

The pretentious self

[This is a revised version of an article titled 'I', published in the Oct & Nov 1987 issues of Manashni, the voice of the Australian Zoroastrian Association of NSW, Sydney, Australia]

Confucius (literal name - Chungni) was born in 551 BCE of a 17 year old mother and a 77 year old father. His father lived for 4 more years during which time he imparted his ancient wisdom to his intelligent wife, who became a source of inspiration to the equally intelligent youth. Chungni was a contemporary of Gautama Siddhārtha, the Buddha (ca. 563 to 483 BCE) and of Pythagoras (ca. 566-486 BCE). He was titled K'ung Fu-tsze meaning Kung, the Master by his followers. After having resigned from his job in the civil service he travelled around the provinces in China (from age 56 until his death at age 72) instructing his followers on the philosophy of life, on the use of common sense, about morality and the use of wisdom in public life, conduct of government, the Chinese Classics, Law & family life. During their meetings the Master forbade his followers from using **'shall', 'must', 'certainly' and 'I'** in their discussions.

In Greek alphabet the letter **'I'** is pronounced **'Ego'** (the letter 'A' is 'Alpha'; 'B' is 'Beta'...). Ego as 'I' - the centred self becomes accepted as synonymous with a devious human quality.

In Gatha Ahunavaiti - Yasna 32.3

Zarathushtra gives a very apt description of this uncouth human quality as **'pairi-matōiš'**:-

'A perverted / arrogant conviction about one's own self / mind' being 'pairi'
- i.e. 'confined within to revolve around its own little self',
'A self-centred mind' while referring to the notoriety
of the false, untruthful & double-dealing daēvas.

In Gatha Spənta Mainyu - Yasna 49.11

Zarathushtra also describes Ego as 'Evil Conscience'

'...Ego-centric rulers as having a dim insight, being evil-doers, evil speakers,
evil-thinkers and possessing an 'evil-conscience'-'duzh-daənanğ'.
They will truly be relegated to the 'Abode of Untruth'.'

Many translations of Gathic/Avestan texts refer to **'Yazamaide' as 'I revere / I praise'**. If the word 'I' were to be avoided one may say **'Reverence be to / Praise be to'**, instead. **Zarathushtra**, in his one-to-one dialogue with Ahura Mazda, refers to himself as **'azəm'** (Skt: 'ahám'), meaning **'this person' and even, 'we', meaning himself with his co-workers.**

Gatha Ushtavaiti - Yasna 44.7:-

'...azəm tāiš thvā frakhšni avāmi, Mazdā
Spənta Mainyu vispanāñm dātārəm.'

',,,Thus fain would this person recognize thee, O Mazda
Through thy Holy Spirit, thou, the Creator of all'.

Gatha Ahunavaiti - Yasna 29.10

Zarathushtra addresses Ahura Mazda *on behalf of his co-workers as 'we'*, while asking for *'the grant of a vital force and strength which will lead us to peace & rest'*

However, in order to be able to maintain the correct poetic rhythm and to bring the metric beat of the verses to the required length he is also obliged, at times, to use *'mā', 'mē' 'mā' and 'mōi'*, meaning, *'me', 'myself' and 'mine'* particularly in his teachings to his followers.

Gatha Ushtavaiti - Yasna 44.11:-

Zarathushtra in his dialogue with Ahura Mazda reassures him that *"His 'Revelation' shall be proclaimed to his followers as 'his self/this person' has been chosen 'the first' to do so"*.

Gatha Ushtavaiti - Yasna 46.17:-

Zarathushtra in his dialogue calls himself - *'this person has instructed.....worship is best done through action, not inaction.....'*

The Gathic/Avestan word for *'I am'* is *'Ahami'*, the Vedic Sanskrit word being *'Asmi'*. However, it is interesting to note that in Classical Sanskrit the word becomes *'Ahami'*. Again, with migration and conquests in the west the word for *'I am'* is borrowed from the Aramaic language in the western dialect of the Avestan language to become *'Ādam'* as noted in the inscriptions on the Achaemenian Tombs and on the Fravaši and Fire Altars of Cyrus the Great. Further, in some of the Prakrit group of languages the word for *Man* is *'Ādami'*.

Ego (to my mind) is *one's wilfully misplaced 'true inner self' ('daēnā' - conscience) - Zarathushtra's 'duzh-daēnang' (evil conscience, falsified conscience, knowing pretence, pretentious self)*. It is a secretive conviction, which makes one become knowingly aware of and believing in what one is really not. Consequently, deep down the pretentious conscience expends considerable mental energy (and, perhaps unrequited stress) in the relentless pursuit and constant approval of some 'other self' - an external energy just to satisfy the selfish needs of the 'true self'. *Ego* is often conveniently deemed to be some form of weakness although it *knowingly* curtails growth, which *actively* hampers progress.

The 'i'ness person is labelled in a variety of ways as being - self-centred/ self-righteous/ egoistic/ egotistic/ egotistical/ ego-centric / ego-tinted/ ego-oriented/ pretentious.....etc.

All individuals, the followers of untruth, who have committed some civil or criminal offence, are fully aware (conscious of the fact) that they have placed their self-interest, self-promotion and personal gain first, while over-ruling the norms of society they live in.

In Gatha Ushtavaiti, Yasna 43.7:-

Zarathushtra's heart becomes overwhelmed by his love for Ahura Mazda when Vōhu Manāh accosts him as to "which path he would choose when there was doubt in the daily acquisition of gain between others in his settlement and his own self."

His answer lies in the next verse, **Yasna 43.8**:-

‘I, Zarathushtra, am the dedicated adversary when I am among the followers of Untruth but when I am among the Righteous I shall continue to maintain the ecstasy of my Inner strength. Thus, may I share with you for all time thy Infinite strength’

He points out, too, that the existence of the simple principles of Evolution, in the absence of Morals and Ethics, results in Egocentricity. Doctrines are devised by Ego taking a subtle part, in a way as to mask its real identity. Since the intention of masking is surreptitious, ***Ego is itself Evil personified. One’s Ego is a knowing wilful falsification of one’s own conscience (Zarathushtra’s ‘duz-daənəng’)***. Groups, too, sometimes, commit offences because a misconceived purpose of the common goal carries the leaders away.

We must, here, delve further into Zarathushtra’s notion of the possessors of a spiritual void in **Gatha Spənta Mainyu, Yasna 49.11** (also noted above).

He talks of those who possess a **Falsified Conscience (*duzh daənəng*)** and thus manage to cultivate an **Evil Insight (*akāish khwarəthāis*)**. These intermediaries, he says, are literally living in **‘their own self-induced hell on earth’** and they will be made to return to their familiar abode in the After-life.

‘The possessors of Evil Insight, be they among rulers, workers, speakers, thinkers and those who follow untruth by falsifying their consciences are truly the real dwellers of the Abode of Untruth. It is, verily, in the Abode of Untruth where their souls will be made to return.’

There is certainly nothing wrong in maintaining a positive attitude while promoting oneself and advancing in life’s progression. As it is generally put when one sets out to achieve something “the sky is the limit”. Unfortunately, should this noble thought of progress become uncontrolled, its use as a driving force for personal advancement can, in indifferent manipulative ways, become problematic when ***some other self somehow creeps in between the true self and nobility of character***. Since this ‘other self’ tends to promote a false sense of pride, it drives the person to some sort of unrequited craving in desperately wanting to control an outcome, mostly at the cost and the welfare of others. The adage, ***‘In ego, we get and forget while in nobility, we give and forgive’*** clearly appears to apply here.

The bond of ‘attachment’

For the one who lives in the noble attributes of the soul and has acquired the ‘*gunas*’ - the noble qualities of the soul, existence is for universal expansion, bestowing, like benevolent Nature does, without asking for anything in return. The right intention seems to be to establish joy. There is no desire for any approval and therefore the intention is beyond all worldly wants. This happens due to a supreme state of non-attachment, a form of sacred link, which is above all mundane worldly motive.

Whereas, the desire for personal gain, the desire to control, possess, begrudge also triggers off personal imagination or opinions leading to attachment. *The bond of attachment*, i.e. personal wants through some imagined justification of the craving, makes the perpetrator fearful of letting go of things and happenings. But the soul is above fear and attachment; it requires no external support. And, if we are able to discountenance our ego we become truly focused on our own true self and no fear can affect us. We then disregard the urge to control and analyse others by unsolicited control of situations to ensure they live up to our expectations. This is the first step towards realising the ‘*gunas*’ of the noble soul.

The philosophy is that humans by nature are free when born and this state of liberation is permanent. It is he and no other who becomes the prisoner of his own delusions. He has within him the power to cast off this bondage but his unreal self prevents him from doing so. This is why no person ever calls himself ‘self-made’ if he is first did not consider himself successful, that is materialistically secure in the eyes of society - or so he believes. But then people do go astray because they believe self-delusion is better than any other alternative.

Every event in our life has **a cause, an effect and a consequence** (when the intention is self-righteous) and **a gainful result** when the intention is righteous. None of these factors in an event ever occur isolated, one without the other. They sequential events are governed by the Laws of Nature (the Avestan / Vēdic - Āshā / Ṛta complex) and ordained uncompromisingly to come to pass. It follows that to become **Self-righteousness (Vain)** is to perpetuate a cause for an effect. Since vanity **leads one to promote evil designs** it soon leads on to the temptations of **opportunism and callous arrogance**, which one has to pay for sooner or later as a **consequence**. Such a person is tempted to whip up a frenzy to gain agents to support him, falsely believing they are in strength. The agents become applause givers to promote the activities of the applause seeker and a vicious cycle sets in.

Group Egotism

The above train of circumstances lead to ***Group-Egotism or Collective Self-righteousness***. In the case of many such figures in human history it has clearly shown that they had already stooped further than they would have ventured to confess to themselves and to their conscience. The volatility of this strong feeling becomes so intense that such a common bond can, sometimes, lead to a false personal craving for group gratification, mainly arising from (the evil intent of) self-gratification and a sense of superiority. The volatile groups, during Zarathushtra’s time, were the Karapans, Kavis, Usigs and some priests, who had incorporated the exhilarating Haōma (Vedic: Soma) ritual in the Yasna ceremony. The modern equivalents would be the socially deviant groups of political radicals and religious extremists, who are prepared to incite antiracial and ethnic sentiments and among others, those who misuse alcohol and drugs for self-gratification.

Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 32.3 (above) we have noted that

‘...from untruth and the Ego-centric mind do all contrary actions arise....’

Gatha Spenta Mainyu, Yasna 49.4

Zarathushtra here uses different words '*drugvatō Daēna*'
to indicate Ego as 'Evil Conscience'

*'Those with evil intent spread hatred with their hearts and
false gossip with their tongue.....such men devise
evil and possess a falsified Conscience'*

Any organisation, institute, government....etc continues to thrive well only if its differering ranges of beliefs within its administration are respected. When some are held down by egotism and false pretexts the rest of it is obliged to stay in those depths, too. It has been quite amazing that until recently, with active emphasis on Interfaith dialogues, no religion had been tolerant enough to incorporate within it the teachings of other prophets. As long as distrust, indifference and intolerance promoted through Group Egotism and, perhaps, to continuing ignorance remains prevalent such unwillingness to integrate will continue to act as a barrier to human progress.

References

- Āptē, Vāman Shivrām**, The Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi 1979.
- Griffith, R. T. H.**, The Hymns of the Ṛig Vēda, Motilal Banarassidas, Delhi, 1976.
- Kanga, Kavasji Edulji**, 'Avasthā bhāshā ni sampurna farhang' (A Dictionary of Avesta, Gujerati and English languages), Education Society's Steam Press, Bombay, 1900.
- Kanga, Kavasji Edulji**, Khordēh Avesta (Original in Gujerati 1880), Reprint Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay, 1926.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier**, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Edition, 1988
- Sethna, Tehmurasp Rustamji**, Yashts/Yasna/Vəndidād (3 separate Vols.), Ma'aref Printers, Karachi, 1976 and 1977.
- Taraporewala, Irach J. S.**, 'Ashō Zarathushtra nā Gāthā' - The Gāthās of Zarathushtra, Avesta Text in Gujerati and English, Trend Printers, Bombay-4, 1962. This rare edition in Gujarāti, meant to be of assistance in the pronunciation of the Gāthic words and to augment a better comparative understanding of the explanations, is complementary to the First Edition (published in the Roman script in 1951). In this respect this Edition certainly succeeds.
- Taraporewala, Irach J. S., (Reprint of the First Edition of 1951) The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra, Hukhta Foundation, Bombay, 1993.

Sam Kerr
Sydney, Australia
20 October 2012