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**PROCEEDINGS OF
THE SECOND NORTH AMERICAN
GATHA CONFERENCE**

HOUSTON, TEXAS
1996

Edited by:
Sarosh J. H. Manekshaw
and
Pallan R. Ichaporia



**FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN
ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA**

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PREFACE

After the successful First Gatha Conference held at Costa Mesa, CA, in 1994, the Center for Gatha Studies decided to hold The Second North American Gatha Conference at Houston, Texas. The Conference was co-sponsored by the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, and by the Zoroastrian Association of Houston, who served as the hosts for the conference.

International scholars were invited to present their recent studies and research. The papers presented are of a high standard and it was decided by The Center that these should be published as “The Proceedings of the Second North American Gatha Conference”. The Research and Historical Preservation Committee of FEZANA consented to print “The Proceedings” in their Journal -- Volume II.

Divergent subjects were dealt with, including philology, theology and philosophy of the Gathas. The Proceedings will be a major source of research for the scholars of religion, and at the same time will be of interest to the general readers. This volume contains all the papers presented at the conference from the world-renown scholars and learned people. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

In editing the papers the major part was played by Sarosh J. H. Manekshaw, and his excellent work is acknowledge and very much appreciated. I have only intervened where it was necessary to avoid discrepancies. The different transcriptions for the Avestan and Pahlavi languages coming from the contributing scholars were also respected.

Pallan R. Ichaporia
Chairman, The Research & Historical Preservation Committee of
FEZANA

INTRODUCTION

The Second North American Gatha Conference, held in Houston, Texas, from August 31 to September 2, 1996, was organized to build on the successes of the First Conference held in Costa Mesa, California, in 1994. The primary aim of the conference was to continue to promote research in Gathic studies and to serve as a vehicle for disseminating this information to those interested in such studies.

The organizers chose a different, albeit controversial, way to arrange the sessions. It was recognized that we were dealing with two different levels of information: (1) Innovative or new research findings from academic scholars, aimed primarily, but not exclusively, for others in the academic world; and (2) Topics of general interest from “lay” scholars within the Zoroastrian community, who have taken a particular interest in studying the Zoroastrian religion, and whose papers would be of primary interest to the general population. Accordingly, the conference was arranged to have two days of sessions by the “academic” scholars and one day from the “lay” scholars.

The papers presented in this Proceedings, however, do not distinguish between the two types of presenters, and are presented alphabetically, by author.

To encourage audience participation, a panel discussion was arranged each afternoon. After all the papers for the day were presented, the speakers formed a panel and there was an open discussion between the audience and the panel. This resulted in some lively debate and gave the audience an opportunity to ask their questions of, and to present their comment to, the panel. Unfortunately, it was not possible to keep records of these open discussions, and hence they could not be included in these Proceedings.

The organizers wish to acknowledge the following for sponsoring and supporting the Conference:

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PSYCHOLOGY OF THE GATHAS: A PSYCHOHISTORICAL VIEW OF THE TEACHINGS OF ZARATHUSHTRA

By
Ardeshir Anoshiravani

The existence of God, or a creator, is the central theme of all major organized religions of the world. In our modern era there is a consensus amongst almost all theologians of the world about the existence of a supreme being or a creator. However, the agreement does not extend beyond the mere existence of God, as the theologians of various religious persuasions debate endlessly about God's characteristics or attributes. In the context of this presentation, it can be said that the great debate between these individuals appears to be about God's personality. Once again, human beings have succeeded in creating many divinities under one name. To these people collectively, God is one who labors, who tires, who rests, who loves, who angers, who avenges, who doubts, who observes, who reacts, who forgives, who rewards, who punishes and above all, from time to time, performs miracles. In the minds of each group of believers, God assumes a certain character according to the predominant temperament assigned to him. Therefore, God can be predominantly loving, angry, vengeful, forgiving, rewarding, punishing, miraculous, or any combination of the above. In this type of religious system, God is an authoritarian and fatherly figure who is to be kept pleased as a master should be by his servants.

Machio Kaku, a physicist and writer, in his book *Hyperspace* states "I have found it useful to distinguish carefully two types of meanings for the word *God*. It is sometimes helpful to differentiate between the God of Miracles and the God of Order. When scientists use the word *God*, they usually mean the God of order." Kaku in his book goes on to describe the main advantage of religions of miracle, as being the increased survivability due to its followers predilection to blindly follow a leader on the basis of strength and dominance. However, intelligence, reason and choice causes chaos, dissipation, disarray and collective weakness, thus diminishing the chances of winning a ferocious war. Therefore, he concludes that the natural selection processes have favored the ones who believed in miracles and myths, over those who followed reason. "... this theory would explain why so many religions rely on faith over common sense, and why the flock is asked to suspend reason." He also seems to recognize the value of myths

as he indicates “Survival favored the intelligent ape who could reason rationally about tools and food gathering, but also favored the one who could suspend that reason when it threatened the tribe’s integrity. A mythology was needed to define and preserve the tribe.”

It can be categorically asserted that the religion of Zarathushtra is based on belief in a universal order, sense of reason, value of divine knowledge and freedom of choice. To some, Zarathushtra, in describing his religious doctrine, has almost approached what in today’s terminology can be called “a scientific precision”. Rabindranath Tagore in his book titled *The Religion of Man*, states “... there are probably not many religions of so high antiquity in which this fundamental doctrine, that religion is a knowledge or learning, a science of what is true, is so precisely declared as in the tenets of the Gathas. It is the unbelieving that are the unknowing; on the contrary, the believing are learned because they have penetrated into this knowledge.”

How did Zarathushtra attempt to teach “the science of what is true”? How did he try to bridge the gap between what is known and what is simply believed? A search for answers to these questions, elicits a uniquely profound system, which can be broadly called the psychology of the Gathas. Zarathushtra in his Gathas, did not define God as “the dispenser of benefits” to those who please him. Instead, God is the origin and the creator of the universal order (*Asha*) which determines the reaction to and the consequence of every action and behavior. This reaction and consequence, according to this doctrine is completely independent of God’s pleasure or displeasure. This core conception brings about a shift in the locus of control and responsibility without diminishing the divine authority of the creator. This also empowers human beings and encourages learning the laws of nature and acquirement of the divine knowledge. Once man understands the laws of nature and system of consequences, he stops propitiating God for special concessions and begins to think, speak and act in a way consistent with his eternal and universal order; thus becoming righteous.

B. F. Skinner, the founder of modern behaviorism in his landmark book, *The Behavior of Organisms*, discusses the effect of positive and negative reinforcements (consequences) on maintaining the behavior of living beings. Simply stated, according to him positive reinforcers (rewards) increase the frequency of a particular behavior, whereas negative consequences (punishments) decrease the likelihood of reemergence of the

behavior. The negative reinforcement, although is more successful in extinguishing the unwanted manifestations, in the long run may cause behavioral contamination and the effects might not be as durable as is the case with positive reinforcers. In other words, the fear of punishment is only effective as long as the perception and the intensity of punishment remains intact. Otherwise, it becomes almost tempting to engage in the prohibited behavior.

Many religions predominantly rely on fear and punishment to reduce the non-compliance of their adherents. But in the Gathas, there is abundant reference to the inherent positive value of righteous thoughts, words and actions. It indeed seems that the idea of the “operant conditioning” was first expressed in the Gathas long before it was promoted by Skinner.

Psychodynamic theory which was mainly promoted by Freud and his followers was the dominant psychological system during the major part of this century. The Freudian *topographical* (conscious, subconscious, unconscious) and *structural* (id, ego, superego) models of human psyche, are to a certain extent consistent with the psychology of the Gathas. It appears that *Spenta mainyu* and *Angra mainyu* can easily encompass the Freudian concepts of Superego and Id. However, Freudian psychology does not go far enough to include the concept of “discernment” which is a uniquely human attribute. *Vohu manah* is the innate God-given capacity which among other things enables every individual to discern the quality of his actions and freely choose the path of his journey through life. This is an important difference and a major flaw of both Freudian and Skinnerian psychologies, as they assume that the dual concepts of *good* versus *evil*, *right* versus *wrong*, *progressive* versus *destructive* and *righteous* versus *deceitful*, are entirely learned notions handed down from generation to generation according to cultural tendencies and idiosyncrasies of each particular group. Obviously, according to this school of thought no universally acceptable system of duality can exist.

A brief discussion of Zarathushtra's psychohistory

The facts of Zarathushtra's life history, over many centuries, have become mixed with myths and fantasies. However, as it is usually the case, separating fact from fantasy is a relatively easy task. Especially when one relies on the authority of the Gathas and other credible traditional accounts of his life.

Zarathushtra was born in an era when a primitive polytheistic religion with powerful priests presiding over its many complicated and colorful formalities was at its peak. Zarathushtra from a very early age showed unmistakable signs of being a genius. He was an inquisitive and observant child who was not afraid to question the wisdom of adhering to the unreason and following the promises of imaginary gods. He invited anybody who listened to debates based on common sense and observable facts. He was not a passive youngster; to the contrary all evidence from the Gathas, which he authored later in his life, and other sources indicate that he was a strong, determined, assertive and innovative person who was not afraid to put his own well-being in jeopardy for the sake of promoting truth. It appears that he was one of those rare few, who had to forfeit their childhood because they had been destined for greatness. According to the recorded tradition, once during his childhood, his father Pourushaspa Spitama, apparently out of desperation, afforded him the opportunity to debate a highly ranked, but as it turned out, an unfortunate priest. The priest survived the debate itself but on his way home, apparently died of what in modern medicine is dubbed as “suicidal heart attack”.

Zarathushtra was a fearless thinker and activist who was enormously energized by the power of truth. He moved restlessly amongst his people attempting to provoke them to contemplation, inner reflection and righteous action. He did not attain much success as he bitterly complains in the early parts of his divine songs. He was subjected to much persecution and threat. But he did not relent, until he found an enlightened listener in the person of King Vishtaspa. Subsequently, Zarathushtra’s life entered an ocean of tranquillity as he enjoyed a profound sense of self-realization. He, in his lifetime, witnessed the victory of his good religion and sensed the sweetness and humanity of Ahura Mazda’s divine law, *Asha*, in action.

From a personal and family point of view, Zarathushtra’s life was as fulfilling and satisfactory. He married a woman that he loved and respected. His wife’s name was Hvovi. They had six children together, three daughters and three sons. His daughters’ names were: Freny (loving), Thriti (promoter?) and Pours-chista (possessor of knowledge). And he named his sons: Isat-vastar (friend of the community), Urvatat-nar (supporter of people) and Hvar-chitra (sun-like looking). A glance at the names that Zarathushtra and Hvovi chose for their children actually reveals an interesting fact about the depth of their commitment to the vast change

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that they wanted to bring about. It is well known that a majority of the names prior to the advent of the Gathas revelation were either various derivatives of certain animals quality or quantity or related to the multitude of their deities. For example all names that end with -aspa pertain to horse. After Zarathushtra's proclamation of the good religion, names such as Spenta-data (progressive law), Fresham-vereta (newly chosen), Fresho-kera (renovator) and Hoshyaothana (good deed) replaced the animal and deity-related names.

In conclusion, Zarathushtra was, at the minimum, a human being like no other who produced a systematic, rational and everlasting message which contains the quintessence of universal truth. His teachings promote a way of life which inspires "happiness onto the soul of creation". Most significantly, he produced a message that, no matter how much advancement is achieved by human beings in the fields of science and technology, his followers will have nothing to rationalize or apologize for, on his behalf.

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TWIN *MAINYUS* -- THE GATHIC DOCTRINE

By
Jehan Bagli

The doctrine of the Twin *Mainyu*, is the seminal notion that serves as a nucleus for the genesis of the concept of dualism in the Zarathushtrian religion. Basically humanity perceives the structured world in binary opposites. The most profound opposites universal among the human experiences are those of light and darkness. Religious and spiritual traditions have historically associated light with goodness, and darkness with emanation of evil.

One finds this association starting with the Vedic era in (Upanishad 4.37), through the Hebrew Bible, as in Genesis 3, Psalms 27.1 and Isaiah 2.5; through Chinese religious traditions, all the way to modern Christianity, in the Gospel of John 8.12.

The syncretic Zarathushtrian tradition that evolved out of the early Gathic religion is no exception to this universal phenomena. Our later tradition believes in a constant lock of a cosmic combat between the two primal principles, *Ahura Mazda*, representing light, and *Angra Mainyu*, representing darkness.

The specificity of the Gathic dualism of the Zarathushtrian faith, as opposed to the syncretic viewpoint, resides in the ethical conduct, in context with the opposite ontological principles. It is therefore important to examine in some depth, the Gathic scriptures, to attempt and understand the thinking of the prophet on this issue. Prophet Zarathushtra in that early dawn of civilization, appears to sense the basic universal concept of the two opposites, at the very core, at the absolute focus, that molds the human conduct, namely, the human mind. The mind, that unique metaphysical entity gifted by the Creator to humans is the one, that has the ability to recognize and choose between the truth and falsehood, between the right and wrong. Doctrinally speaking, humans are endowed with the most important divine attribute of the Creator, *Vohu Mano*.

Prophet Zarathushtra, in his perception of the two opposing primal principles, appropriately defines them as *Mainyus*. The term finds its derivation from the Avestan root “*mana-*”, meaning “to think”.

In Yasna 30.2 of the Ahunavaiti Gatha, the Prophet addresses the entire humanity with the words:

Sraotā geush āish vahishtā
Listen with your ears, the best,

avaenatā suchā mananghā
ponder with an enlightened mind

āvarenāo vichithahyā
the teaching of your choice

narem narem khakyāi tanuye
each human being for oneself.

In the very next verse, (Yasna 30.3) he speaks of what is the best.

At tā mainyu paouruye yā yemā
In the beginning two mental aspects which are twins

khafenā asrvātem manahichā vachahichā shyaothanoi
mutually disclosed themselves in thoughts, words, and

deeds

hi vahyo akemchā āoschā
the one of them as the better and the other the bad.

The key word of importance in this verse is that the two mentalities are Twin (*yemā*), suggesting the common source of their origin. What common source can there be for the two opposing mentalities? A rational inference to this question has to be: the human mind. The Prophet ends this verse by referring to the choice between them by the intellectuals and the ignorant.

In the subsequent verse, (Yasna 30.4) the Prophet articulates over the genesis of existence through these two mental aspects.

Atchā hyat tā hem mainyu jasaetem
When these two mentalities came together

paourvim dazde gaemchā ajyāitimchā
at the very beginning they created life and non-living

The Prophet continues: “Till the end of time when there will be the worst state of mind for the deceitful and for the righteous the best state (meaning happiness) of mind.”

The most crucial terms here that needs to be understood are *gaemchā* and *ajyāitimchā*. Many translations, Western as well as Zarathushtrian, gloss over these together as “life” and “not-life”, or “life and death”. At the outset, the term *gaem* appears twice in the Gathas (Yasna 30.2 and 43.1), and is derived from *gaya* meaning life. So philologically there appears to be no discrepancy with the translation of *gaemchā* as “life”. There is, however, a clear discrepancy with the translation of the term *ajyāitimchā*. One can outline clear rationale why “not-life” or “death” are unsuitable.

Firstly: A direct negative of *gaemchā* would be *agaemchā*, meaning “not-life”, but the Prophet does not use that term.

Secondly: The Avestan term for death is derived from the verb *mar* meaning “to kill”. The derivative *mareta* or *maretan* (as in *gayo maretan*) referring to mortal, implying subject to dying. The actual word death is used very sparingly in the Gathas. Only once is *merethyu* used (Yasna 53.8). So the translation as death seems clearly incompatible.

Thirdly: The term *jiāiti* is derived from *jvas*, meaning living. This has been used at least 8 or 9 time (Yasna 31.15, 32.5, 32.11, 32.12, 32.15, 33.10, 46.4, 46.8, 53.9), in association with livelihood and way of life. The proper and most suitable translation for the word *ajyāitimchā* should be “non-living” or “a life not worth living”.

Putting all this together we arrive at a parable which says: “at the beginning two mental aspects came together to create life and non-living”. How do we decipher it?

An examination of Yasna 30 clearly reveals:

- (a) That all the verses 2-6 of this Yasna are focused on the mind, thinking and the choice.
- (b) The entire corpus of the hymn is directed to humanity at large.
- (c) The Prophet also speaks of humanity as belonging to opposing classes of *ashavan* -- the righteous, and *dregvantam* (Yasna 30.4) -- the wicked, or *duzdaonghao* -- the ignorant.

Considering these factors, we can rationalize, that the phrase “creation of life and non-living” must imply that “the better mentality creates a life following the path of *asha*, while the bad one generates as way of life not worth living”. Theologically, therefore, *Spenta Mainyu* leads to a life of righteousness while the other *mainyu*, -- as it is not named in the Gathas -- generates a worthless way of life.

In summary, the Prophet presents:

- (1) A common source for the two mentalities, the human mind.
- (2) That humanity has to choose between them.
- (3) The better mental aspect leads to a life following *Asha*, the bad one generates life not worth living.

With this as the functions of the two mentalities, let us examine the major difference between the Gathic doctrine versus its evolution in the syncretic religion. While in the later tradition the two *mainyu* enjoy a coequal status, that is unequivocally not the case in the Gathas. We note in Yasna 30.6 and 30.7, the Prophet clearly elaborates what the proper choice of humanity should be. He stresses that, “those who made the choice of the ‘bad mentality’ followed wrath, hatred, and afflicted the human existence, while those who chose the ‘better mentality’ shall survive the final judgment” (Yasna 30. 6-7). In keeping with this, we note that the term *Spenta Mainyu* -- selfless or progressive mentality -- appears in the Gatha 16 times. In contrast, the other term *Angra Mainyu* as such is absent in the Gathas. (Only once in a linguistically modified form the term *Akascha Mainyu* occurs in Yasna 32.5). Taking this in context with the two key attributes of the Creator, *Vohu Mano* (Good Mind) and *Asha Vahishta* (Absolute Righteousness), the Prophet proclaims to humanity, that only by

choosing *Spenta Mainyu* -- the benevolent or selfless mentality -- will it succeed in the temporal world, to evolve the Good Mind (*Vohu Mano*) that can recognize that immutable law of nature vested in the concept of *Asha Vahishta* -- the Supreme Righteousness. Zarathushtra, thus clearly defines the importance of *Spenta Mainyu* -- the better way over the bad one.

So what were the factors that caused this fundamentally reflective dualistic thought to undergo profound transformations with time? As we approach the Younger Avestan era we see the religion of Zarathushtra gradually spreading westward, from its source of origin, in Northeastern Iran. With this, the religion encountered the early organized prescriptive faith of Mesopotamian civilization controlled by that Median tribe -- the Magis. This powerful priesthood adopted and accepted the teachings of Zarathushtra. In doing so, the Magis ensured the transmission and perpetuation of the religion through the entire Iranian world of the time.

However there was a heavy price tag associated with this. This powerful priesthood concomitantly elected to make some profound changes in the philosophical, theological, and ritualistic aspects of the Gathic religion to satisfy their needs for aspirations of power. Many pre-Zarathushtrian divinities and rituals were reincorporated in the Gathic religion during this period. The pantheon of *Yazatas*, non-existent in the Gathas evolved through the incorporation *Verethraghana*, *Tishtriya*, *Mithra* and *Ardevi-Sura Anahita* in this era. The pre-Zarathushtrian *Haoma* ceremony could very well have reentered the Yasna ritual at this time. Among the most poignant reinterpretation introduced by the Magis was in the realm of the doctrine of twin *Mainyus*. The Magis who adopted the religion centuries later reduced this philosophically reflective concept of ethical duality into a radical one, in nature. As Prof. Fox (Fox, D. A., *Journal American Academy of Religions*, Vol. 35, p.133, 1967) writes, "Magi added a number of innovations to Zoroastrianism. None more significant than their clear-cut rigid dualism in the concept of a deity". They evolved *Zurvan* --the divinity of time -- as the supreme deity, and explained the twin *Mainyu* as *Ahura Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu* emanating from *Zurvan*. *Ahura Mazda* the supreme Gathic Divinity was thus reduced to an issue of *Zurvan* coequal with its adversary. This concept became deeply rooted with time in the syncretic Zarathushtrian faith that evolved. Even though the reverence to *Zurvan* has receded with time, the coequal nature of the two mainyu has remained an accepted misconception.

In the texts of the Younger Avesta, particularly in many of the Yashts, and in some of the later Yasna, (Yasht 13.71-77; Yasna 61.2), the term *Angra Mainyu* was profusely quoted as the demonic spirit responsible for the evil creation. We note this nowhere more pronounced than in the Videvdad or Vendidad, (Vendidad 19.1, 4, 6). In contrast with the Gathas, where Zarathushtra at no time refers to a total compartmentalization of creation into two groups; Chapter 1 of the Videvdad -- a text written circa 2nd century A.C. (almost 1800 years after the time of the prophet) -- enlists all the good creation as that of *Ahura Mazda* against the entire counter creation of *Angra Mainyu*.

The thinking of the Greek philosophers was also highly influenced by the profound remythologisation of the Gathic faith by the Magis. This has left a great paucity of the comprehension of the Gathic teaching. As Gershevitch mentions (Gershevitch, I., *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, p. 12, 1964) the Greek philosophers of the 4th century B.C.E understood the Zarathushtrian faith as a religion of Oromazdes and Areimanios the two gods, as depicted by the Magian example. Plutarch addresses prophet Zarathushtra as “Zoroaster the Magus”. According to Theopompos (400 B.C.) the two contrasting divinities were alternatively supreme for three millennium each, and after this time they are in deep conflict for the next three thousand years, clearly a non-Gathic concept of the younger Avestan era. Diogenes Laertius quotes Aristotle saying, “...Magi are more ancient even than the Egyptians, and according to them there are two first principles ... one called Zeus or Oromasdes and the other Hades or Areimanios” (M. Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. II, p. 281). These expressions, have left a profound imprint of the misconceptions, of the ethical dualism of the Gathic faith even to this day.

As we approach the Pahlavi era, the contrast with the Avestan dualistic concept is even more strongly magnified. The efforts of the 9th century theologian Mardan Farrokh-i Ohrmazdadan, the author of *Shikand Gumanig Vizar*, and a profoundly committed dualist, brings the subject to a stage of consummation. The author focuses on the basic premise that *Ahura Mazda* is all good and under no circumstances can He be responsible for the creation of evil. If evil arises from Him that would clearly make Him imperfect and therefore unworthy of worship by the human. This is extensively elaborated in Chapter 11 of his treatise (SGV, Chapter 11.13-16, 103-111). It must be realized that Mardan Farrokh is thus clearly developing on the theme, that had, by the 9th century become one of the

central tenets of the faith, viz., the struggle between the good and the evil symbolized by *Ahura Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu*.

The author is so profoundly obsessed with evil as a creation of a divinity, that he ignores the possibility of it arising from bad thoughts, bad words and bad deeds, through the wrong choice made by humanity.

The Gathic concept of twin *mainyus* demands a critical evaluation of the truth embedded in the message of the Prophet. Taken in context with the notion of choice, that humans have to make, in this temporal existence, it presents a tenet that defines the responsibility of humanity to the creation.

It is under the influence of the dynamic Iranian cultures, that the Gathic concept of the "two *mainyu* that came together to create the life and the non-living" (Yasna 30.4) was all but forgotten. The notion elaborated by Zarathushtra that it is only by choosing one or the other mentality, that humanity (as well as the divinity) will be directed to good or evil, was completely overshadowed. Gathic dualism, coupled with *Vohu Mano*, the Good Mind, and *Asha Vahishta*, the Absolute Truth -- that presents a view of the control by, and responsibilities of humanity within creation -- has thus become ill-defined with time.

It is crucial for us to make a concerted effort to understand what has happened in the long and rich history of our faith. What had caused the Gathic concept, such as that of the twin *mainyus*, of the divine fire of *Ahura Mazda*, to undergo these profound transformations. It is absolutely essential that we bring this to the attention of our youth -- the generation that will assume the responsibility of perpetuation of our faith in the next century. It is imperative that we build the bridge of knowledge that spans the gap. So that the off-spring of this generation is better equipped to handle the problems of perpetuation than the generation gone-by.

It is thus evident that the ethical dualism of the Gathas resides in close proximity with choice made by humanity through the exercise of their freewill. To make the perfect choice of their own freewill, is the plane of evolution that will be synchronous with the beginning of *Frashokereti* (Yasna 32,13), the resurrection of absolute perfection.

THE THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL LEGACY OF THE GATHAS TO THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

By
Keki R. Bhote

Abstract

The Gathas are the quintessence of Zarathushtra's teachings in Zoroastrianism; and Zoroastrianism, as the mother of all monotheistic religions, is the quintessence of the ecumenism that binds all religions together.

This paper depicts the enormous influence that Zarathushtra's teachings have had in the cradle of civilization -- Egypt, Sumeria, Babylon, Canan, Greece and Rome, and extending even to India and China.

It highlights the principles, articulated by Zarathushtra in the Gathas, that have found their way into Judaism -- probably, the second most rational religion in the world -- and through Judaism into Christianity.

It concludes by asserting that the Gathas -- the oldest of religious scholarly literature -- are, at the same time, the youngest in terms of applicability to modern man. And we, Zoroastrians, have the duty to spread Zarathushtra's teachings to a world that desperately needs to hear his message -- not in terms of blind conversion, but as a way to model our lives.

The Principles of Zoroastrianism as Highlighted in The Gathas

The Gathas represent the oldest, monotheistic, scholarly, epigrammatic, quintessential, religious literature that has withstood the ravages of five thousand years. They are a virtual revelation by God to Zarathushtra -- a Rosetta stone for future religious leaders to decipher the universality of the ethics of ecumenism.

The Gathas are a collection of 17 hymns, or songs, each called *Haiti* or in the more usual later term *Ha*. The 17 *Ha's* of the Gathas were later incorporated into a long prayer or liturgy, known as the Yasna, with 72 chapters.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra details several principles that have made Zoroastrianism the most rational religion in the world and, more important, one that is ideally suited to fit the yearnings of modern man.

1. *The Concept of One High God (Ha's 8 and 9)*

Zarathushtra uplifted the concept of God from the animism, paganism and polytheism of the ancient world into a resplendent monotheism - one supreme Almighty, Ahura Mazda -- the point of origin of the universe, its creator, preserver, and developer. Ahura Mazda's transcendence is cosmological rather than the political, historical, personalized and confining versions in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

2. *The Cosmic Law of Asha (A Recurrent Theme Throughout The 17 Ha's)*

Scholars have translated *Asha* as righteousness, truth, purity and the path to God. But these are narrow interpretations. *Asha* is the Divine Law or Plan which governs all of creation. Zarathushtra postulates that just as there are physical laws that govern the material universe -- the law of gravity, the movements of the stars and planets, etc. -- there are corresponding spiritual laws that govern the relationships in the human arena. Both these laws exist whether we like them or not; whether we obey them or not. Good and evil and a symbolic heaven and hell are, in reality, adherence to or deviation from the universal Law of *Asha*. How simple a concept and yet how supremely profound a code of ethics!

3. *Freedom of Choice and Will (Ha's 2, 4-9, 11, 12)*

Zarathushtra formulated a religion with no dogmas, no commandments, no compulsions. Man is endowed with reason, with freedom of thought, word and deed. He is free to choose between good and evil. But with the gift of *Vohu Manah*, the Good Mind, he can be encouraged to adhere to the righteous path, the Law of *Asha*. How very different from all other prescriptive, dogmatic religions that condemn man as born in sin and threaten fire and brimstone for non-compliance.

4. *Consequences: Cause and Effect (Ha's 8-5, 17-6, 8, 9)*

A superficial evaluation of all this freedom -- moral and physical -- might lead the skeptic to label it as individual license and public anarchy. But Zarathushtra warned that freedom for man's actions goes hand-in-hand with responsibility for the consequences of such actions. If he chooses the wrong path, he suffers inner angst, insecurity, and depression, even though this may not be apparent to others. The Law of *Asha* does not gift redemption to repentance and wipe the sin slate clean. By contrast, if man chooses the right path of *Asha*, he is flooded with the warm glow of inner tranquility, peace of mind and a radiant happiness.

5. *The Inner Conscience (Sroash) (A Recurrent Theme in All 17 Ha's)*

But how is man to distinguish between good and evil, between adhering to or deviating from the path of *Asha*? In the spiritual world, the sensors are reason, knowledge and the inner conscience -- *Sroash*, that spark of the divine, deep down God-thought that resides in every person. It is the guiding compass that tells right from wrong.

6. *Good and Evil (Ha's 3, 4, 10)*

Because of its polarization of good and evil, Zoroastrianism has often been mistaken, especially by Western writers, as a dualistic faith. The twin powers of good and evil -- *Spenta Mainyu* and *Angre Mainyu* -- are described as equal and opposite. But this is an aberration of Zarathushtra's own teachings. Ahura Mazda, for him, is the Perfect Goodness, absolute and eternal -- a supreme, cosmological monotheism. The dualism is the product of the human mind. Evil has no meaning apart from the free choice of the individual. It is temporary and of nuisance value.

Through the ages, man has lamented and questioned the need for sorrow and unmerited suffering. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra rationalizes evil as a challenge to man, a battleground where he can be tested. Through sorrow, man learns of the mysteries of the inscrutable and the limitations of his finite mind in the midst of the vast infinite and its unfathomable patterns. Sorrow is an ennobling influence and "all evil is good in the making."

7. *Eschatology -- Heaven and Hell (Ha: 10.7)*

Zarathushtra taught that there could not be death of matter, only a transformation. Upon death, the soul -- based upon the preponderance of good deeds over evil, or vice-versa -- goes to Heaven or Hell. Eventually, all are redeemed to a permanent Heaven. But Zarathushtra's main emphasis is on the here and now -- on life on earth. At center-stage is the mind of man. It is the mind that creates a virtual heaven and a virtual hell. Each conformance to the Law of *Asha*, through good thoughts, good words, good deeds, is a bit of heaven. Each deviation from the Law of *Asha* is a bit of hell.

8. *Spirit of Independent Inquiry (Ha's 7.3, 8.6, 9.12, 13, 15.3)*

Given this physical, spiritual order to the universe and man's free will, Zarathushtra's teaching would be contradictory if it attempted to delineate a specific, rigid creed explaining every facet of the divine Law of *Asha*. Zarathushtra stressed that the revelations of the divine order are found in nature itself and not in any one man's doctrine. He urged that each person should accept only those beliefs that he himself concluded to be true after independent observation, after hearing from "gurus" and after self-instruction about the nature of the universe. In a famous quote from the Gathas, he enjoined his followers:

“Do you listen with your own ears,
Do you look with the best inspiring divine intelligence,
At the creed of your own choice, each man for himself,
In order to instruct himself through our sages
Before the magnificent events?”

9. *Units of Human Society and Equality of The Sexes (Ha's 4.16, 18, 5.1, 6.3, 4 and 3.2, 17.5)*

The Gathas stress that the foundation of human society is the family. This foundation leads to the structures of town, state, country and eventually the world. If the foundation of family is strong and abiding, the higher superstructures can be bound together by love and wisdom.

In the dawn of civilization, five thousand years ago, when women were treated as chattels, Zarathushtra elevated women to be every bit as equal to men, enjoying the same rights in a free and responsible

society. Superiority lies not in the dominance of one sex over the other but in adherence to the path of **Asha**.

10. *Protection of The Environment and Mother Earth (Ha's 7.3, 8.6, 9.12,13, 15.3)*

Zarathushtra was not only concerned with the spiritual part of the Law of *Asha*, but its physical part as well. The physical Law of *Asha* requires a spirit of inquiry, making Zoroastrianism the most scientific religion in the world. Zarathushtra was also the world's first environmentalist. Mother Earth, its land and water and air should not be contaminated by human abuse. Five-thousand years ago, Zarathushtra was as concerned about the preservation of Planet Earth as the U.N. Conferences on Global Environment.

11. *The Spirit of Service (Ha 8.1)*

In many ways, Zoroastrianism is known as “The Religion of the Good Life.” Zarathushtra did not want man to be sequestered in some mountain-top monastery to meditate. He enjoined his followers to take full part in the arena of life. Material work is intrinsically good. The maximization of material prosperity is not anti-religious, if the object is not sensual pleasure, but to be of service to mankind -- in promoting brotherhood, justice, education and charity. In one of the most famous quotes of his ministry, Zarathushtra says: “Happiness to him who gives happiness to others.” And service is not confined to just human beings. Zarathushtra urged extending help to the entire animal kingdom. And this way back at the dawn of the agricultural revolution -- long before the animal rights movement.

12. *The Ultimate Vision, The Ultimate Goal (Ha's 8 and 9)*

Zarathushtra's vision is that of a world moving toward perfection. Pessimists may argue that society is standing still, if not getting worse. But despite all lurches, switch backs and set backs, it is a cardinal Zoroastrian faith that the world is indeed getting better and that man's role -- through good thoughts, good words and good deeds -- is to leave it a little more perfect than when he entered it.

The Vast Reach of Zoroastrianism Into The Cradle of Civilization

The pristine purity and the power of Zarathushtra's theology, as captured in the Gathas, were so great that they penetrated into every corner of the cradle of civilization -- from Egypt, Sumeria, Babylon, Assyria and Crete in the Middle East; to the tribes of the Hittites, Cananites and Phoenicians; to the vast lands of India, China and Central Asia; to the Greek philosophers -- Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato; to the Roman empire and Europe, through the Mithra and Anahita cults; and through the ages -- to the Achaeminid empire, the Parthian interlude, the Sassanian empire, Islamic conquests and even down to modern Bahaimism.

Parallelism with Hinduism (3000 B.C. to 2500 B.C.)

The earliest influences of Zoroastrianism are manifested in Hinduism. Born of the same Aryan stock -- the Iranians and Indians had a common pre-Zoroastrian Mazdayasnan faith. Long before the schism that developed between the nomadic Indians, who eventually migrated to India and their Iranian cousins, who elected to remain pastoral in Iran, the two peoples had common gods, star worship and a profound reverence for the elements of nature. Zarathushtra's arrival at the start of the schism, marked a turning point between his magnificent monotheism and the continued polytheism of the Hindus.

Nevertheless, the two peoples had a similar language -- Sanskrit of the Hindus and the Avestan of the Iranians. In fact, Sanskrit words could be substituted for Avestan in the Gathas, without changing their meaning. More important, Zarathushtra's vision of man's role to move the world toward perfection, is captured in the Upanishads. Hindu theology, when separated from the allegorical pantheon of its deities, is remarkably compatible with Zoroastrian concepts.

The Influence on Egypt (3000 B.C. to 2500 B.C.)

The Egyptian civilization, dating back to 4000 B.C., was much older than the Iranian and direct influences of Zoroastrianism on Egypt are more tenuous. Yet, there are striking similarities:

- Foreign immigrants into Egypt started the worship of Horus, (Iranian Hvarak) and Ra (Iranian Rae).
- In the ancient Hieratic alphabet, the names of the letters in that alphabet were Avestan names.

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- The Egyptian and Iranian calendars had a striking similarity. Each of the 12 months and each of the 30 days of the month in the Egyptian calendar had exactly the same names as in the Iranian calendar.
- The pyramid texts in Egypt have now been traced to an intellectual people with a highly developed theology, coming from Iran.

The Influence on Sumeria (3000 B.C.-2000 B.C.)

Sumeria, in southern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) had a closer linkage with Iran:

- The names of Sumerian gods were of Iranian origin.
- The Sumerian pantheon had the same Zoroastrian archangels, as described in the Gathas.
- Zarathushtra's Law of *Asha* -- regulating the physical and spiritual order in the universe -- is repeated in the Sumerian religious literature.

The Influence on Babylon (3000 B.C.-2000 B.C.) and Media (2500 B.C. to 550 B.C.)

Babylon and Media were in close physical proximity to Iran and were influenced by Zoroastrian theology, Zoroastrian architecture and Zoroastrian customs. Between 2458 B.C. and 2234 B.C., eight Median kings were called Zoroaster. The Median priests, conquered by Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid empire in 550 B.C., in turn, "conquered" and corrupted the purity of the Zoroastrian faith. Known as the Magi, their claim to Christian fame, is their following the star of Bethlehem to witness the birth of Christ. Much of the dilution of Zarathushtra's teachings is attributed to the Magi.

The Influence on the Cananites

This very early Jewish tribes in Palestine seem to have been influenced by Zoroastrianism. The names of the Jewish months are derived from those of the Zoroastrian months and are in the same order. The concept of a supreme High God is also a Zoroastrian inheritance.

The Influence on the Greek Philosophers (550 B.C.-330 B.C.)

Until their contact with the great Achaemenid empire of Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes, the Greeks were a primitive people, with a primitive,

bewildering polytheistic religion. But three centuries of contact with the glorious civilization of Iran, under the Achaemenid emperors, influenced their leading philosophers, though not the Greek struggle for political independence.

Pythagoras (6th Century, B.C.) introduced a revival to the pagan Greek mythology, stimulated by the revealed religion of Zarathushtra. The Magi had a great impact on him. He looked upon the practice of silence, the influence of music and the study of mathematics as valuable aids in tending the soul.

Socrates (470 B.C.-399 B.C.), influenced by Pythagoreanism and Zoroastrian spiritualism, brought cultural and spiritual values into prominence. The convincing power of Zoroastrianism awakened Socrates to the need of supplying the failing Greek material world with spiritual and cultural values. Socrates saw the need for a “Demiurge,” or Greater God -- an architect like Ahura Mazda -- to fashion the universe and shape the spiritual and cultural life of man.

Plato (429 B.C.-347 B.C.), the philosophical heir to Socrates, went even further in capturing Zarathushtra's theology:

“Desiring, then, that all things should be good and nothing imperfect, God took over all that is visible -- not at rest, but in discordant and unordered motion -- and brought it from disorder into order. When He framed the universe, He fashioned reason within soul and soul within body to the end that the work He accomplished might be, by nature, as excellent and perfect as possible.”

This passage from Plato's teachings are reminiscent of Zarathushtra's God as creator, as the formulator of the Law of *Asha*. His endowing man with reason, and man's slow but steady march to perfection.

Tie-in With The Mithra and Anahita Cults

Mithra was an ancient, pre-Zoroastrian deity, closely associated with the Supreme Being. He is invoked as the Lord of Heavenly Light (with the sun as his physical vehicle) both in the Vedic hymns and in the Avesta.

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In Zarathushtra's Gathas, Mithra is completely eclipsed by Ahura Mazda, but in later Zoroastrian theology, he is elevated to a judge of departed souls and is associated with Anahita, the Deity who presides over waters. Mithra then came to be regarded as the father-aspect of nature and Anahita as the mother-aspect.

With both Mithra and Anahita associated with Spring festivals, the cult rapidly spread to the Babylonians and Hittites, to Greece, to India and to all kingdoms of Asia Minor. Eventually, it penetrated the Roman empire and, as the state religion of Rome, spread to all of Europe and North Africa. The Roman mind, which loved law and order, was attracted to the religious discipline of the Persians and the rigor with which they enforced it. Mithra, as Lord of Light, promulgated a code of honor. He promoted an *esprit-de-corp*s and brotherhood that was a binding force to hold the vast Roman empire together. Mithra gives legitimacy to the transformation of the republicanism of the Roman consuls to the “divinity” of its emperors.

The Influence on Buddhism and China

From the earliest years of the Sassanian empire, founded in 220 A.D., Iran was an important meeting-ground on the famous Silk Road -- from Europe to China. Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, an offshoot of Zoroastrianism, mingled with Buddhism (which originated as a Hindu reform movement) to travel along the Silk Road to China. Zoroastrian principles influenced Buddhist teachings and Confucian philosophies, although direct links to the latter cannot be traced directly. What is known, however, is that Zoroastrianism pervaded much of China, even becoming a state religion, along with Buddhism, from 800 A.D. to 900 A.D.

The Remarkable Impact of Zoroastrianism on Judaism

More than any other religion, Judaism was influenced by Zoroastrianism, especially during the 300 years when Jews lived in peace under the Achaemenid empire. Cyrus, the empire's founder, had freed the Jews from the captivity of Babylon and is referred to in the Old Testament as the “Savior” of its people. He rebuilt Solomon's temple for them and his grandson, Xerxes, funded the building of the wall of Jerusalem, the remnants of which are the famous Wailing Wall.

The parallelism with Judaism is uncanny:

- Each is proclaimed by a prophet -- an interpretation of God.
- Each had a divine revelation.
- Each worships but one God.
- Each emphasizes good thoughts, good words, good deeds.
- Each became intolerant of other religions.
- Each developed priestly cults and emphasized ceremonial cleanliness.
- Each evolved beliefs in angels and demons.
- Each visualized an eschatology and the coming of a Messiah.
- Each resulted in a Diaspora.
- Each yearned for a return to the Promised Land.

Divine Revelation. The revelation to Zarathushtra came, first with visions of *Vohu Mano* (Good Mind), and then the vision of God at River Aretak. For Moses, the revelation was at Mount Zion, from where he brought down the tablets of stone with their 10 commandments. But there were differences too. Moses did not seek out God. It was a command performance initiated by God, with Moses groveling and writhing in fear. By contrast, Zarathushtra sought out God with respect and dignity. There was no divinity of distance.

The Concept of God. Zarathushtra visualized a Supreme Being -- the Creator of the Law of *Asha* -- the point of origin of the universe. Ahura Mazda was more transcendental, with God being prior to and above the universe; more cosmological and less anthropomorphic, i.e. human and personal. Moses' Yahweh was originally a tribal God, exclusively for the Jews, and who only later became universal. The Jews regarded themselves as God's chosen people, in sharp contrast to Zarathushtra, who proclaimed that his message from God was applicable *equally to all mankind and for all time*.

Cosmological Conceptions. Zarathushtra's Ahura Mazda established the Law of *Asha*, regulating order in the physical and spiritual worlds. Man's role is to help the world move toward perfection. He visualized an evolution -- animal yesterday, man today, angel tomorrow. Moses' Yahweh visualized God creating the world out of nothing -- *ex nihilo* -- in short, chaos.

Man at Center Stage. Both Zarathushtra and Moses placed man at center stage. In Zoroastrianism, man is endowed with reason, free will, perception

and conscience. In Judaism man is gifted intellect, free will, conscience and moral affections.

Expectations of a Redeemer. Zoroastrianism mentions a *Saoshyant*, a leader at the Resurrection, who bestows immortality and blessedness to all. (This parallels the concept of the *Bodhisattva* in Buddhism, who delays his ascent into Nirvana to help people on earth.) Judaism speaks of a Messiah, but who is regarded more as a political and temporal savior rather than a heavenly one.

Eschatology (Life After Death). Zarathushtra emphasizes that heaven and hell start in this life, with adherence to or deviation from the Law of *Asha*. Reward and punishment are self-induced. The soul, upon death, goes to Heaven or Hell based upon the balance of good deeds and evil deeds. But ultimately, mankind is redeemed to a permanent Heaven. Early Jewish teachings gave no thought to life after death. It was only after centuries of contact with Zoroastrianism that Judaism developed a tentative eschatology.

Caste System. Zoroastrianism had no caste system -- only a division of labor into 3 classes -- priests, warriors and tillers. Slavery was rejected outright. Judaism also had no caste system, with two classes -- priests and all others. Slavery was a temporary expedient.

Place of Women. Zoroastrianism placed women on a totally equal footing with men. Judaism, while giving freedom to women, placed them on a lower footing than men. A woman was generally considered the property of her husband.

Civic Service. Zoroastrianism promotes energy, action, thrift, work ethic, charity and service for the downtrodden. Judaism, similarly singles out the poor for special attention. Care of strangers and alms giving are obligations.

A Final Comparison. It is ironic that Zoroastrianism, that contributed so much to the theology of Judaism, finds the roles reversed in today's world. There is much that we Zoroastrians can learn from Judaism, as it is practiced today. Its powerful lay -- not priestly -- organizations knit Jews all over the world together in a loyalty that is awesome to behold. Its teachers are not priests, but distinguished rabbis, who impart a profound knowledge of the theology of Judaism. Their religious schools for children

and young adults are models of instruction and true insights into the religion. Above all, they have a unity of purpose and a desire to survive, as opposed to the fractious, specious, tiring and endless arguments we have on issues that by-pass our No. 1 problem -- survival.

Zoroastrianism at The Crossroads

In many ways, we Zoroastrians are truly blessed. We have survived wars of extermination. We have survived banishment from the shores of our ancient homeland. We have survived the virtual obliteration of our religion. And we have no external threats to confront. We are blessed with a rich legacy of high education, of a strong work ethic, of service to our fellow human beings and of outstanding ethics. Above all, we are blessed with a blueprint, so succinctly captured in the Gathas of Zarathushtra, to model our own lives and to become role models for our children, neighbors, friends and community.

Let us not waste precious time in useless debates about issues that will have no relevance for the future. One hundred years from now it may not matter who wins the debate of conversion versus no conversion. Our religion is in mortal danger of surviving as a living religion. We must accept the fact that a Zoroastrian is not just one that is born into the religion, but one who lives it. Let us pass on the message of Zarathushtra and his Gathas, as Zarathushtra enjoined us to pass that message, to not just the chosen few, but to all of mankind. Let us light the torch of that message anew, so that we can say with Annie Besant, the great theosophist:

“I dream of a day when the breath of the great prophet, Zarathushtra, shall sweep again through his temples, fanning the ashes on the altars of these ancient lanes, and every altar shall flash into flames; and again from heaven the answering flames shall fall, making the Iranian religion once more what it ought to be, a beacon of light for the souls of men, one of the greatest religions of the world.”

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN RITUAL STUDIES

By
James W. Boyd and Ron G. Williams

In this conference we have heard papers defending the origins and values of Zoroastrian ritual in the Gathas, as well as arguments for relegating ritual to a secondary role in the life of this tradition. The latter view implies certain real dangers of ritual: rule-guided ritual behavior can be deadening to the reflective mind; it can reinforce rigidity and conformity and be tied to an outmoded world view that has been superseded by modern physics. Prof. Williams and I are not blind to these dangers. In this paper, however, we want to talk about another side of the face of ritual: the positive role of ritual in the present. Our presentation is in three parts. In Part I we will take a quick look at the field of ritual studies. Part II offers a proposal about the essence of ritual. And Part III suggests how all this can be applied to conference issues.

PART I: The Field of Ritual Studies

Ritual Studies is a newly emerging field within Religious Studies. Religious Studies is a Western intellectual discipline, which has concentrated on doctrine, world view, myth and legend, and de-emphasized ritual.¹ In the last two or three decades, however, there has been a "ritual turn" in the field. In addition to seeing doctrine, philosophy, and narrative as legitimate objects of academic concern, some scholars have begun to study ritual in its own right. To accomplish this turn, academics in the field have had to overcome the "widespread discrediting of religious practices," which generally characterized Religious Studies.²

This discrediting has many sources, not least of which is the Western "protestant" cast of mind which subordinates ritual practice to theological/discursive meaning. On the positive side, this privileging of word over act has encouraged careful study of myth and cosmology, but it has left ritual practice isolated and misunderstood.³

Besides this protestant preference for the word, academics have not remained immune to another aspect of the modern world: the dominance of what might be called a "technical rationalism." It is from this perspective that

ritual is often viewed as a failed technology. Ritual is construed as magic, and magic in turn is claimed to lack real causal efficacy and, hence, to be incompatible with the modern world view.

A number of dramatic changes in the intellectual world, however, have brought about what we have called the “ritual turn.” First, there was the rise of functionalism in the social and psychological sciences--a shift due to Freud/Jung, Durkheim, and others. Functionalists saw rituals as accomplishing real world effects that had to do with psychological maturation or with the maintenance of power relations in society. These views were reductionistic, ignoring any religious meaning in ritual practice, but they did focus on ritual practice.

Then the rise of phenomenology led to an even more focused concentration on ritual, and marked the beginning of Ritual Studies proper. These scholars sought to attend to the basic features of the ritual performance, which resulted in new kinds of investigative tools, including ethnographic procedures, choreographic notations, and cinematographic techniques.⁴ These techniques have the advantage of highlighting the ritual itself rather than narrative interpretations of it. But this is not enough. Detailed, thick, description of ritual activity is incomplete without theoretical insight as to what is going on.

Now that we have before us an increasingly heterogeneous collection of accounts of ritual performances from many cultures, one of the principle tasks in Ritual Studies is to explicate the essential, and thus universal, features of ritualized actions. This is not only a matter of devising typologies of various kinds of rituals. It is, more fundamentally, coming face to face with the philosophical question: “What, in essence, is ritual?” As you might imagine, this question resists easy answers. And yet, if we cannot identify the features common to all and only ritualized actions, then, philosophically speaking, though we may know many things about ritual, we do not know the first thing!

PART II. A Proposal About the Essence of Ritual

We will pause for a brief, visual illustration. This sequence from a Shinto ritual raises the question we wish now to consider: What happens

when an ordinary action like spontaneously clapping one's hands is transformed into a liturgical ritual act?

A recent work by Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, titled *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, has made a serious attempt to provide criteria to help determine what counts as a ritualized activity.⁵ Although they do not provide all the answers, their work is one of the most promising efforts to define "ritual." These authors concentrate on the process of **ritualization**, and focus on the question: **What takes place when an ordinary, mundane act becomes a ritualized act?**

In part, their answer is this: ritualized acts have been removed from the normal nexus of intentions, goals, purposes, and motives which give ordinary acts their identity and meaning.

To explain this claim, consider normal, ordinary actions: Ordinary actions are constituted by, and understood in terms of, the intentions governing them. For example, we see a man kneeling on the floor of a cell and apparently talking with someone though there is no one there. Have we seen a madman or someone in prayer? We need to know his intention to know what act we have witnessed.

