

We must do more to strengthen our multiracial bonds, through our schools and through the community.'

Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Education.

BAHA'IS | BUDDHISTS | CHRISTIANS | HINDUS | JAINS | JEWS | MUSLIMS | SIKHS | TAOISTS | ZOROASTRIANS

THE GOLDEN RULE: Each religion is different, but all teach people to be good. They teach the "Golden Rule": that we should treat others the way we'd like to be treated. Here's a Zoroastrian version of the Golden Rule...

Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others. – Shayast-na-Shayast

Like sugar in milk

In the last of our series, we meet a small community with a big heart.

Once a year, the kids from one of Singapore's many children's homes get treated to an outing by the Zoroastrians. They might head out to a fast food restaurant or maybe the zoo, for a day of fun. It may seem like a small thing, but it makes a big difference to the kids.

Of the 10 major religions covered in this series, the Zoroastrians are Singapore's tiniest community. There are only around 200 of them living here. But that doesn't stop them from helping others when they can.

Zoroastrianism originated in Persia (now called Iran) more than 3,000 years ago. When they were persecuted in their homeland a thousand years ago, many fled to Gujerat in northern India, which they made their new home. Many of them were talented merchants and businessmen. Before long, they were trading all over Asia. They eventually arrived in Singapore.

Like other faiths, they believe strongly in contributing to Singapore and responding to calls



Children from a home join Zoroastrian families for an outing.

for help. "We must share everything, however little we have," says Mr Rustom Ghadiali, president of the Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Singapore. "The prayers say that sharing is very important in our life."

From early on, they lent a hand in building the Singapore we know today. Some built free

schools and started charities. One famous member of the community, Mr Navroji Mistri, donated \$1 million in 1953 to build a children's ward in the Singapore General Hospital. The hospital's Mistri Wing is named after him.

Following this tradition, Zoroastrians today are active in all sorts of volunteer work, both here in Singapore and abroad. They've preserved their links with Iran and India, and with Zoroastrians living in other countries. There are only 200,000 Zoroastrians worldwide, but their strong ties mean that they can swing into action quickly when the call for help goes out. When the Asian Tsunami struck in 2004, Zoroastrian organisations from Canada to India chipped in with donations. And when an earthquake destroyed the ancient Iranian city of Bam in 2003, help was offered without hesitation.

A legend is often told about the Zoroastrian refugees who first arrived in India and wanted to stay. The local Hindu king was worried that these foreigners would cause problems, so he sent them a bowl of milk, filled to the brim. The Zoroastrian leaders knew the meaning of this message: the king was trying to tell them that, like the bowl, his kingdom was already full and had no room for them.

They added a spoonful of sugar to the bowl before sending it back to the king. The milk didn't overflow, because the sugar dissolved in it. Their message to the king: accept us, and we will be like the sugar to your kingdom. Today, Zoroastrians still believe they should sweeten the lives of people around them.

More about Zoroastrians

FOUNDER. The religion was founded by the Prophet Zoroaster at least 3,000 years ago, making it one of the oldest religions in the world. Their holy book is the Zend Avesta. Their motto is "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds."

ONE GOD. Zoroastrians were probably the first to push the idea of belief in one God, whom they call Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom.

FIRE. Zoroastrians revere fire. Their place of worship is known as the Agiary, sometimes called a fire temple. They always keep a flame lit and don't allow it to go out.

FREEDOM. Cyrus the Great, Emperor of Persia in 590BC, was influenced by Zoroastrian beliefs and insisted on freedom of religion: people were free to choose their religions. This inspired later leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States.



PARSI. The Zoroastrians who first went to India were called Parsis, while groups that arrived later were known as the Irani. Today, some people use the name Parsi to refer to all Zoroastrians.

EPIC TALE. People love epics – grand stories about their past. Many religions have epic tales. Zoroastrians are one of the oldest religious communities in the world, so it's not surprising that they have their own: the Shahnama. The poem was written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around 1000AD. Its tales of heroes and kings and the wonders of Persian civilisation have thrilled many Zoroastrian children. The Shahnama is treasured in Iran – by both Muslims and Zoroastrians – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, and as far away as China. It tells them about their past, and allows them to take pride in the deeds of their ancestors. Like other epics, it has inspired beautiful art, like this 16th century painting from Iran (above).

• This page is an initiative under the Community Engagement Programme, supported by the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle.