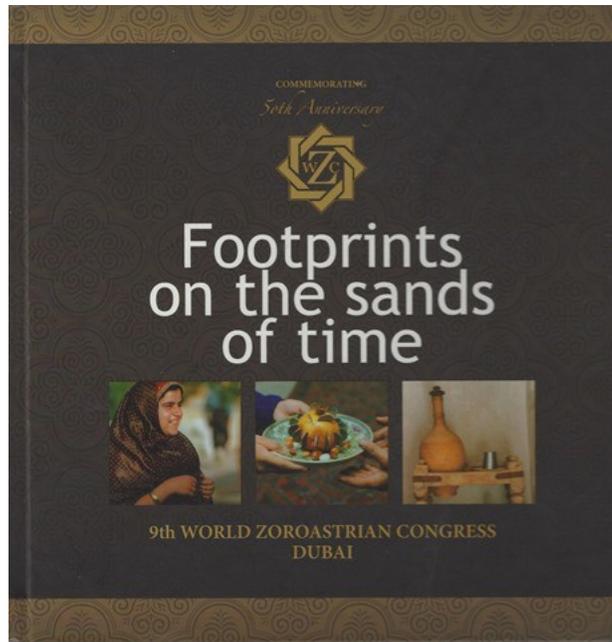


Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 198 – A Psalm Of Life by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - words to live by - Stanzas 5 - 9!

Hello all Tele Class friends:



2009 Dubai World Zoroastrian Congress Theme

Growing up in our beloved M. F. Cama Athornan Institute, we were blessed by having unbelievably dedicated, humble, enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers like Kantilal, Daruwalla, Sanjana, Sidhwa, Patel Sahebs. They barely made their living but never complained about it. What we all are today, we owe to these wonderful teachers.

Daruwalla Saheb was our teacher of English and he taught us from the prescribed books of prose and poetry with backgrounds about the authors, their lives, the circumstances under which they wrote the prose and poetry, etc., a well rounded knowledge of the lesson at hand. Many of the poems we had to learn by heart.

One of my favorite was always: **A Psalm of Life by that amazing American Poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow!**

(please see the attached for the complete poem)

This was not just a poem to me as taught by Daruwalla Saheb. This was a poem to be used to spend our day to day life!

The poem has 9 stanzas. We covered the first 4 in last WZSE #197. In today's WZSE #198, we will cover stanzas 5 - 9.

I have selected the following website for the poem and its background and its analysis stanza by stanza.

<https://englicist.com/summary-analysis/a-psalm-of-life->

longfellow-summary

A Psalm of Life:

About the Poem

“A Psalm of Life” is an inspiring poem written by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The poem was **first published** in the October 1838 issue of The Knickerbocker or New-York Monthly Magazine, a magazine published in the New York City.

A psalm is a religious or sacred song or hymn, in particular any of those contained in the biblical Book of Psalms and used in Christian and Jewish worship. But here **the meaning** of “a psalm of life” is a song of life, where the poet glorifies life and its possibilities.

It is an invocation to mankind to follow the path of righteousness, the right way to live this life. (added accent by me)

The poem is **didactic** in tone.

The poem ‘A Psalm of Life’ often takes the subtitle “**What the Heart of the Young Man Said to the Psalmist**“. This is very important in suggesting the context of writing this poem. Here, the speaker (a young man) responds to the Biblical teachings that this human life is not important and that we are made of dust and eventually return to dust. So, we may take it as a psalm in response to a psalm.

In the poem, A Psalm of Life, the poet sees life from **an optimistic outlook**. To him this life is full of possibilities, as we can achieve higher goals by making the full use of our time and by working hard, and of course, by keeping faith in the power and potential of life. He does not have faith in those who hold the pessimistic view of life. Throughout the entire poem, the poet Longfellow conveys his view of life, instructs the readers to make the most out of this life, and inspires us to participate in the work and activity of life. **(My Comment: same as the outlook of life taught by our Prophet Zarathushtra!)**

The poem consists of nine stanzas of four lines. The poem is also lyrical in nature. The **rhyme scheme** followed is A B A B, where the last words of the first line and the third line rhyme, and alternatively the second and the fourth line rhyme in each stanza.

