

## **The question of conversion**

Dear ...

Concerning “conversion”:

§ There are two small Zoroastrian communities, one the early Parsi settlers in India, and the other a handful of the good living in their homeland, Persia, in a more or less hostile environment. Each one resembles a lonely old tree stood in the middle of a vast deserted plain. Their underlying concern is the survival of the community rather than the enlargement of their social body. Apart from the small number of the Zoroastrians who have survived the calamities of Time, in recent decades the religion of Zoroāstra begins to experience a revival. A large number of people of the Iranian world (actual Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Syria, etc.) embrace the religion of their ancestors; there are also an increasing number of individuals belonging to the traditional “Indo-European” sphere who are interested in the creation of the new Aryaman –an ethical and friendly civilization. As usual there are also people who rush up to control or at least to channel this trend into their proper interests, and for this goal they create “associations”, “world councils”, etc. However, there are some who reflect upon the foundation of the civilization based on two pillars, the Aryan kingship and the Mazdayasnian religion.

As for your question about conversion, I will outline a few points that come out of the texts of the Magian priests.

§ The Avesta gives a clear answer to conversion question: If there be someone to whom the Good Religion appears agreeable, who aspires to become Mazdayasna, and accepts good thought, good word and good deed, he or she should be accepted in Aryaman, there should not be any difference in degree between him or her and a Mazdayasna born in a Mazdayasna family (Doc. 1).

§ If a true Mazdayasna welcome a convert, he himself is not proselyte. Indeed one cannot attempt to convert someone else to the Mazdayasnian Zoroastrian religion by force, or by concealment (by deception), or even by persuasion.

Some Magi particularly value the spiritual road that leads one to the worship of Ahura Mazdā. For example, Mardānfarrox states: “I did not like to follow a religion by inheritance, but I

sought that which is more reliable and acceptable before the testimony of wisdom, I went also along with many different sects, until a time when, owing to the beneficence of the divinities, and the strength, fortune and power of the Good Religion, I escaped from the depths of the gloom and ill-solvable doubtfulness.”<sup>1</sup>

The Magians accept the active power of the will at one’s conversion, and then they only acknowledge conversion by the free choice of an individual. ‘Abd al-Jabbār of Hamadān, a Mu‘tazilite, mentions this saying of the Magians : “We do not force nor encourage people to embrace our religion. This is the religion given by God (Ahura Mazdā) solely to us. But we do not prevent [others] from entering it. If we struggle and lift up sword against [other] nations, it is only for making them pay taxes and submitting them [to the royal law]. But we do not fight for religion.” (Doc. 2)

The Magians dislike conversion by concealment deeply. They use the Avesta term *iθyejah maršavan* (Zand: *sīz ī nihānravišn* ‘covert peril’) for the covert practice of the bad religion. In Sasanian times, Manichaeism was Mazdayasnian only in appearance (the Manichaeans called themselves *māzdes*, i.e., ‘those who worship Ahura Mazdā’), but in reality Mani was not Aryan and the religion invented by him was alien and gnostic. Mani’s “concealment” ensnared a number of sincere Aryans. Mardānfarrox says about himself thus: “By the same power of the divine science, and the books and colloquies of the wise, ... I was saved from much doubtfulness, error, deceit and wickedness of doctrines, and, especially, from that one who was greater, more monstrous and more evil-teaching than [all] the deceivers, that is the hard-headed Mani, whose doctrine was sorcery, religion deceitfulness, teaching malice, and habit secretiveness (*nihānravišnīh*).”<sup>2</sup>

In these recent centuries the perils of “concealment” have come from the school of Āḍar Kēvān<sup>3</sup> and also the “western” school of Mazdean Studies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> . ŠGV 10.45-49.

<sup>2</sup> . ŠGV 10.50-60.

<sup>3</sup> . See my paper The “Parsi” School of Āḍar Keyvān, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> . See the book of J. H. Moulton who explains how to Christianize the good religion, by rejecting the Vīdēvdād and giving a new interpretation to the Gāthā. *The Treasure of the Magi. A Study of Modern Zoroastrianism*, London, 1917.

§ In the Persian Pursišnīhā (the so-called روایات پارسی) there are some questions about conversion.

One question concerns a gravedigger or a corpse-burner, follower of the Lie (*durvand*, an infidel), who wants to become a follower of the Good Religion (*vehdēn*).

The Pārsī priest of Persia answers that: If he properly observe the rules of religion and no harm come on the tradition, that is, connection with the religion and with the Vehdēn, then it is allowable. (Doc. 3)

§ Another question concerns a *vehdēn* convert to a different faith who wants to return to the Good Religion.

Here, too, after being admonished, performing the expiatory ceremony (Av. *paitita*, Pers. *petit*), and being administrated the purification ritual lasting for nine nights (*barəšnūm ī nōh šab*) he is allowed to join the community of the good. (Doc. 4)

§ Another question concerns a Vehdēn convert to Islam by force and against his will.

There are two conflicting attitudes towards this situation: One advises that the Vehdēn who has been under duress characterised by threats and violence, out of helplessness, should commit suicide (by the use of poison) but he should not turn Muslim (*durvand*). It seems that this one is the advice of the teachers of the old (*paoiryō.tkaēša*). The other is more clement. The Magians of Persia, having witnessed the savagery and brutality of the Tāzīg (Muslims and Arabs) that the Vehdēn had to suffer, did not blame those who abandoned the righteous path and became impure (Muslim). (Doc. 5)

§ Another question concerns an Indian boy or girl, of low caste, acquired by a Parsi, to be used as a domestic servant. If he (*bannag*) or she (*peristār*) believe in the good religion, it is proper that he or she wears the sacred girdle (*kustīg*) and becomes Aryan; and if he or she become knowledgeable on the religion and faithful, they should give him or her Barəšnūm. (Doc. 6)

Indeed, the Parsis of India who had acquired Indian boys or girls, followed the above statement, and taught them Avesta prayers and allowed them to wear the sacred girdle and shirt (*šabīg*). However, according to a letter sent to the high priests of



u-š guft ohrmazd : agar hān ī didīgardādestān mard hād kū durvand hād, hān mard kē veh dēn ī mazdesn abar sahed, ā ēn ī juddēv ī ohrmazddādestān āstavānīg bē gīred [kū : kāmāg veh dēn āvared]. avēšān-z mard bē pedīrend hān abardar humat ud hūxt ud huvaršt. hān ī gāhān srāyišn [xvāned, kū : srav] zbāyed. nē hān mard duš gōbišn varzed. ād hān ī avēšān mardān pēš harvisp duš kunišn varzīd [kū : pēš harvisp vināh kird est], hān vināh, frāz abganed veh dēn ī mazdesnān harvisp duš kunišn [kū : vināh xvār dāred]. ēdōn hān mard andar veh dēn baved cōn hān <ī-š> pēš dēn ast kū fradum dēn [ravāg kird] ast. humānāg ī ōy cōn avēšān mardān ahlavān būd hānd, spitāmān zardušt [kū : veh dēn andar āmad hend]. ēdōn hān ī kē mard veh dēn andar āmad hād, ēdōn hān mard gāhān srav dranzēned [kū : bē gōbed]. ēdōn avēšān kē harvisp yazdān bē sahed [kū : bē srāyed], ped pas-iz xvarišn puxt xvared, gōšt-iz puxt xvared [kū : bē xvared] <dahan bē bannād>. ēdōn hān ī mard pas kē xvared [kū : xvard ēsted] gāhān yazed cōn dahan bē hiled [kū : bē višāyed]. ēdōn hān mard vehdēn baved [kū : mazdesn].

#### Doc. 2 From the book of ‘Abd al-Jabbār of Hamadān

والمجوس تدعي لزرادشت من المعجزات والآيات أكثر مما يدعيه النصارى لمن دعاهم إلى النصرانية، ويقولون: نحن لا نكره أحدا على الدخول في ديننا ولا نرغبه فيه، وهو دين حصننا الله به، فمن دخل فيه لم نمنعه. وإنما نقاتل ونحمل السيف على الأمم لتأدية الخراج والدخول في الطاعة فقط، فأما لأجل الدين فلا نحارب. وعقول الفرس وحكمتها وتحصيلها قد عرفه الناس، وكثرة وسع ممالكها فوق ممالك الروم بطبقات. فينبغي على قياسكم أن يكونوا محققين وصادقين. (عبدالجبار بن أحمد الهمداني، تثبيت دلائل النبوة، ١، بيروت، ١٣٨٦/١٩٦٦، ١٨٥)

#### Doc. 3 From the Persian Purs.<sup>5</sup>

از روایتِ کاوس ماهیار.

پرسش آن که: گورکن <و> مرده سوز [و] دروند [اگر] بهدین شوند یا نه؟

پاسخ این که: اگر قاعدهء دین مستحکم نگاه دارد، و پیوند به دین و بهدین را آزار نه رسد، روا است و می شاید.

#### Doc. 4 From the Persian Purs.<sup>6</sup>

از روایتِ نریمان هوشنگ.

<sup>5</sup> . MU I, 281 ; MU II, 454 ; T 13742, 161b.

<sup>6</sup> . MU I, 281 ; MU II, 387 ; T 13742, 161b-162a.



«اینها بچه دروند هستند. استخوانِ بهدین و اینها یک جای شود خوب نیست.» چون در زندگی آنها همه کارهای دین از دست آنها می کردند، و بعد مردن در دخمه گذاشتن را منع می کنند، لهذا التماس (پرسش) این است که: لاشه <شان> در دخمه گذاشتن شاید یا نه؟ این معنی را واضح کرده مرقوم فرمایند.

پاسخ سیزدهم آن که: در باب پسران و دخترانِ جدیدین خرید نمودن، و بهدینان را باید که اول نگاه به دین و آیین و جان و مال خود کردن که هیچ نقصان نه می رسد. ثواب عظیم است که فرزندانِ جدیدین خرید نموده، به اوشان اوستا یاد دهند و در دین وه مازدیسنان در آورند. اما این معنی بسیار ناپسندیده و بعید نزدِ اهل مردمانِ دین بهی است که موبدان و بهدینانِ هند در زندگی به دستِ همان پسرانِ مذکوره خوردنی می خوردند، و وقتی که ایشان ودیعت حیات نموده و به رحمت خدا می روند، بر لاشهای ایشان مسکین بیچاره سخن ناسزا می گویند و بحث بیجا می کنند که «این فرزندان زاده جدیدین اند، نه باید لاشه آنها و بهدینان در دخمه یک جای کردن، خوب نیست!» این سخنِ ناسزا بیبهره از کرفهء دینِ زراشت و جادهء حق است، و بر این معنی هر کس که حرکت کند و لاشه آنان را به دخمه نه می سپارد آن کس در دین مرگزان است و پیش مهر و سروش روسیاه. موبدان و بهدینان می باید که به فرزندانِ مذکوره حرمت زیاده تر نگاه دارند، و لاشه آن و درده را به قاعدهء دینِ بهی به دخمه گذارند که باعث خشنودیِ اورمزد و امشاسفندان بوده باشد.

ثانیا این جانب به زبانِ بلاغت بیان دستورزاده دستور کاوس خلف جنت مکان دستور رستم مسموع شد که: بعضی دستوران و موبدان و بهدینان در اکثر ولایت مانع و مزاحم هستند، و بند و بست نمودند که فرزندانِ مذکوره را اوستا یاد نه می دهند، و در دینِ وه مازدیسنان نه می آورند.

این معنی بعید از عقل و غریب از نقل است. عزیزان من سلامت، در دویم برگردِ جدیدیوداد دادارِ جهان استه هومندان اشو به حضرت زراشت اسفنتمان انوشه روان فرموده است که جمیع مردمان را به دینِ بهی به شاهراه هدایت نموده از مستفیض خود مفخر و مباهی سازند. دویم آن که در زمانِ هشیدرماه و هشیدر بامی و سیوشانس جمیع جدیدینان را در دینِ بهی می آورند. پس از این حجت و برهان در دینِ بهی واجب و لازم است که پسرانِ مذکوره را در دینِ بهی آوردن کرفهء عظیم و ثواب مستقیم است. پس آن کسانی که از این کار مانع و متعرض هستند گویا که در دین جدیدینان انداز می نمایند، و از مبدأ و معاد هم خبر نه دارند، و به شاهراهِ ضلالت و بطالت می روند. آنها را بهدین گفتن در دین محال است. هر گاه بهدین باشد، دینِ بهی را زیاده کند.