wishers by forming a Y.C.Z.A. Alumni Association;

(b) to encourage younger leadership to take over activities and programmes of the Y.C.Z.A. and to better serve the needs of the community as a whole and its youth, in particular; and

(c) to increase the Trust Funds of the Y.C.Z.A. Educational and Charitable Fund which is registered under the Bombay Public Trusts Act and which for the benefit of Donors is registered under Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act.

If Parsi thy name is Charity, please show it in action.

I urge those old Y.C.Z.A. ites and all other persons who may be interested in helping us to help others to send us their names and addresses and Tel. Nos. or contact the Y.C.Z.A. Secretary at Central Bank Building, 3rd Floor R-11, Sir Homi Mody Street, Mumbai-400 023. (Tel. No. 2642874) or Mr. Kersi K. Commissariat at Suleman Chambers, 2nd Floor, Battery Street, Apollo Bunder, Mumbai-400 039 (Tel. No. 2873888) between 11.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.