A Psalm of life: Summary and Line-by-Line Analysis

**(5) In the world’s broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!**

(Instead of me reciting the poem and attaching the audio file, I have selected to use a very moving presentation by a gentleman whose family migrated to USA from Barbados, West Indies, during the most difficult of times, the Great Depression Years. The family, as you can imagine, suffered many hardships, taunts, etc. but they survived in spite of all the difficulties. The mother wanted to visit one last time their ancestral village and home in Barbados and the eldest son takes her there. He roams through the village and sits on a tomb stone of his ancestors and recites this poem with some background. So, here is the background and the recitation of the poem by Rev. Michael Haynes at:

http://www.favoritepoem.org/poem_APsalmofofLife.html

In the above stanza of A Psalm of Life, the poet compares this world to a vast battlefield where we, the human beings come temporarily in the camps to fight the battle of our life. So the human beings are compared with troops. The poet urges us to be a hero in this battle of life, to fight this out bravely and finally win it. In other words, he wishes us to be successful in life by following the right way of life. He doesn't like to see us like the dumb cattle driven by others, with no particular goal or direction.

**(6) Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,— act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!**

In the sixth stanza of the poem A Psalm of life, the poet reminds us of a very popular quote: "Learn from the past, live in the present, and hope for the future." But here the poet instructs us not to trust the future, however pleasant it may seem, because we often get carried away by the happy dreams about our future and forget to act in the present. He also tells us to forget the past events, as they are dead, and they should not haunt us anymore and affect our present action. And what is crucial is to act in the present, 'in the living Present!' We have to follow our heart, and keep faith in the God overhead.

**(7) Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;**

In the seventh stanza of the poem, the poet says that the lives of so many great and successful men remind us that we can also achieve those heights if we wish and strive for that. And if we can do that, we would be living forever in our works, in the hearts of people. Longfellow compares this immortality to leaving footprints on the sands of time. In other words, we will not be living forever here, but we can leave our marks on the infinite flow of time through our good work. That would inspire later generations to follow our way.

(SPD Comments: Phrase: "Footprints on the Sands of Time" is often used all over in the literature.

Our 2009 Dubai World Zoroastrian Congress Theme was the same (please see the photo above))

**(8) Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.**

In the penultimate stanza of A Psalm of life, the poet continues the same theme of leaving a 'footprint' to inspire others to follow. He compares a dejected or wretched person with a hopeless shipwrecked man sailing over the large sea of life ('life's solemn main'). That person can find the examples set by us, and can gain courage and hope to move forward.

**(9) Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.**

In the final four lines of A Psalm of Life, the poet Longfellow asks us to be up at once and start working. However, the poet here urges us not to mind the consequences, or, to make our mind prepared for any fate. We must carry on, reaching great heights, still not leaving. We must learn to labour, to work hard, to act wisely, and wait for the rewards patiently.

So, going through this poem, we now realize **how inspiring and motivating this poem has been**. The poet conveys his message all over the poem. But I feel, the first two lines, and the very last line of the poem are enough to give an impression of what this poem is all about: we should not spend our priceless moments sitting idly and doing nothing, rather we have to work hard towards reaching our goal and to make the most out of this short life.

SPD Explanation:

1. Remember the old 1940's Hindi Film song by Surendra:

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Janam Leeyaa to jeelay bandeh, | (If you took birth, friend, then live your life fully!) |
| Dar ne kaa kyaa kaam bandeh, | (There is no reason to be scared) |
| Jeevan hai sangraam bandeh, | (The life is a battlefield friend) |
| Jeevan hai sangraam! | (Life is a battlefield) |

Quite the same as the 5th Stanza above!

2. A famous variation of the phrase: "Footprints on the Sands of Time", was attributed to Sir Isaac Newton which is worth mentioning here.

He was many times asked: "How come Sir Isaac you see so far ahead in the future than all the rest of us?"

His answer: "I am standing on the shoulders of the giants that preceded me."

"The Footprints on the Sands of Time" to Sir Isaac were "The shoulders of the giants that preceded me."

A very apt simile!

3. The poem points to some Zarathushtri principles like righteousness, fighting the evil and be victorious, helping mankind even after death, etc..

May the Flame of Fellowship, Love, Charity and Respect for all burn ever eternal in our hearts so we can do HIS work with humility, diligence and eternal enthusiasm!

Atha Janyaat, Yatha Aafrinaamahi! (May it be so as we wish!)

(Aafrin Pegaamber Zartosht, from [Ervad Kangaji Gujarati Khordeh Avesta Baa Maaeni](#) – Page 424, adapted Aafrinaamahi - we wish instead of Aafrinaami – I wish, in the original)

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli