

ZOROASTRIANS IN BIRMINGHAM

The Zoroastrian community in the city is small and numbers only a handful of families. Nonetheless they gather regularly on auspicious occasions such as Persian New Year and the birth of the Prophet Zarathustra.

Zoroastrians in Birmingham have in the past organised landmark national events, such as the Zoroastrian Day, co-sponsored by BCF, held in Birmingham Council House in 2010 and the inauguration of the Parsi Faith Hill by the Hindu community at the Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple in 2013. In addition to local events which are organised by public spirited individuals, there are also events organised by the Zoroastrian faith organisations within the United Kingdom.

Jimmy Suratia is the Zoroastrian representative and former Chair on the Birmingham Council of Faiths
email: suratia@lineone.net

The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe
(based in London)
web-site: <http://www.ztfe.com>
email: secretary@ztfe.com

The World Zoroastrian Organisation
(based in London)
web-site: <http://www.w-z-o.org>
email: chairman@w-z-o.

The North West Zoroastrian Community
(based in Manchester)
web-site: <http://www.nwzc.org.uk>
email: secretary@nwzc.org.uk

BCF

**Post: Birmingham Council of Faiths,
c/o BVSC, 138 Digbeth,
Birmingham B5 6DR
Email: membersbcf@gmail.com
www.bhamfaiths.org.uk
<http://www.facebook.com/bcf.bhamfaiths>**

Originally founded in 1974, Birmingham Council of Faiths' objective is to promote knowledge and mutual understanding of the beliefs and practices of the city's many religious faiths.

Its belief is that through greater understanding of each other, a more harmonious and cohesive society can be created.

An additional strategy is to act as an interfaith hub, networking between the diverse faith organisations in the city and to serve as a focal point for information about their activities. This brochure is one of ten covering the Council's affiliated faiths, which currently include Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians.

Zoroastrians



one of
Birmingham's
faith
communities

ZOROASTRIAN BASICS

Zoroastrianism was the religious doctrine first taught in Persia (modern day Iran) approximately 3500 years ago by the Prophet Zarathustra, after whom the faith is named. It was among the first monotheistic religions and worships the creator god, Ahura Mazda (Lord of Wisdom).

The Zoroastrian holy book is the Avesta, which is written in an early form of Iranian, closely related to Vedic Sanskrit. The oldest and most sacred part of the scriptures are the Gathas, hymns composed by Zarathustra himself.

Zoroastrians believe that for every individual, life is a constant battle between Good and Evil. Each person has a guardian angel and is the religious symbol known as the Faravahar or Farohar, which is depicted on the front of this brochure. Both the angel and the Zoroastrian mantra of “Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds” help in the fight between Good and Evil.

Zoroastrianism was the religion followed by the rulers and many of the people of the Persian Empire and the faith declined with its downfall. As Zoroastrians faced persecution and forced conversion to Islam, some fled and settled in India about 1385 years ago. There these settlers are called Parsis and are today, one of India’s most respected and successful communities. In the former Persian territories there, a diminishing minority of Iranian Zoroastrians still remains.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As a rule, Zoroastrians are born into the faith. Parsi Zoroastrians in particular would not convert any person as this was one of the promises made when they first settled in India. Furthermore, only the children where the father is a Parsi would be allowed into the faith. These issues are a point of controversy for the Parsis.

Worship is predominantly undertaken at home in the form of the daily prayers. Other celebrations, especially family ceremonies and marriages, are mostly organised at home or at appropriate venues. Some families opt to go to India to conduct them.

Generally, the Zoroastrian child learns about their faith and prayers through the family. Prior to reaching adolescence, the child formally commits to the faith in a ceremony called the Navjote, where he or she wears the sacred vest and thread for the first time. These items will then be worn daily whilst reciting prayers.

Only the children born into a priestly family can become priests. The children go to India, where they are initiated as priests in the Navar Murtab ceremony. They learn the prayers that accompany events such as Navjotes, Marriages, Deaths and the Jashan ceremonies.

The Jashan ceremonies are conducted to commemorate good occasions but can also be conducted to remember those departed. The Jashan is a ceremony of offerings where the Priest(s) pray and tend a fire of sandalwood in the presence of fruits and flowers.

SOCIAL PRACTICE

There are no consecrated places of Zoroastrian worship in the United Kingdom. However, there is a prayer room at the Zoroastrian Centre in London which is the focal point nationally for worship and events. The Zoroastrian Trust Fund of Europe (ZTFE) has also recently secured the services of a full-time priest from India. Nonetheless, other than the full-time priest at the ZTFE, all the other priests (approximately two dozen in total in the United Kingdom) accommodate their religious duties with their full-time careers.

Zoroastrians believe that at death the soul leaves the body but remains on earth for three days, after which it departs to the spiritual world, accompanied by its guardian spirit. Arriving at the Chinvat bridge of judgement, if a person has lived a virtuous life the soul will cross the bridge to heaven. Where one has lived a life of evil, it will be dragged to hell.

On death, traditionally Zoroastrians expose the body in the open in Towers of Silence, where they decay and are consumed by nature. As the only Towers of Silence exist in India, most Zoroastrians in the United Kingdom are either cremated or buried in ceremonies presided over by a priest. There is a small Zoroastrian cemetery at Brookwood in Surrey.

Globally, the Zoroastrian community congregate at congresses around the world. The 6th Youth Congress was held in 2015 in Auckland, New Zealand. The next full congress of believers will be in 2018 in Perth, Australia.