Or: consider this simple gesture [Boyd hands a book to Williams]: Until we know the primary intention governing this act, **we do not know what act it is**. Is it a matter of keeping a promise to return the book, or is it an illustrative act for a conference paper, or is it gift giving? These different intentions constitute different acts, which is again to say that normally, our acts are embedded in, and defined by, a complicated flow of intentions and purposes.

With this as background, Humphrey and Laidlaw claim that, in contrast to ordinary action, there is a separate mode of ritual action. Ritual acts are acts which have a different relation to the kinds of intentions we have been considering. The identity of ritual acts does **not** depend on the (normal) intentions with which they are done, for they are instances of acts stipulated in advance and replicated every time the ritual is performed.

To return to the example of handing over the book: Imagine that this kind of gesture becomes ritualized--it is part of a liturgy in a religious tradition. It will be stipulated that at a certain point in a sequence of ritual

acts, one priest will hand a certain book to another. If this process has been carried out in the prescribed way, the ritual act has been performed, irrespective of whatever other intentions the priest may have. If on one occasion the priest who is handing over the book has the intention of carrying out his vows, and on another occasion, has the intention of expressing his reverence for the written tradition, these differing intentions do not constitute different ritual acts. On both occasions, the priest has performed the “same ritual act,” no matter what his other intentions are. So, a ritual act differs ontologically from non-ritualized actions. The identity of such an action depends only on the fact that the practitioner intentionally replicates a stipulated kind of ritual action.

This brings us to Humphrey and Laidlaw's second claim: the ritual act is not performed unintentionally. But all that is required is a certain minimal intention. In the case of the ritual transfer of the book, the one relevant intention is to replicate the prescribed pattern of action. This intention, the authors call “the ritual commitment.” There is much more to be said about the meanings of ritual acts, but here the point is that **the intentionality involved in the ritual commitment to imitate a kind of action differs from ordinary acts which are differentiated by the varying intentions that govern them.**

We can summarize these claims as well as deepen the notion of stipulation, by saying that **there are senses in which a ritual act is both mine and not mine.** It is mine, in that I do it intentionally: there is the commitment to perform the ritual act. But it is not mine, because I am carrying out an act prescribed by others; I am aiming at the realization of a pre-existing, stipulated, ritual act. Typically, stipulation requires imitating a named practice, ostensibly demonstrated. We can surmise that the principle way the priest learned to do the ritualized act of handing over the book was by watching it demonstrated, rather than from internalizing propositional rules or being provided with theoretical explanations of how to do it.

Another point made by Humphrey and Laidlaw is this: meaning is related to the ritual act, but **the identity of a ritual act is not determined by its meaning.** In our example of the priest performing the same ritual act but with differing intentions, his intentions may indicate different ways of understanding the ritual, i.e., differing ways of apprehending it, but ritual identity lies in performing the act as prescribed.

The first order of business, ritually speaking, is to imitate a named practice, which can in turn be given meanings. But these meanings, by which the priest apprehends the imitated act do not determine that act -- the interpretation doesn't change the fact that the act has been performed. Hence, ritual acts can maintain their identities over time, in spite of changes in interpretations of them, or theological disputes surrounding them. This is true as well of whatever meaning is attached to the act while it is being learned. One may learn that the act has a certain meaning and later come to have a more profound understanding of it; all the while, the repetitions of the act remain instances of the same ritual action.

The consequences of this point are far-reaching. If a ritual act were ontologically determined by its meaning, then it would be trapped in that meaning. But if meanings result from ways of apprehending the ritual activity itself, then ritual acts can not only survive over time in spite of the vicissitudes of interpretation, but can grow in meaning through reinterpretation.

Humphrey and Laidlaw put this by saying that ritual acts are **archetypal** in the sense that they present themselves as independent objects, natural kinds, as it were, as if they existed from time immemorial. Natural kinds, like lions or gold, do not come with their meanings already delineated; rather, they are there to be understood, theorized about, and reinterpreted. Similarly, archetypal ritual acts are there to be both imitated and apprehended. Apprehension may range from the imposition of meanings and emotional responses that are diverse and subjective, to socially shared interpretations.

So, ritual acts have a *sui generis* aspect to them, which, though often closely aligned with meaning, have a certain independence from meaning. In this regard, scholars both inside and outside various religious traditions are sometimes tempted to speak of ritual as transcending meaning or as involving a special kind of non-discursive meaning, that cannot be exhausted by propositions. In these senses, ritual acts are sometimes said to be "empty." In any event, whether the act appears to convey religious meanings, to be a natural kind object in search of meaning, or to be "empty" of meaning, the essence of the act stands aloof from the swirl of interpretations and intentions in which it is embedded.

AN EXAMPLE FROM CINEMA

We will summarize the Humphrey/Laidlaw view of the nature of ritual with an example from the cinema. In Francois Truffaut's film "The Green Room," a morose protagonist builds a chapel full of burning candles to keep alive the memory of friends lost during the Great War. Each day fresh candles must be lit from the spent ones in a prescribed way. Thus, a common mundane activity -- lighting candles -- has become ritualized in the chapel setting. The question is: "What has changed?" What makes these new procedures ritual acts?

The answer, as we have seen, is in terms of the different role of intention in the two contrasting cases. Ordinarily, candles are lit to illuminate a room, or to set a romantic mood, or for any number of other reasons. Illuminating a room is not the same action as setting a mood -- though both acts involve lighting candles. This is an ontological point about ordinary action: the identity of an ordinary act is essentially related to the primary intention governing the act -- whether one intends to provide light or create a mood.

But once the generic act of candle lighting has become ritualized in the chapel, the act has been plucked from the usual nexus of intentions, motives, purposes, and goals. It is now stipulated how and when the candles are to be replaced, and the new ones lit. As long as Truffaut's protagonist performs the required acts in the prescribed way, they count as repetitions of the stipulated ritual act -- no matter what other intentions may come into play. In the film, the chapel builder enlists the help of an assistant. It develops that she has different motives for engaging in the daily ceremony of the candles. He wants to keep alive the threatened memory, almost the very existence, of the dead comrades. She wants to celebrate the lives of those dead ones and bring their example to bear on the present and future. But because it is a ritualized act, these different intentions -- memorializing vs. drawing on exemplars for the future -- are irrelevant to the identity of the act. It is the ritual act, provided that the lighting is accomplished as prescribed. **This disconnection of ordinary intention from the identity of the act constitutes the ritualization of the generic action of candle lighting.**

But as we have said, there is one relevant intention necessary for the ritualized mode, the “ritual commitment” to perform the particular act of lighting the candles in a stipulated way. And as a stipulated act, this ceremony of candle lighting takes on the character of being archetypal, in the sense that it presents itself to the protagonist and his assistant (and one day to future participants) as an act that is independent of their ordinary activity, inhabiting a special realm of its own. Both liturgists, in turn, **apprehend** the act, imposing different meanings and emotional responses. The candle lighting emerges as an archetypal act rich in meaning and at the same time in search of meaning.

PART III. Applications of This View to Conference Issues

Humphrey and Laidlaw argue that ritual is a unique kind of human activity. Their account is as important for what it denies as for what it asserts.

For example, in essence rituals are **not discursive**; they do not speak to us in rational, propositional tones, but rather present themselves as archetypal **actions** and artful **images**. Similarly, rituals typically do not straightforwardly convey messages, in the sense of transplanting ancient ideas into contemporary minds.

One consequence of these features of ritual is that insofar as the identity of the ritual act is not determined by its social/religious interpretations, but is instead an activity already in place and in search of meaning, the status of ritual is bound to be controversial.

To develop this idea, we will consider again some criticisms of ritual. One far-reaching criticism focuses on ritual vs. everyday life. In the Jain tradition, there is the often-reiterated warning that “nothing can be done in ritual that cannot be done better in real life.” That is, real life commitments to ethical deeds trump ritual deeds which may be seen as artifice; what really counts is sincere living. Such criticisms may hit the mark in specific cases; and on a deeper level, given the essence of the ritual act, this is an inevitable concern. If Humphrey and Laidlaw are correct in their analysis, ritual acts are in a sense removed from the flow of purpose, motive, and intention which alone makes ethical assessment possible. So

ritual can always seem a detached and morally frivolous routine divorced from everyday life.

Such doubts can easily be expanded to include two additional charges: (i) that ritual is too often a mind-deadening repetition of meaningless acts and formulas, and (ii) that when it is done in this way, it is inauthentic or even hypocritical. Ritual actions do not issue from one's own personal consciousness but are mere imitations that lack spontaneity and personal integrity.

A final family of criticism concerns ritual vs. words. These criticisms compare ritual action unfavorably with discursive language. One such claim is that ritual has been superseded by philosophy -- the discursive dimension of human activity. Here we enter an age-old debate that is larger than just the issue of ritual; it is the debate between those who privilege the Word (and hence philosophical, theological and scientific discourses) and those who privilege the act or image (the dramatic and visual arts, all cousins to ritual performance). Those who place these two aspects of human activity in opposition, and then choose one to the exclusion of the other, are reminiscent of what we called earlier the "protestant" cast of mind which claims that images too quickly become idols and that truth is accessed and expressed only via ideas, words, and doctrine. In the West, this debate began with the Old Testament; and Plato emphasizes "the ancient quarrel between philosophy and art." The criticism of ritual in particular religious traditions may thus be a surface issue revealing much deeper preferences.

What is interesting here is that these doubts about ritual are made plausible if not inevitable by the nature of the ritual act. If Humphrey and Laidlaw are correct, the ritual act is akin to a scripted performance and is ontologically prior to interpretation, resists reduction to doctrine, and can exist without a propositional equivalent, so it can easily appear meaningless or irrational.

What we are arguing here is that these criticisms follow naturally from the nature of ritual: i.e., that ritual is subjected to such criticisms is related to its essence as much as to particular historical factors. These negative doubts have substantive, *prima facie* justification and may be warranted in particular cases. However, they may also constitute an

incomplete and misleading picture of the rightful powers of ritual. Let us look at the positive side of ritual.

(1) Consider the first set of criticisms which decry ritual's distance from real life. That ritual is not "real" life comes from the fact that the ritual act is outside the normal flow of intention which makes ethical assessment possible. But even on the Humphrey/Laidlaw account, which insists on a gulf between ritual and everyday acts, one's ritual act is still his or hers, and it is done intentionally -- with the particular intention they call the "ritual commitment." That particular ritual intention and the acts related to it, will be open to ethical/religious assessment. The questions "why engage in ritual acts?" and "how best can the ritual commitment be carried out?" invite ethical reflection, and it may be that, done rightly, ritual activity is a profoundly ethical deed.

(2) Secondly, though ritual is not ethical reflection, the ritual life may significantly contribute to the practitioner's moral growth and even to an expansion of moral knowledge. We have explained elsewhere⁶ how regular repetition of an unchanging practice may be, in complex and indirect ways, an instrument for growth in righteousness. Metaphorically, the ritual serves as a companionable guide, a moral template, and a compelling aid inviting one to moral reflection.

(3) Thirdly, insofar as ritual is more closely allied with the arts, and insofar as art does what only it can do, ritual may well contribute an irreducible and irreplaceable aspect of a cultural and religious tradition. To force it into a minor role, a decoration of theology, is a waste of ritual's powers. To be sure, it is art's misery as well as its glory that it is neither real life nor discursive expression; but the sometimes helpful criticisms based on those facts can also lead to the recognition that ritual is not ordinary life lived badly, rather, there can be a ritual life which may be lived well. Those who fail to fully acknowledge the powers of art, will likely fail to probe the secrets of ritual.

(4) Finally, ritual acts, because they are underdetermined by meaning, and aloof from intention, may appear in some interesting senses "empty." This opens up the possibility that ritual can be uniquely fit for the display and expression of whatever aspects of the sacred are not well got at by word, theory, means/end structures, and the projects of the ego. Even

though rituals may aim at real-world effects, they also interrogate us whether anything lies outside of the rational calculation of means. Ritual experience may touch the sublime that philosophy and theology try to name and define.

CONCLUSION

How then does all this relate to the focus of this Conference: the Gathic Vision in the Next Millennium? As we have heard, one type of question that can be asked of the Gathas is, what is the status and role of ritual in these texts? This is an important historical, linguistic, and ultimately empirical question. But there is another equally important question -- which Wittgenstein has taught us to ask -- and which should be discussed, now and at future conferences: What is the present role and reality of ritual in the lives of those who find it religiously significant, (and, we might add, what is the experience and understanding of those who do not find it significant)? Wittgenstein shifted his attention from the origin and authority of ritual to the present effects of ritual and the search for a description which would bring out, for example, our experience of ritual and perhaps its sense of "depth." He pointed out that origins may privilege ritual and yet in the present ritual may vanish; or: ritual may have arisen later than textual origins, and yet flourish and be the coherence of the faith in the present; so contemporary ritual and its origins are not logically linked; only empirically.

Part of the importance of this shift in emphasis -- to the present role of ritual in people's lives -- is that it points us toward the future and may lead us to ask about ritual's potential, its degrees of freedom, its prospects for survival. We must be careful not to confine ritual to its origins -- for it moves beyond them every day, is open to new modes of apprehension, and is responsive to current challenges.

From the perspective of the study of ritual in general, we have tried to indicate something of ritual's uniqueness and complexity. Most religious traditions have trusted their founding vision and subsequent insights to two distinct but related streams of expression and exploration: the way of the ritual Gesture and the way of the reflective Word. So it's a serious matter when one stream comes under fire and perhaps faces extinction.

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN RITUAL STUDIES

As we said at the outset, now that we are academic heirs to functionalism and phenomenology, and have multiple accounts before us of ritual performances in many religious traditions, the time is at hand to seek more theoretical insights into the very essence of ritual -- what is ritual, what is its secret, that human beings continue to perform it and debate it across time and cultures. We suspect that though we now know many things about ritual, we do not yet know the first thing.⁷

Notes:

¹ Theodore W. Jennings, Jr.. 1987. "Ritual Studies and Liturgical Theology: An Invitation to Dialogue." Journal of Ritual Studies 1/1:35-56. See p. 39.

² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³ As Jennings says, it has led to the dismissal of ritual as "merely illustrative of the oddity of primitive mentality." p.40.

⁴ That is, phenomenological approaches concentrated on ritual performance "instead of substituting the narrative..., or discursive 'explanations' for the real meaning of the ritual." p. 41.

⁵ Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw. 1994. The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁶ Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd. 1993. Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

⁷ A video sequence of an Afrinagan ceremony was shown during the reading of the last paragraph. J. W. Boyd and R. G. Williams. 1992. A Zoroastrian Ritual: The Afrinagan. Videotape: Ft. Collins: Colorado State University.

GATHAS: DO THEY UNITE US OR DIVIDE US?

By
Dolly Dastoor

The title of my talk is a provocative title, deliberately chosen to make people reflect on the divisions which seem to be pulling at our community from within, regarding the precepts and practices of the religion. At present we appear to be in a state of confusion with no unified world view of the religion.

But how did this divergence in religious thought come about? Were we always so divided? In this presentation I will try to step back and analyze the situation from a historical and psycho-social conceptual framework, to see, if we could start a healing process of reversing this divisive trend, by building bridges and not erecting further fences.

To answer the question: Do the *Gathas* unite or divide us, we have to look at:

- I. The issues on which the community is divided;
- II. History of the development of this division;
- III. How we bridge this rift.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there will be no value judgments attached to either side of the equation, no attempt will be made to belittle or underscore the fervor and beliefs of people who subscribe to any one view because that too is the result of a historical process. We must always bear in mind that on both sides of this divide are religious people who are well intentioned and well meaning, genuine in their beliefs.

The role which I have ascribed to myself, is to sift through religious history and view the facts through the lenses of a lay person who is also a psychologist. As we stand on the threshold of a new millennium, it is only proper, that we look at the evolving influence of the *Gathas* from a historical and psycho-social framework, on our religious thought, and beliefs, our spirituality, and as a consequence on our behavior as a community.

I. ISSUES ON WHICH THE COMMUNITY IS DIVIDED

At present there are several issues which are pulling the community apart. These have been succinctly outlined by Adi Davar in his presentation “Leadership for bridging differences in the community” at the 10th North American Zoroastrian Congress in July 1996. The chief issue, as I see it, is the question of marriage outside the community and of allowing people of other religions (spouses and others) to formally accept and adopt the Zoroastrian faith. Some Zarthushtis feel that the *Gathas* with their philosophy of “freedom choice” and “universality”, are encouraging such an action. They feel very threatened by this philosophy in their pursuit of preservation of tradition in a homogenous community.

Much has been written about both these issues by people who are labeled “liberal” and “orthodox”. Let me clarify as to how I define these labels, always bearing in mind, that these definitions are value neutral.

Liberals are Zarthushtis, who emphasize the ethical teachings of the *Gathas*, and find the priestly rituals less than meaningful and consider the Avestan *mantras* irrelevant and meaningless. They seek refinement of their heritage, a liberation from what they perceive to be outmoded practices and concepts. They advocate a return to the more fundamental teachings of the prophet. They are in a sense fundamentalists.

The orthodox, on the other hand, are those, who try to uphold the traditions of the faith as practiced over centuries, without questioning. They believe in the value of rituals and ceremonies for propitious reasons. They, too, believe in the *Gathas* from a practical point of view, and not only as moral-ethical principles.

But fundamentalism comes in many shapes and sizes. The Webster Dictionary, 9th edition, defines fundamentalism as a “movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles”. Thus defined there can be fundamentalists among the liberals as well as among the orthodox.

The creation of these two ways of thinking is developmentally determined. The sensibility of liberals is totally at variance with that of the orthodox and is established very early in life by family upbringing. A child, who is encouraged to be sensitive to the personal feelings of others, asked to inspect his/her own feelings, made to learn to judge right from wrong in terms of ethical standards internalizes control and begins to question external authority.

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The child, in an orthodox family, on the other hand, grows up learning values in terms of external social controls, explanations needed by the child are responded to, in terms of authority, seniority, e.g. when a child asks a question he is responded by "because I say so ---, this is the way it has to be done ---, you are the older child and it is your responsibility to do so ---", etc. The child, thus, becomes attuned to organized paths of thought and behavior, outside of himself and accepts religious facts on blind faith.

In actual reality very few people fall into either of these two mutually exclusive water tight compartments. People are generally middle of the road. Many of us are traditionalists who follow traditional practices but are willing to RELOOK, RELEARN and RECONSTRUCT our beliefs and practices if these 3Rs are rooted in sustained learning, knowledge, wisdom and objective review of history.

II. HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIVISION

I will now try and give a brief overview of the evolutionary history of religious thought. For the more serious students of history, I refer you to Prof. Farhang Mehr's book "*The Zoroastrian Tradition*". Dasturji Dhalla's book "*History of Zoroastrianism*" and "*Outlines of Parsi History*" by Dasturji Mirza.

The thread which runs through all of them is that religion does not operate, or evolve in a vacuum. It is nurtured against a backdrop of deep-rooted traditional beliefs. It interacts with and is influenced by other religions, cults, ideologies and sociologies prevalent at the time. It evolves in its own framework and is interpreted by people to suit their own political and economic objectives. This is nowhere more true, than when, the religion is the religion of the State, practiced by seasoned politicians, to suit their political aims and gains. This was true in yesteryears and so very true even today.

The study of change in religious thought, requires not only advancement in the research of linguistics, syntax and grammar but also research into the socio-political conditions of the different eras in which the doctrinal changes gradually seeped in. Even though we have gained great knowledge in the structure of the language of the *Gathas* from their similarities with the *Rig Veda*, this comparison cannot give us adequate insight into the socio-political environment and culture of the Gathic, the Achaemenian, the Parthian and the Sassanian worlds.

History tells us that with the establishment of the Achaemenian dynasty, where the kings were very supportive of the religion, the practice of Zoroastrianism got a major boost. The stone inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes clearly testify to the adoration of Ahura Mazda. In this period, the power of the Magis, who were the priestly clan of the 6 tribes of the Median Empire, was crushed. It was only after the Magis embraced the religion of Zarathushtra that they gradually began to re-enter the mainstream Iranian Society. With the defeat of the Selucids and the establishment of the Parthians the assimilation of Magis was complete. They appropriated Zoroastrian priesthood and athravanship exclusively to themselves reaching their highest priestly powers under the Sassanians.

By the first century CE, as communication became difficult between the people of Western Iran who spoke Pahlavi, a new language, born in the Parthian period, and the people of eastern Iran, who continued to speak Avestan, which was by now beginning to decay, the need was felt, for the transliteration of the Avestan texts, into Pahlavi and this task fell to the learned Magis. Pahlavi became the court language of the Parthians and the Sassanians. It survived the downfall of the Sassanian empire for at least 3 more centuries i.e. till the 9th century CE.

I SEE HERE THE FIRST STEP IN THE SYNCRETIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS TEXTS

After a lapse of 500 years with the ascendancy of the Sassanians in 226 CE, Zoroastrianism once again became the religion of the Kings and once again we see the fusion of the Church and State.

We know from history, that, after the wanton destruction of the scriptures by Alexander, the task of collecting the scattered Avestan texts, was started by Parthian King Vologes I, continued by Ardeshir Papakan, the first Sassanian king, with his high priest Tansar, and completed by Shapur II with the help of the illustrious Dastur and Prime Minister Adarbad Maharspand.

Commentaries were added to the Pahlavi transcriptions which came to be known as *ZAND AVESTA*. This exercise was at least a 1000 years after the Avestan texts had been orally transmitted. By now, society had evolved, thinking had changed, and patriarchy was well established, hence the preparation of the texts was likely to have been influenced by extraneous factors.

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Manichaeism was at its height in this period, and the faith of the people was misguided by Mani's heretical teachings. King Shapur declared that the work as collected, was the most authoritative and anything outside of that, should not be followed. Even though the canon was declared closed by the edict of Shapur II, work on rendering the Avestan texts into Pahlavi continued long after the downfall of the Sassanian empire.

THIS, I THINK, WAS THE SECOND STEP IN THE SYNCRETIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS TEXTS.

In the Sassanian period, as religion played an important role in the socio-political life of the Iranian people, many religious, philosophical and literary works appeared in the Pahlavi language. These works were written by orthodox followers of the faith as well as by heretics, by philosophers as well as by politicians. Hence each text needs to be studied in the context of the psycho-social background of the author.

In the latter half of the Sassanian period, further syncretization of the religious texts took place with the development of the Persian alphabet. By now spoken Pahlavi had fallen into disuse. People could no longer understand the religious texts written in that language. Hence parts of the Avesta, which had been rendered into Pahlavi a couple of centuries ago, were now being rendered into Persian with additional commentaries added to them. This new ensemble came to be known as *PAZAND*. Also in the 6th Century CE, a new 46 letter Avestan script was developed and Avesta was finally written in the Avestan script. To complicate matters further Pazand was written in the Avestan script. (Pahlavi written in Avestan script is known as Pazand). Additional prayers were composed in Pazand by the priests and added into the Khordeh Avesta.

THIS IN MY OPINION WAS THE THIRD STEP IN THE SYNCRETIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS TEXTS.

We now go down history to the 7th century CE in the period of the Arab-Islamic invasion of Iran. In this period not only were the libraries burnt and books destroyed but there was a determination to substitute Islam for Zoroastrianism and Arabic for Persian. To minimize damage, from such a catastrophe, a number of priests compiled the extant fragments of the scriptures and put down on paper the rules and commentaries kept in memory.

Let me digress here a little and mention that the history of "oral traditions" is full of people like the "garrots" of Africa, who for want of a better term, are described, as specially trained human tape-recorders. Their

sole job, was to memorize for posterity, religious literature. We should be eternally grateful to them for preserving religious knowledge in the early part of our recorded history and for the salvage operation during the latter part of the Sassanian period.

However when the “oral tradition” got transmitted in “written form”, any number of problems in distortion, ranging from, different pronunciation of the same word by different people, to different meaning to same sounding words, could have arisen in the process, e.g. the Pahlavi script contained only 12 primary letters so that one letter had more than one phonetic value. We also know from recent scientific research on memory, that distortion in engrams can take place in each step of the memory consolidation process. Even if the religious texts were recorded verbatim in written form, commentaries could not have escaped the thinking of the commentators.

Of course the same argument holds for the *Gathas* as well. They, too, were recorded in written form, from the oral form, sometime, in the early part of “recorded history”. But the important fact to bear in mind is, that the *Gathas*, for some unknown reason, did not undergo transformation into different languages, only transliteration. They remained linguistically pure.

We are told that the Zarathustis who migrated to India took the holy texts of the Khordeh Avesta, Vendidad, and the Visperad with them. They relied mostly on the Avesta Zand, i.e., the Pahlavi commentaries and the Pahlavi books written during the Islamic period. As there were very few people who understood Pahlavi, the knowledge of the religious texts was the prerogative of the elite. By the 12th and 13th century these 9th century Pahlavi texts were being written in the Sanskrit script.

In the last part of the 19th century a Gujarati version of the Avestan texts also appeared based on the Pahlavi, Sanskrit and Persian renderings. As late as the 19th century, with the growing knowledge of philology, efforts were finally made by scholars to approach Avestan texts, in the original language, independently of the Pahlavi renderings.

In the middle of the 19th century, K. R Cama introduced to Parsi scholars, the science of comparative philology and the scientific method of interpreting sacred books. The first result of this critical study was the realization that the extant Avestan texts were not composed at a single period by one person but were the product of many persons who worked at various times. The *Gathas* on the other hand, were shown to be the oldest in time of composition, authorship and linguistic purity. The prophet’s work

was continued by his immediate disciples and extended over a very long period after him. Obviously the immediate impression of the prophet must have become fainter in successive generations.

Cama was also able to show that the religion, as manifested in the Younger Avesta, had departed in certain respects from the religion of the *Gathas* and the subsequent compositions showed signs of degeneration both in substance and in style. The simple and abstract spirit of the *Gathas* was blurred, if not lost, and the content of the later texts became more complex and concrete. Nature worship which Zarathushtra strove to supplant by a higher type of ethical religion was shown to have been reinstated in these later texts.

Gathic ideals lingered but it failed to inspire Pahlavi writers with its abstract tones. The Pahlavi writers, influenced by Christianity, had become fascinated by miracles and the concrete side of the practice of the religion.

Some Zarathustis, now hailed the *Gathas*, as providing a self-sufficient religious system in itself. They felt that an exuberant outgrowth of dogmatic theology and ceremonial observances had supplanted the buoyant simplicity of the Gathic teachings; they felt that what was being practiced, represented a decline from the pure teachings of Zarathustra. The orthodox, they argued, attributed to Zarathustra, doctrines that he never preached.

They advocated a return to the original purity of the faith, by stripping off the accretions that had gathered round the pure canon of the prophet. They advocated the removal of the haze of ignorance and bigotry that had overclouded the light of their excellent religion.

This new thinking was highly sacrilegious and heretical to the orthodoxy. The new evidences gathered from philological research were very startling indeed to the Parsis who were accustomed to attributing all Avestan compositions to Zarathustra and who had never approached their sacred texts from a historical perspective.

These statements aroused strong resentment from the laity and priests alike. Fortunately, more sober opinion intervened and declared, that, while the *Gathas* should be taken as the norm, there should also be admitted into the Zoroastrian canon such parts of the later scriptures which were in accord with the Gathic spirit.

The problem at once arose as to who was going to decide what was in accord with the Gathic spirit and what was not. A new controversy opened amid more bitter feelings. To our great distress and misfortune, the priestly class of the day had deteriorated in scholarship and was not able to give scholarly direction.

Here, we must note, that almost all religions of the world experience predicaments of interpretation of the WORD OF GOD. Even the KORAN and the BIBLE are not exempt from these predicaments. God's message, revealed to the prophet, is compiled by the prophet's disciples at different times and parts get added to it by devout followers in subsequent periods, depending on the socio-politics of the times. Hence doctrinal controversies stem from varying interpretations of the *Gathas*, as well as, divergences in the Younger Avesta.

If we look at the *Gathas*, and the subsequent literature, the contents become contradictory. This is not to say, that the contents of the Younger Avesta are wrong, they are just different. However, that is also our tradition, probably better engraved in our psyche and collective unconscious than the *Gathas*. For the simple reason that the traditions as prescribed in the Younger Avesta have been known to us longer than the ethical principles of the *Gathas*, which saw the light of general knowledge only in this century. To me, as to many others in the audience, the *Gathas* were names of special prayers said on the 5 days of the Muktd ceremonies. I had no clue as to what they meant and what message they contained. That was the knowledge of an average Zoroastrian child. A sad state of affairs indeed.

To recapitulate from a layman's point of view, the history of Zoroastrian religious thought can be divided into 4 phases:

1. GATHIC PHASE where religion had a moralizing, liberating function. Its aim was to remove social injustice and superstition. The religion as practiced by the Achaemenians was used in a moral and spiritual context.
2. POST ACHAEMENIAN PHASE where religion was dominated by Magis, with the re-integration of pre-Zoroastrian concepts, reintegration of rituals to ward off evil spirits. Younger Avestan texts were a product of this period.
3. SASSANIAN PHASE where religion was used as a "unifying" force for power, and preserving territorial integrity. With the rise in corruption,

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dissent and deterioration of socio-economic condition, religion was used as a “legitimizing” for the continuation of the Sassanian dynasty.

4. POST-SASSANIAN PHASE where religion both in India and Iran was used as a “cementing” force to keep people glued to each other, to preserve customs, culture, traditions and knowledge as remembered. It was a phase of survival which made the community inward looking.

III. HOW DO WE BRIDGE THIS DIVIDE?

So far, I have traced the development of the divergence in religious thought within the community. In the next section, I shall try to see, if it is possible to bridge this divide. But before I attempt to do that, I would like you to take a moment to reflect on the question, whether this divide is real and if it is necessary?

Farrokh Mistree, who is a professor of mechanical engineering, but a lay person like me, in his presentation, “Two Models, Two Paths, One Community” at the 8th North American Zoroastrian Congress in 1992, analyzed the rift in the community, and presented four alternatives as possible solutions, leaving the choice to the individual practitioner.

His alternatives were:

1. Follow the *Gathas* alone without the use of any rituals.
2. Follow the *Gathas* plus some selected rituals, rejecting Middle Persian and later Parsi/Iranian traditions.
3. Follow the *Gathas* and use the Middle Persian texts to understand the principles embedded in the *Gathas*.
4. Practice the religion based on faith alone.

Following this analysis, Farrokh Mistree makes a case for 2 models of development for the community.

MODEL I:

Gathas alone represent the core of the religion. Rituals are irrelevant to the living of the religion.

MODEL II:

Gathas together with other religious texts and rituals form the core of the religion.

He further suggests that those who subscribe to model I should develop a neo-Zoroastrian church. But do the two models have to be mutually exclusive as Farrokh Mistree expounds in his article in the FEZANA Journal, Summer 1996? To form a new church will be a quick-fix simple solution without any genuine effort to appreciate opposing positions. Can our small community absorb this division?

Now let me go back to the original question. Do the *Gathas* unite us or divide us?

If we follow the models as Farrokh has suggested then the *Gathas* will divide us. But do we have to go that far? Can we not find a happy medium between the two extreme views of religion; *one, resting on the premise that religion is of divine revelation, and all that is handed down from the past, forming the tradition of the people, is sacred and unchangeable, and the other view resting on the premise that religion is a philosophy, a set of ethics and guiding principles only for living an ethical life.* The Truth lies somewhere in between. There has to be an amalgam of both these views, but an amalgam based on studied choices, not based on a hotchpotch of ingredients which would give us indigestion.

Human life cannot be stripped of mystery altogether. Man is a spiritual being and rationalism, is not the whole of human nature. All religions have superimposed religiosity and rituals on their prophet's teaching to deepen the faith of the practitioner. The danger lies when the superimposition is allowed to become the essential. This would cause cognitive dissonance.

In actual fact we need both: the sublime ethical principles of the *Gathas* as well as the texts, commentaries and rituals even though they may have been developed centuries after the prophet, in as much as they provide clarification of the principles of the *Gathas*.

CONCLUSION

It needs to be emphasized and re-emphasized that dissent and questioning is not heresy. I have made no attempt to expound the contents of the ethical principles of the *Gathas* or the irrelevance of any of the other texts. I have tried only to trace a developmental line of the divergence of religious vision which has come to view the *Gathas* in isolation of all other texts and to view all other texts as superseding the contents of the *Gathas*.

GATHAS: DO THEY UNITE US OR DIVIDE US?

Religion defeats its purpose when it degenerates into dogmatic theology only.

In the spirit of bringing about harmony in our small community, I earnestly request our priests and scholars of different disciplines, with FEZANA acting as facilitator, that, they should together, set up a task force to study objectively, the two opposing views in the context of history, sociology, and anthropology of the different times, to study the various ceremonies, rituals and practices against the back-drop of the *Gathas* and collectively agree on their relevance and applicability in changing times.

What will unite or divide the community will be our own motivation, attitude and flexibility, not the *GATHAS*. If believers on both sides of the equation talk to each other with understanding, with an appreciation of where the other is coming from, then the *GATHAS* will never divide us but will be the great unifying force leading the community to greater heights.

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ASHA: THE ESSENCE OF DIN-I-MAZDAYASNI

By
Kaemerz P. Dotiwala

*Yatha ahu vairyo atha ratush ashatchit hacha,
venghuesh dazda manangho shyaothanam angheush Mazdai
khshatremcha ahurai a yim drigubyo dadat vastarem.*

The *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* prayer also known as the *Ahunavar*, according to Yasna 19.2-3, is said to be the prayer that *Ahura Mazda* (God) prayed to create His creations. It forms the very foundation of the corpus of Zarthushti prayers.

The translation reads, “He (*Ahura Mazda*) is as much the desired Master (*ahu*) as the Judge (*ratu*), according to *Asha*. (He is) the doer of the acts of good intention (*vohu manah*), of life. To *Ahura Mazda* (is) the kingdom (*Khashathra*), whom they have established as pastor for the poor.”

This prayer holds the “key” to enlightened and good leadership, based on the Law of *Asha*. In this prayer, one declares one’s desire for both the physical and spiritual Lords (*ahu*) and (*ratu*), who are to be recognized in accordance with the immutable Law of Nature -- *Asha* (truth). *Ahu* and *ratu* may be seen as the physical and spiritual counterparts of man which, when realized through introspection, are the existential realities of Truth (*Asha*). It is upon the foundation of this truth (*Asha*) that the (good) actions (*shyaothana*) in life are possible, though only when one apprehends the importance of the Kingdom of God as well as the gift of the good mind for the sake of the Lord of Wisdom (*Ahura Mazda*) Himself. A realization of these esoteric principles enables the “One who knows” (*Ashavan*) to help those in need on a physical, psychological and spiritual level.

Let us now delve into this Law of *Asha*, and see how it has impacted a whole community, its culture and if internalized today, how it could have a positive impact on bringing peace and harmony in our bereft world.

The concept of *Asha* is the doctrine of Natural Law in one of its early appearances. It is the Cosmic Principle which makes the cosmos what it is, and at the same time provides the basis for moral life and moral judgment.

It is because Zarathushtra bases his religious message and ethics on apprehending and applying the Law of *Asha* and not on a set of moral rules to obey, that his religion *Din-i-Mazdayasni* is a reflective religion rather than a prescriptive one.

Asha connotes the eternal, immutable and causative law that governs the universe. It is also the divine law that signifies the ideal moral, social and moral order that should prevail in the world, as well as one that regulates the spiritual and corporeal world. It is for this reason that in *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, the natural and divine laws are the same. Therefore, no act can be right unless it is congruous with the Law Of *Asha*.

No exact counterpart of the word *Asha* exists in the English language. The existence of an eternal law and order in one form or another is deeply rooted in Indo-Iranian culture. In Old Persian it is *Arta*. Its Vedic equivalent is *Rta*.

Asha also denotes:

- (a) Truth;
- (b) Law or Order;
- (c) Right or Righteousness;
- (d) Justice.

Elucidating on the on the above mentioned four meanings of *Asha*; *Asha* is:

- (a) Truth: In the most general philosophical concept.
- (b) Order: In the cosmological workings of the universe.
- (c) Right: In the most general term reflecting moral correctness.
- (d) Justice: When usual to denote the moral principle of a social system.

The philosophical theory of *Asha*, as the concept of Truth as reflected by *Asha*, can be explained by basing our explanation on the Zarthushti concept of the existence of the Ideal World (*Mainyu* World), and the Material or Physical World (*Gaetha* World). We can do this by characterizing these worlds as modes of existence -- existence as independent idea entities, and as material entities. According to later theological explanations, *Ahura Mazda* created the ideal existence, conceptually perfect and altogether stable. Viewed as a reality it exists as a perfect possibility rather than an actuality. *Ahura Mazda* then created the Material World which could evolve towards the perfection already envisioned by *Ahura Mazda*.

Within this Material World, there are two spiritual vectors or mentalities (*Mainyus*), called *Spenta Mainyu*, the benevolent mentality and *Angra Mainyu*, the evil mentality. (The doctrine of the two spirits appears in Yasna 30 verses 3, 4, and 5; with a reference to their followers in verse 6.)

Apprehending the conflict of the two spirits in terms of *Asha*, one can understand that *Spenta Mainyu* (Good Mentality) is good specifically because it promotes and follows the Law of *Asha*, thereby bringing the world towards the state of ideal perfection. *Angra Mainyu* (Evil Mentality) is evil precisely because it attempts to frustrate the progressive realization of *Asha*.

It is in this aspect of Gathic theology that *Asha* is interpreted as, untruths. Because, it is the true picture of the form of ideal existence, and also the ideal towards which the conflicted world evolves. Using the same framework one can further explain how *Asha* is interpreted as “right.” That thought, that word, that act is right which is in keeping with the Laws Of *Asha*, and which moves the world and it’s humanity towards that ideal existence envisioned by *Ahura Mazda* at the time of creation.

Asha is interpreted as Order or Law, because the physical world works in harmony based on certain principles (scientific principles) and can be comprehended by the mind as such. The mind judges what is in accordance with *Asha* and promotes it, thereby dispelling evil which is called *Druj* (falsehood or deceit). Moral responsibility demands individual reflection on the implication of one’s actions, because *Asha* represents the causative law, i.e. a relationship between an individual’s actions and their consequences. Therefore, when an action is based upon the principle of *Asha*, that, “right deed” produces benefits for the individual making that action, as well as for society. Conversely evil deeds harm both the agent perpetrating the evil act as well as society.

In *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, it is one’s actions that determine the direction of one’s life. An individual is free to choose his/her course of action and set the accrual of certain consequences in motion.

An important point to remember is that, the consequence of each action is predetermined, but the choice of action for the person is not. That is, each one of us has total freedom to choose his/her actions. Thus, the fate of each person is not preordained. However, once the choice is made and the direction of that choice is set, the consequences of an individuals thoughts, words and deeds will always follow in accordance with the Law Of *Asha*.

According to the Law Of *Asha*, this, “process” continues on an accrual basis. It is because of this reason that in *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, the question of ego and utilitarianism does not arise, because when both the individual and group interests are regulated by *Asha*, no conflict can appear. Therefore human beings as coworkers of *Ahura Mazda* must endeavor to carry out righteous deeds selflessly, with correct thinking and right-mindedness (*Armaiti*) because rightness of acts cause the mind and the conscience to operate in unison.

Such we, indeed, the Saviors of the Earth,
They follow Duty’s call, the call of Love:
Mazda, they listen unto Vohu Mana;
They do what *Asha* bids, and Thy commands
Surely they are the vanquishers of hate.

Actions based on *Asha* cannot be egotistical, because these moral standards are set by the attributes of *Ahura Mazda*, in which the Holy Spirit, Good Mind, Selfless Devotion and Righteousness participate in eradicating hatred and self interest.

An *Ashavan* must realize, that one has not carried out one’s duty as *Ahura Mazda*’s co-worker, merely by keeping away or abstaining from wickedness. Active not passive righteousness is required. Furthermore, one must also realize that the process of triumph of good over evil is gradual and not abrupt.

For one to lead a life based on the Law of *Asha*, one must endeavor to propagate virtue, righteousness and eradicate falsehood and wickedness in order to advance the world towards victory and making existence brilliant, (*Fresho-kerati*).

The Gathas in Yasna 28.8 declare that, *Asha* is of one will with *Ahura Mazda*, therefore *Ahura Mazda* is *Asha* and *Asha* also represents *Ahura*’s will. Dedication to righteousness in response to Zarathushtra’s revelation of reality is the true basis for the Zarthushti community.

Some important points to remember are, that the Law Of *Asha*:

- (a) Is as changeless as *Ahura Mazda* Himself.
- (b) Rules the process of gradual renovation of the world.
- (c) Is itself changeless, but regulates changes in the world, thus representing world dynamism.

- (d) Denotes righteousness; it constitutes the yardstick for the determination of the rightness and wrongness of acts.
- (e) Sets normative ethics and represents absolute value.

Let us now look at the impact that the Law of *Asha* has on:

- (a) Religion and Politics.
- (b) Justice.
- (c) Separation of Church and State.
- (d) Leadership.
- (e) Choosing a Leader.
- (f) Moral Code.
- (g) Penance.
- (h) Liberty.

The Impact of *Asha* on Religion and Politics

All religions stand for justice; all governments have a claim on it. Yet its content and connotations in various religions and politics differ. We will look at the impact of *Asha* in our day to day living as reflected by the Zarthushti community, since a true Zarthushti is supposed to have internalized the concept of *Asha*.

The Zarthushti Concept Of Justice

Divine nature of justice is the fundamental principle. Consequently no man-made law can negate the divine law as propounded in the Gathas. The Gathic doctrines are enunciated in general terms; the details are left to humans to legislate within the Gathic legal framework in the light of society's stage of progress.

The concept of *Asha* signifies the realization of justice without fear or favor, without mediation or discrimination, and without any regard to one's social standing. In *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, no one can mediate to change the consequences of the Law Of *Asha*. *Asha* is an ongoing process; in it justice and righteousness merge and form the law.

Separation Of Church And State

In *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, where strict observance of the positive law is enacted in accord with the principle of *Asha*, justice does not require a separation between church and state, (religion and polity) because in this concept, there is no marriage between the two, but rather they are twins or cogs in a system of gears, working harmoniously for the smooth operation

of state and the benefit of society. The application of the Law of *Asha* always takes into consideration the underlying principle of reasonableness and mercy reflected in the Law of *Asha*.

Zarthushti Concept Of A Leader (*Ratu*)

The dispenser of justice (*Ratu*), should look to the *Ahunavar* prayer which holds the key to being a good *Mazdayasni* leader according to *Ahura Mazda* as taught to Zarathushtra.

In *Din-i-Mazdayasni* all rights and responsibilities (according to the Laws of *Asha*) are given to each one of us by *Ahura Mazda* as a gift, to be used judiciously to lead society towards *Ushta* (Happiness) and *Frashokerti* (making existence brilliant).

The ruler or leader has no divine or God given right to rule, rather he has only those rights that the individuals as a community have subjugated (some of their personal rights) over to the one they have chosen (due to his *Ahura* like qualities) as their leader (*Ratu*), to allow him to rule over them for the overall betterment and the smooth operation of that community. *Din-i-Mazdayasni* denounces autocratic and unjust rulers. In several passages the Gathas instruct and direct the *Ashavan* against submitting to the rule of unjust and ruthless rulers and to support only the righteous rulers who, guided by *Ahura Mazda's* Good Wisdom, Benevolence and Love, dedicate their lives to the realization of Truth and implementing the Law Of *Asha* in their lives.

Choosing The Right Leader

This principle of “Choice” also applies to the election of righteous people as social and political leaders. The Gathas direct that when one has to choose a leader from among the mortals, one must choose a leader who is true to *Asha*, has a love for Wisdom, is dedicated to be of service to mankind with an insatiable desire for the propagation of truth, the exercise of justice and *Frashokerati* (making existence brilliant) of the world.

Gathic Moral Code

An active constructive life is an important component of the principle of *Asha*, which encompasses the Gathic moral code consisting of recommended actions and abstentions. Idleness, sloth, inactivity are considered as a feature of *Druj* (evil) and are therefore censured. Moral courage, righteousness and divine wisdom pertain to those who choose to

be active and therefore strongly encouraged. Zarathushtra teaches and encourages his disciples to be unceasingly active.

O wise Jamaspa Hvogva, I have taught,
That action, not inaction, higher stands,
Obeying then, His will, Worship through deeds;
The Great Lord and Guardian of the Worlds,
Through His Eternal Law discriminate,
Who are the truly Wise and who Unwise. (Yasna 46.17)

To be active implies making the right choice, which requires one to cleanse the heart from wrath and wickedness, to preach truth, to direct others to become virtuous and to unite with other righteous people (*Ashavans*) in endeavours for the advancement of the world.

Zarathushti ethics are utilitarian and not egotistic because a *Mazdayasnis* believes that no conflict between personal and social interests will be encountered by those who act in accordance with the Law Of *Asha*. But should such a variance present itself, a *Mazdayasni* always give precedence to society's interests over those of self.

Penance

The concept of penance does not exist in *Din-i-Mazdayasni*. It does not call for self-mortification or abstention, e.g., fasting; nor of monasticism, celibacy or asceticism; but rather only through good acts and activities is one able to make amends for transgressions against His Law of *Asha*. This is so, because the function of *Asha* is to preserve life and vitality in this world and to give humans an opportunity to enhance their moral apprehension.

Concept of Liberty and Human Rights

Professor John Hinnels in his paper, "The Theory And Practice Of Human Rights in Zoroastrianism" states that, "Zoroastrianism is the first religion that has taken a doctrinal and political stand on the subject of human rights and has condemned the limitation or curtailment of those rights under any pretext." This is because in *Din-i-Mazdayasni* the idea of human rights stems from the principle that man is created to be a coworker with God.

The notion of human rights in *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, is the natural extension of two doctrines:

- (a) The total goodness and perfectness of *Ahura Mazda*.
- (b) The function of humans as *Ahura's* coworkers.

Based on the above notion, humans, contain the spark of *Ahura Mazda* and share His attributes. Therefore, if one human infringes on the rights of another human, it is construed as infringing on the rights of *Ahura Mazda* and therefore not permissible.

Asha requires justice in attitude and behavior, and a just man must behave accordingly. Anger and revenge, oppression and exploitation etc., are not qualities of *Ahura Mazda* nor based on the Laws Of *Asha* and are therefore reprehensible acts, whether committed by individuals or governments and are strictly forbidden.

The emphasis of *Din-i-Mazdayasni* on righteousness, order and a harmonious life necessitates a full observance of justice and equity. This emphasis constitutes the general principle that no one should suffer mental or physical abuse from others.

In full accord with Law shall all men act, the Law that forms the basis of all life;
With strictest justice shall the Ratu judge whether it be the True men or the False;
Against the false in him he shall with care weigh all the Truth that with it has been mixed. (Yasna 33.1)

The above stanza from the Gathas demonstrates an important human issue. In it, Zarathushtra recommends that men and women who strive to follow the path of *Asha*, should act in full agreement with the principle of justice (*Asha*) and treat fairly and humanely their enemies and culprits. Various Gothic passages reflect that even the False people (*Dregvan*) should be treated justly: all their deeds should be accounted for, and if their good and evil deeds are balanced, they will not suffer unhappiness. This type of dispensation of justice is important, as the Law Of *Asha* says, that a human being with that divine spark of *Ahura Mazda*, is all good, and again, according to the Law Of *Asha*, has been given the free will and choice to choose his acts or deeds. Therefore, one's deeds and not the person should be judged, just as each one of us will be judged by *Ahura Mazda*.

The commitment to equality of human beings irrespective of ethnic origin and sex is evident in the Gathas. The Gathas give equal praise to *Fryana* of the *Turanian* tribe as well as to *Jamaspa* of the *Hvogva* family. The privileges of people are commensurate with their righteousness and not with their ethnic affiliation.

The equality of sexes in *Din-i-Mazdayasni* are unreservedly admired and not matched by any other religion. In all his sermons, Zarathushtra gives equal recognition to man, (*Na*), and woman, (*Nairi*), by addressing them separately and on an equal footing. He gives both men and women complete freedom in the choice of creed and marriage.

In a sermon addressed to his daughter *Pouruchista*, Zarathushtra teaches young men and women to consult with their inner self -- with their perfect wisdom and right mindedness (*Armaiti*) before entering into the uniting bond of marriage). (Yasna 53.5,6,7,8,17)

Following the example set by the Prophet, latter Zarthushti sages, extended the Gathic principle of the equality of the sexes to the attributes of *Ahura Mazda*. In the younger Avesta the names of three attributes retain their Gathic female gender, and three other names reflect the male gender.

The class system of the Sassanian era, of priests, warriors, husbandmen and artisans probably had its roots in pre-Gathic Iranian society. The comparative rapid decline of *Din-i-Mazdayasni* after the Arab conquest of Iran was partly due to the erroneous identification of *Din-i-Mazdayasni* with the oppressive acts and class denomination of the Sassanian era.

Liberty_

Liberty is the most precious of *Ahura's* bounties. It is a component of the divine Law of *Asha* and the natural right of every human being. A human being's liberty is so inalienable that *Ahura Mazda* does not curtail a human's freedom of action even with regard to a human's choice to opt for wickedness or evil. *Ahura Mazda* in his justice (*Asha*), however, warns one in advance of the consequences of such evil actions. This concept is strongly reflected in the first sermon of Zarathushtra where he preaches:

Hearken with your ears to these best councils:
Gaze at the beams of fire and contemplate win your best judgment:
Let each man/woman choose his/her creed with that freedom of
choice which each must have at great events;

O ye, awake of these my announcements! (Yasna 30.2)

Din-i-Mazdayasni is the religion of free will par excellence. This freedom is prescribed for all man's transactions and commitments, This freedom however, is tied to and based on, "Good Knowledge" and the necessary insight into religion (Wisdom) as well as responsibility and the resulting cause of that decision or choice according to the Law of *Asha*. In Gathas Yasna 48.1, Zarathushtra says:

Before the struggle in my mind begins,
Tell me, Ahura, all that I should know,
Give me the knowledge and assurance, Lord,
That Righteousness shall overcome Untruth;
Such is Thy plan -- the Final Shape of Life.

This right of liberty is also reflected in the Zarthushti concept of the God - man relationship, where unlike Islam, in which man is *Abd* (servant), and is supposed to give total submission to the will of God or Christianity where man is the child of God, *Din-i-Mazdayasni* considers man as the coworker of God. Hence, neither the owner's right, nor paternal authority, can contain man's freedom of choice. The only restraining force comes from the individual's moral convictions, Conscience (*Daena*), and Good Mind (*Vohu Mana*). It is for this reason that the Christian idea of, "Original Sin" is repugnant to Zarathushthis.

In *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, actions originate in the mind:

- Holy reasoning creates will,
- Expressed by words,
- Resulting in deeds.

In *Din-i-Mazdayasni*, the will is the source of moral behavior. Therefore, the way a Zarthushti will use freewill to accept, reject or circumvent the law of *Asha* will be reflected directly into the way of life that a Zarthushti will lead.

Aim Of A Zarthushti Life

The aim of a Zarthushti life is to bring *Ushta* (happiness) to others and to one's self. The imperatives of happiness are the establishment of harmony and unity:

- (1) between one's body (*Tanu*), and Soul (*Urvan*); and
- (2) between the individual and society.

Harmony has a dual aspect inwardly within one's self and outwardly within the society.

The Avesta and the Law Of *Asha*, while recognizing the individuality of human beings, particularly through the freedom of choice, also puts a great emphasis on man's social identity. Man's activities should be concentrated to the cause of righteousness.

Those who work for the progress and perfection of the world through the guidance of their *Daena* (conscience), in harmony with the Law Of *Asha* earn everlasting *Ushta* (happiness).

One's activities should be such that, they should harm neither the quality of one's spiritual and physical life nor that of the society in which one lives. The importance of one's duties to the community and society is reflected in the five times daily prayers that a Zarthushti is supposed to pray. A Zarthushti invokes the blessings of *Ahura Mazda*:

(a) At dawn, for the righteous head and the members of the household, *Namana*.

(b) In the morning for the righteous head and members of the village, *Savanga*.

(c) At noon, for the righteous leader and residents of the city, *Zantum*.

(e) In the evening for the righteous leader and people of the country, *Dakhiu*.

(f) At night, for the righteous leader, *Rathu* of the religion of Righteousness and all righteous and just people who tread the path of *Asha*.

Ushta (happiness) goes to whoever joins the Brotherhood of *Ashavan*.

Zarthushti Spiritual Militancy and Self Restrain

While abhorring physical violence, a Zarthushti advocates mental militancy. The righteous must fight evil. The struggle must first originate within the self and then be extended to other people.

So let no one give heed to Teachers False,
Nor to their words and teachings lend ear;
Because the home, the town, the province too,
And e'en the country would the False One hurl
Down to the world of torment and of death;
Resist them with your Inner Spirit's sword. (Yasna 31.18)

From this stanza, one can also infer the five levels of authority and governance in society. After defeating the evil mind within one's self, one must endeavor to eliminate evil thoughts in one's household, village, tribe, province, county and ultimately the whole world.

Conclusion and Summary

- *Asha* represents the Universal Divine Order which regulates both the physical and spiritual world.
- *Asha* is the essence of Order; and signifies the cosmic and social order.
- *Asha* is the right path and the religion.
- *Asha* is truth, justice and righteousness.
- *Asha* is regarded as the will of *Ahura Mazda* by practicing Zarthushtis.
- *Asha* stands for the respect and protection of nature and the environment.
- *Asha* stands for truth and moderation, and for a constructive and productive life.
- *Asha* also stands for liberty and the equality of all human beings, with every person being given the freedom to make his or her choice, while at the same time also knowing that they are also responsible for the results of the choice of their actions, which flow from the Law Of *Asha*.

Zarthushtis, in their daily prayers, acknowledge that there is only one right path and that is the path of *Asha*; all other paths lead to falsehood.

Asha is the corner stone on which *Din-i-Mazdayasni* is based and is the key to living a *Mazdayasni* life to be utilized daily Zarthushti's decision making process.

Ushta ahmai yahmai ushta kahmaichit.

Happiness to Him who gives Happiness to others.

ZOROASTER AND THE HORSE

By
Richard N. Frye

I had intended to present a paper on “The Gathas in Time and Place”, but much of what I at first put down was nothing new and I decided to speak about archaeology, which was not mentioned at the conference.¹ One of the important points of the latter was the function of the horse in his society. First, however I should like to make some general remarks.

At the outset let me say that the Gathas themselves provide no information about the time and place of their origin; they are in effect timeless and spaceless.² But can we by analogy and inference go from the better known to the unknown in regard to the Gathas? By this I mean can we place the Gathas in what in German is called *Sitz im Leben* (contemporary milieu) comparing neighboring cultures? Obviously, any comments here will be impressionistic, but with the lack of sources they hardly can be otherwise. First, however, we may list those points on which almost everyone agrees about the Gathas:

The Gathas were composed by Zoroaster, or a proto- or pseudo-Zoroaster somewhere in the greater eastern Iran region, or in southern Central Asia, sometime in the first millennium B.C.E. Some people would place Zoroaster even earlier than the first millennium, but this is not the usual consensus. As I often have said archaicness of language cannot be used as the main criterion for the age of any texts.³ On the other hand one could postulate a span of time for the daily use of a living, spoken language which probably should not exceed half a millennium at the most, which would place the prophet sometime between 1000 and 500 B.C., with more likelihood earlier rather than later. Why earlier? Because the ambiance of the Gathas suggests that Zoroaster, with his references to the cow, was living in a pastoral society with one tribe raiding another to steal cattle. But it is also possible that the prophet was living in a settlement or town, with inhabitants defending their land against nomadic marauders. Also prophets usually receive their inspirations in wilderness, desert or mountains, away from settlements in communion with nature, and Zoroaster could have well fitted this pattern. So the prophet would be placed at the beginning of the *Landaufnahme* (settlement) of the Iranian tribes on the eastern part of the Iranian plateau. The language and style of the Gathas, of course, are our

important sources, but dating of language remains a matter for discussion, since some languages disappear quickly after some catastrophe or conquest of one people by another, while others are very conservative. Some scholars would assign Zoroaster to the sixteenth or fifteenth century B.C., claiming contemporaneity with the *Rigveda*. The latter, however, in my opinion is not so old, because the cuneiform records of the Mitanni in their relation with the Hittites, most likely date from a similar time but are in the Indo-Iranian or Aryan tongue rather than Vedic Sanskrit. What does archaeology tell us about the time and place of Zoroaster, who has been so aptly designated by Skjærvø as essentially a poet in the ranks of ancient bards, as well as prophetic.

It is generally agreed that the Indians preceded the Iranians in the migration to the south from a common homeland in south Russia and/or western Siberia. When the Iranians arrived on the plateau what did they find? If we look at the vast area of that world in which the poet *cum* prophet lived what do we discover? At the outset, in India the Vedas tell us about the Indians who worshipped many deities, both of the Aryan invaders and, in time, also of the aborigines. Rituals were all important in the religious practices of the Indians, and the faiths of Buddhism and the Jains probably had not yet emerged. On the other hand, there may have been incipient schools of yoga and other similar practices. Temples probably had not developed as fully as later, and they do not seem to have been great centers of power as in the Near East. The political situation in the sub-continent seems to have been one of tribal domains, probably staked out by various chiefs of the warlike Aryans. In that early period there is no evidence of a large state. Society may have seen the beginning of a caste system with the Aryan conquerors on top. In brief, this is the picture of India we may postulate at the time of Zoroaster.

To turn to the Near East, the other side of Zoroaster's homeland, we are better informed because of written sources. The western part of the Iranian plateau had seen for a long time settled societies, the Elamites in the south with Mannans and Urartians in the north, while in the east the fewer aborigines probably had been mostly absorbed by the Iranians. West of the central deserts of Iran Mesopotamian influences were very strong, and these also impressed the new coming Iranians, as we can see from such influences on later Achaemenid art and architecture. The ancient Near East, like India, was a polytheistic society with many local deities including spirits of trees, rocks and streams. Magic, charms and amulets to ward off evil abounded.

ZOROASTER AND THE HORSE

Political life, on the other hand, was well developed with states which fought one another, and even empires had been created and vanished. Temples were most important in Mesopotamia, not only as religious, but also as economic centers and foci of power. Society was differentiated into many forms, with guilds of craftsmen and merchants in the towns. This situation seems to have been in contrast to India.

Now we come to the Iranians who were invaders from the north, probably beginning shortly before the turn of the millennium. They moved by walking, or with horse and oxen drawn carts, as well as with chariots. Mainly they were not horse riding nomads, since that was a later development, although bridles and bits were known. In the time of Zoroaster it seems that the chiefs and warriors of the tribes fought from chariots since riding a horse was not only difficult, but also denigrated as the specialty of pastoralists looking after herds of domesticated animals. The religion of the Iranians was similar to other Indo-European speaking peoples, and by comparing the ancient religion of the Greeks, Celts, Germans, Slavs, and of course the Indians, we can reconstruct the probable basic beliefs and some of the practices of the ancient Iranians. We are now fairly sure that they were carriers of the Andronovo culture, so named after an archaeological site in southern Kazakhstan. Let us compare the material culture of the Andronovo people (the proto-Iranians) and that of the milieu of Zoroaster in the south after the migration of the Andronovs.

1. The Andronovs lived on the border of steppe and forest lands of northern Kazakhstan and were primarily pastoralists with a rudimentary knowledge of agriculture. The Iranians, after they came the south, learned about irrigation from the aborigines but still remained primarily pastoralists. Who were the aborigines they met? In the west probably the Elamites extended as far as Sistan where they met Dravidian people. Farther north and east the ancestors of the Burushaski speaking people of Hunza may well have extended far and wide.

2. The Andronovs flourished in the early Bronze age with gray pottery, while the Iranians in their southern, new homeland had met aborigines with better painted pottery. The later time was late Bronze and early Iron Ages, which period in Central Asia is generally assigned to ca. 1000 B.C.E. by archaeologists.

3. There were no towns in the north and the houses of the Andronovans were round and underground like Yima's *var* in the Videvad. In the south the Iranians lived in tents or dwellings on top of the ground.

4. The Andronovans moved south by walking or riding on wagons and chariots. They surely knew horseback riding, since the horse had been domesticated on the south Russian steppes in the third millennium B.C.E. I suggest that for the most part shepherds, rounding up cattle and sheep (holy cows = *gospand*) rode on horseback, for the style or fad of the time persuaded the aristocratic warriors of the tribes to ride chariots, as Indo-Europeans elsewhere -- Greeks of the *Iliad*, Indians of the *Vedas*, Mitanni, etc. The Scythians/Sakas seem to have been the first organized horse riding nomads on the steppes, as described by Herodotus and they are probably to be dated first from the ninth or eighth centuries B.C.E.

5. The Iranians on the move had no temples and Herodotus is correct in saying that they worshipped their deities in the open, preferably on elevated places, as on the platform above Persepolis. No temples have been found among the Andronovans, and they surely neither carried nor built them on their trek southward.

6. The Andronovans, like other Indo-Europeans (Greeks, Indians, Vikings, etc.) practiced cremation of the dead, but possibly on their migration south the Iranians learned to expose the dead, either from lack of wood or from the aborigines.

7. The religion of the Andronovans was general Indo-European or more specifically Indo-Iranian or Aryan, with perhaps shamanistic influences from their Finno-Ugrian or other neighbors. The new message of Zoroaster came in a more settled society with changes from the old religion or a reform of it.

What does all of this imply? From scarce indications in the Avesta it implies that Zoroaster was complaining about low class bandits riding on horses, who were stealing the herds of settled folk, as well as condemning cruel practices against cattle. In other words, Zoroaster's society does not seem to be the culture of the Andronovans in their homeland or their society on the march southward when they are more settled in eastern Iran or southern Central Asia. This further suggests that the date of Zoroaster is at the beginning of our millennium or 900-800 B.C.E.

Where was he born and where did he sing or preach? Now Old Persian (O.P.) was the language of the Parsa tribe who settled in Persis, Fars province. Middle Persian (M.P.) with additions is the descendant of O.P., as New Persian is of M.P. We want to find the place(s) where Avestan (here I shall not try to distinguish Gathic and Younger Avestan) was spoken. In the east the missing link in the Old to Middle Iranian descent is the Middle Iranian (M.I.) phase which we shall call X, the M.I. descendant of Avestan. Sogdian in the Zarafshan and Kashka River basins is not the descendant of Avestan, nor is Khwarazmian or Bactrian, although they exhibit close relationship in some features. Khurasan, where Parthian was spoken, is also not a candidate as the descendant of Avestan. Where is the X on the map where we do not have Middle Iranian sources? I suggest it is the east-Iranian corridor from Herat to Sistan and Arachosia, and the Italians have made a good case for Sistan.

Arachosia or Sistan as the homeland of Zoroaster, on the border of medieval Turan, where there was conflict with non-Iranian aborigines in present Kalat, Baluchistan, has much to commend it. Furthermore, it is close to the Indian lands which linguistically, as well as religiously, have Vedic counterparts of the Avesta.

Legend has it that Zoroaster died in Balkh (Bactria). In the philological tradition of the *lectio difficilior* I suggest we accept that legend, for surely no one or place would like to claim credit as the site where the prophet was assassinated, although it is possible that someone outside of Balkh did not like the place or its people and wanted to saddle that city with such a crime. However this is unlikely.

To conclude with some general remarks, Zoroaster was somewhat ahead of his time in preaching a highly ethical faith and tending towards a monotheism, concentrating on Ahura Mazda, much as the ancient Hebrews did with Yahweh (Jehovah). This happened in a world which was moving from polytheism to henotheism, i.e., concentration on one deity while not ignoring the existence and power of others. This steadfast devotion to one deity may have been the reason for Zoroaster's rejection by his fellow men and his consequent *hegira*, probably moving farther east (perhaps to Bactria?) The question of monotheism vs. dualism is not discussed here, for in my opinion it is an ethical or philosophical question rather than cosmological.

Another question is the identity of Ahura Mazda “the wise lord”, obviously an appellative, possibly invented by Zoroaster to conciliate various followers of the older Iranian religion. I am unable to say whether it is another name for the Indo-European chief god -- Jupiter, Zeus, Varuna -- it would not be amiss to suppose such was the case. I suppose that, as with other prophets, Zoroaster wanted to reform and renew the old faith and introduce his personal revelations into those beliefs, rejecting some but continuing others. As usual with other religions, Zoroastrianism, or the teachings of the prophet, spread slowly with ups and downs, but it would have been difficult for his followers to disagree with his ethical teachings. Rituals and practices were another matter. Consequently the religion did spread, and the amalgam with the beliefs found in the “Younger Avesta” became the later religion which we call Zoroastrianism, or more properly Mazdaism. That changes occurred in time in the beliefs and practices of the religion is not unexpected, as in other faiths, but the remarkable continuity of Zoroastrianism is a sign of the strength of Iranian culture and society over the ages.

I fear what I have said is simplistic, and certainly not new, but all scientific and scholarly endeavor is to simplify our understanding of the world and man, and not to obfuscate it. Archaeological work is necessary in the east Iranian corridor to provide new materials, and we may hope in the future excavations will be carried out there.

At least these remarks are the bare bones and framework of placing Zoroaster and his Gathas in time and space. Others may put flesh on these bones, but then on details disagreement is rife and controversy inevitable.

Notes:

¹ I followed the dictum of my teacher Walter Bruno Henning that a theory is not true just because it is new, and another theory is not false simply because it is old.

² Cf. P. O. Skjærvø “Hymnic Composition in the Avesta,” *Die Sprache* 36 (1994), 1 99-244.

³ After all, in the Germanic family in 1996 German is more "archaic" than English, and in the Semitic branch of languages in 1996 Arabic is more “archaic” than Hebrew.

JAMSHEED IN THE GATHAS AND THE PAHLAVI TEXTS

By
Helmut Humbach

In the legendary early history of the Iranians as described by Firdausi, mankind begins with Gayōmard (Firdausi has Kayōmarth). He was followed by Hōshang, Tahmūrath and Jamsheed, the king of the Golden Age of Aryan mankind. Jamsheed, (Lit. ‘bright Jam’) comes from Pahlavi *Jamšēd* or simply *Jam*, and from Old Persian, Jamsheed’s name would be *Yama Xšaēta* ‘bright Yama’. Old Persian *Yama*, not attested itself but is reconstructed from closely related Vedic *Yama*, the name of the ruler of the underworld in Old Indian mythology. Yet in the Avesta, the phonetical variant *Yima* or *Yima Xšaēta* is well attested.

In what has come down to us from the Avesta, the first mortal is Gayōmard (Av. *Gayō marəta* means ‘mortal life’) mentioned in the phrase *haca gaiiat marəθnat as saošiiānš* ‘from Gayōmard up to the Saōšyant’ (Y. 26.10), which refers to the duration of this world from its beginning upto end. Gayōmard is followed by the so-called Pešdādian rulers Hošang (*Haošiiānha*), Tahmuras (*Taxma Urupi*) and Jamšeed (*Yima Xšaēta* or *Yima*). As early as in the Hōm Yašt (Yasna 9 of the Avesta), *Yima* is described as the king of the Paradise of the Golden Age of mankind, ‘who got out from the *Daēvas*, both energy and fervor, both sheep and cattle, both satiety and reputation; (and) under whose rule both kinds of undiminishing nourishment were available for consummation, both cattle and men were imperishable, both water and plants were not drying up, there was neither frost nor heat, neither old age nor death, nor envy produced by the *Daēvas*, since there was no deceit before *Yima* uttered the deceitful speech in order to please the untrue one (i.e. *Angra Mainyu/Ahriman*)’.

According to this picture, *Yima* represents the fourth generation of mankind but his nature, like that of the Rigvedic *Yama*, shows some affinity to that of a primal man who lost immortality by violating the divine law. Thus, *Yima* shares several characteristics with Gayōmard and Mašya, lit. ‘mortal, man’, another kind of primal man whose name is preserved in the Pahlavi literature but certainly is of Avestan origin, mirrored by Old Persian *Martiya*, a proper name of the Adam type.

Yima means ‘twin’. Originally *Yima* may have been understood as a hermaphrodite combining virility and femininity, thereby being able to procreate progeny without a partner. Yet in both the Indian Rigveda and

the Pahlavi Bundahišn the conception of Yima's/Yama's hermaphroditism is superimposed by the conception of Yima/Yama forming a primary twin couple with his sister Yami/Jamag. In both traditions this twin couple is faced with the duty of procreating progeny. Therefore, the only, inevitable way of fulfilling this duty is to commit incest. On the Indian side this act of incest is a deadly sin by which Yama and mankind lost immortality. For Iranians who were used to cultivating the idea of marriage between relatives, the matter was different. According to Bundahišn 14B,1 Yima having lost immortality, first married a she-*Dēv* and gave his sister Jamag in marriage to a he-*Dēv*, an improper solution as contrasted with the next-of-kin-marriage attributed to them by Bundahišn 35,4 which says that 'from Jam and his sister Jamag a pair (*juxtag*) of man and woman was born, and they became wife and husband together'. The Bundahišn tradition is paralleled by similar passages of the Pahlavi literature. Unfortunately, we cannot make out whether it derives from a lost Avesta passage, thus continuing a Proto-Aryan tradition, or it is of later origin, perhaps even influenced by the Vedic myth.

In Zoroastrian tradition, Yima's twinning was rather considered as a twinning of character. Yima was the first human being in whom good and evil, life and death came into conflict with each other. He was, to make use of an expression coined by Professor Irani, a twin in himself. That makes one think of the occurrence of the word *yāma* 'twin' in the famous passage on the two spirits in Yasna 30,3 of the Gāthās is an unrecognized allusion to Yima:

*aṭ tā mainiū paouruiē yā yāsmā xʼafənā asruuātəm
manahicā vacahicā šīiaoṣanōi hi vahiiō akəmčā*

these are the two spirits (existing) in the beginning, twins who have been heard of as the two dreams, the two thoughts, the two words, and the two actions, the better and the evil one.

A second allusion to Yima is found in the famous Gāthā stanza Yasna 45,1 in which it is Yima's sin which is alluded to. The stanza begins:

*aṭ frauuaxšiiā nū gušō.dūm nū sraotā
yāēcā asnāt yāēcā dūrāt iṣaṣā*

'now I shall proclaim, listen now, hear now, O you who are approaching from near and far';

and it ends:

nōiṭ daibitīm duš.sastiṣ ahūm mərəṣiiāṭ

akā varanā drəguā hizuuā āuuərətō

may the deceitful blasphemer¹, by his evil choice, not destroy the world for a second time with his tongue through preference being given to him.

Previous translators erroneously took together *daibiḡīm ... ahūm* as ‘second life’, and as a term of Zoroastrian eschatology unattested elsewhere, but the passage rather speaks of this life or world, with reference to Yima, the ‘blasphemer’ par excellence, who destroyed the world for the first time.

Yima’s sin is described in Yašt 19,33.34 of the Younger Avesta as *draoγa vāxš* ‘his deceitful speech’ in consequence of which the Royal Glory (*Xvarənah*) withdrew from Yima. Here Avestic *draoγa* ‘deceit, lie’ has a connotation similar to that of Old Persian *draoga-* which in the Darius inscription of Behistun is used in reference to the rebellion of Bardiya with the connotation ‘usurpation of the throne by a wrong claimant to it’. In a similar fashion, Yima revolted against God and wanted to usurp his throne. This interpretation is corroborated by both Pahlavi sources and Firdausi, where Yima’s sin consisted in his claiming to be God the Creator himself.

In Zādspram 31c5-6, Yima confesses:

*u-m harw dām ud dahīn i mēnōg ud gētīg guft kū man dād
pad ān i drō i-m guft man xwarrah ud xwadāyih az-iš appā r būd
u-m tan be ō wišōbišn i dast dēwān mad*

and I said that I (had) created all the creatures and creations of the spiritual and material worlds.

For these lies which I uttered, glory and lordship were taken away from me,

and my body fell into destruction at the hands of the *Daēvas*.

The consequences of Yima’s sin are also described in Dādestān e Denig 38,19-20:²

*ka az druz frešfhist
u-š az ōhrmazd bandagih be ō abardom xwadāyh ārzūgēnid
u-š abar dām-dādārihi xwēš guft³*

when he was deceived by the Druj

he was thereby made eager for supreme sovereignty instead of the service of Ohrmazd

and he spoke about himself, who have created the creatures/creations.⁴

The same notion story occurs in Firdausi's Šāhnāmeḥ, Chapter 4

- 60 *hami tāft az šāh farr-e kayān*
the Kayānyan glory shone brightly from the Shah.
- 65 *manī kard ān šāh-e yazdān-šinās / zi yazdān be paycid wa šud nā-sipās*
the king who had worshipped God acted arrogantly, he turned aside from god and became ungrateful.
- 66 *garānmāyagān-rā ze-lākar be-xwānd / ce māyeh soxan pišišān berānd*
He summoned all the chiefs, and what a wealth of words he used.
- 75 *gerāidūn ke dānid ke man kardaminn / ma-rā xwānd bāyad jehān āfarin*
So now that ye perceive what I have done / All hail me as the maker of the world.
- 77 *cu in gufteh šud farr-e yazdān az vay / gusast*
After he had spoken these words God's Grace departed from him.

An entirely different aspect of Yima's sin is alluded to in the Pahlavi translation of Yasna 9,1, the first stanza of the Hōm Yašt of the Avesta: 'Yima made men eat meat as result of which they lost their paradisiacal immortality.'

In the Avesta text of the stanza Zaraθuštra addresses Haoma as being *x^vahe gāiēhe x^vnuuatō aməšāhe* 'of own well-shaped sunlike immortal life' for which the Pahlavi translation has *ceš-t āni x^veš gyān nēwak kard ēstēd amarg* 'since your own beautiful life/existence has been made (has become) immortal'. This Pahlavi is in line with the Avesta but then it is followed by the amazing gloss *hat ā-š tan pad frārōnih amarg kard ēstēd ud nē ēdōn ciyōn awešān kē gōišti Jam jūd u-šāšn andar tan amarg kard ēstēd* 'the body of Hōm was made (became) immortal on account of its honesty, and not in the way of those who had devoured the meat of Jam and in whom the bodies were made (became) immortal.'

The above translation 'and in them/whom the bodies were made (became) immortal'⁵ of *u-šāšn andar tan amarg kard ēstēd* which follows Bartholomae's German is grammatically correct but it does not make sense, neither in the detail (they became immortal in their bodies) nor as a whole (the meat-devourers are said to have become immortal), the context

forbidding the idea that men became immortal by having devoured the meat offered to them. Note that by the use of the verb *jūdan* ‘to devour’ which is the *daevis* equivalent of ahuric *xwardan* ‘to eat’ the consummation of Yima’s meat is qualified as sinful. I think this was already seen by the famous medieval Parsi scholar Neriosangh who, in his Sanskrit version of the Pahlavi, refashioned the gloss completely⁶, which concludes that inevitably something is wrong with the Pahlavi text.

Instead of *hat ā-š tan pad frārōnīh amarg kard ēstēd ... u- šān andar tan amarg kard ēstēd* we have to read *hat ā-š tan pad frārōnīh amarg kard ēstēd ... u-šān andar tan *marg kard ēstēd* ‘the body of Hōm was made (became) immortal on account of its honesty, and not in the way of those who had devoured the meat of Jam and in whose bodies death was produced’. By perseveration, the transmitted *amarg ... amarg* (immortal ... immortal) is corrupted from *amarg ... marg* (immortal ... death). The initial *a* of the second *amarg* distorts completely the meaning of the passage; ‘death was produced in the bodies of men by poisoning with death matter’ by deleting it, the passage becomes meaningful.

Above we have quoted two Gāthic stanzas, viz. Y. 30,3, the stanza on the two spirits, and Y. 45,1, in which the audience is put on their guard against a second destruction of the world. Both of these allude to Yima and his sin but it is in Y. 32,8 only that Yima is mentioned by name. After having complained about the many crimes by which the deceitful one strives for fame, the prophet passes over to Yima in that stanza the first two lines of which run:

*aēšam aēnaḥḥam vīuaḥhušō srāuui yimascīṭ
yē mašiiāṅg cixšnušō ahmākāṅg gāuš bagā x’ārāmnō*

The first line is not much controversial:

‘particularly⁷ Yima, the son of Vivahvan, became notorious for such crimes’

However, the second line is most puzzling. Here we just understand the phrase *yē mašiiāṅg cixšnušō ahmākāṅg* ‘he (Yima) who wished to satisfy/gratify/please the mortals, our people’ whereas *gāuš bagā x’ārāmnō* has been enigmatic till now. The context suggests that the line describes Yima’s sin but, as we shall see, the Pahlavi translation (also called Zand) interpretes it in a somewhat different way:

kē-š ō mardomān cāšīd kū amagān gōšt pad bazišn xwardēd

(Yima/Jamšed) who taught men (saying): “you eat, as apportioned, the meat of (those which are) ours”,

The translation is supplied by the following gloss:

(*āmēzag mardomān sēnag-masāy bāzā-masāy*)
(the side-dish of men (being as much) as a lapful (or) an armful).

All that gives the impression of the line being understood by the Pahlavi translation as an admonition by the prophet to be moderate in consuming meat and, instead, making ample use of the side-dishes. The Pahlavi translation is, of course, unreliable in at least certain of its details. Thus, e.g., its rendering of Avestic *cixšnušō* ‘wishing to gratify/satisfy/please’ by *cāšīd* ‘he taught’ is based on a most superficial outward similarity of the two words. Yet it is not unlikely that the Pahlavi gives an approximative picture of the contents of the Gāthā passage by reading into it a regulation which was valid at his time. For Neriosangh, in his Sanskrit version of the Pahlavi translation rendered Phl. *pad bazišn by dakṣiṇayā* ‘with a present’ using the term *dakṣiṇā* which in Sanskrit (in a technical term) denotes ‘the fee or present to the officiating priest’. It is the meaning of Phl. *pad bazišn* rendered as apportioned (lit. with/by apportionment).

yo manuṣyebhyaḥ samāsvadayati asmākaṃ paśūnāṃ dakṣiṇayā khādanam

(glossed: *sinaḥ-masatayā bājāya-masatayā*)

(Yima) who recommended to men eating of (the meat) of our cattle with (presenting) a *dakṣiṇā*
[(being) as much as a lapful or an armful].

Our above rendering is corroborated from a passage of the Pahlavi Dēnkard 9,31,12 in which the same subject is discussed more explicitly, by an author who was still in possession of some more traditional information⁸. Its transmitted text runs:

*Ud ān Wiwaghānān Jam ā-š šnayēnid mardom u-š šnayēnid
gōpand hudāhag ēdōn pad gōwišn, Zarduxšt, ka-š guft ō mardomān
ašmā gōspand ANŠUTA-ēd, kū ašmā xwēš pad bōzišn gōšt xwarēd
apaymān pad bazišn gōšt sagr bawišn hast ANŠUTA-ēd mā āz rāy
ud mā arišk rāy ; mā bē abganēd taftag rodīg (Sanjana: pidi rōdīg)
ud mā bē abganēd pidi pēšag rāy pad kušišn kušēd ku-tān ēdōn
nēwag u-tān bandag.*

This was rendered into English by West- Pahlavi Texts IV 341:

And mankind were gratified by that son of Vivanghan who was Yim, and cattle were gratified by him producing thus (the phrase) “you are mankind” in words, O Zarduxšt when he spoke to mankind thus: “You are the mankind for cattle, that is, you (who) are mankind eat meat of your own subdivision (*pad bazišn*), and through subdivision by you there is a superabundant occurrence of meat; you are mankind, neither for Greed nor for Envy, do thou throw away the warm entrails, nor do thou throw (them) away warm on account of custom, now you slay for slaughtering, so that thus it may be beneficial for you and for your servant.”

Yet West’s translation, as well as the similar one by Sanjana⁹, is confusing and does not make any sense, a fact which suggest that this text too -- as so many other Pahlavi texts -- is corrupted. Thus ANWTA = *mardom* ‘mankind’ evidently a mistake for *ānšnwtk’/ hwšnwtk’* = *hušnūdag* ‘satisfied, gratified, pleased, contented’, and of the two occurrences of *tān* ‘to all of you’ at least the second one is wrong for *tan* ‘body’. *tan bandag* ‘your servant’ is corrupted from *tan bowandag* ‘healthy body’, yet not only details are not only wrong but the whole text is in disorder. Taking the Pahlavi translation of the Gāthā line discussed above as a point of departure the following restoration is proposed:

*Ud āni Wiwanghānān Jam ā-š snāyēnid mardom u-š šnāyēnid
gōspand hudāhag ēdōn pad gōwišn, Zarduxšt, ka-š guft ō mardom:
ašmā pad gōspand *hušnūd-ēd, ku ašmā pad bazišn xwēš gōšt
xwarēd *hušnūd-ēd, mā āz rāy ud mā arišk rāy apaymān gōšt
xwarēd, pad bazišn gōšt sagr bawišn [glossed: hast (kē gōwēd): mā
bē abgan (ē)d taftag rōdig ud mā bē abganēd pid i pēšag ēd rāy pad
kušišn kušēd kū tan ēdōn nēwag ud tan bowandag]*

‘Jam, son of Vivanghan satisfied/gratified/pleased mankind and satisfied/gratified/pleased the beneficent cattle, O Zarduxšt, when he addressed men with the following speech: “be you contented with your cattle; i.e. eat you your own meat according to apportionment -- in the quantity apportioned (to you), and you will be contented; do not eat meat immodestly out of greed or out of envy; with the meat apportioned (to you) you must be satiated.” [There is (one who says): Do not throw away the warm entrails nor throw away the fat of the limbs. Do slaughter by (professional) slaughtering so that all of you will be fine and your bodies will be healthy.]

The Pahlavi translation of the enigmatic Gāthā line ‘as an admonition to be moderate in consuming meat’ gives the impression that the Avesta was understood by the translator. This impression is confirmed by our Dēnkard passage which also corroborates our rendering of Phl. *pad bazišn* as ‘according to apportionment, as apportioned, in the quantity apportioned’.

As contrasted with this, Christian Bartholomae, the founder of modern Avesta philology, in his 1904 translation of the crucial Gāthic line: *yəš mašiiāng cixšnušō ahmākēng gāuš bagā x'ārəmnō* made use of some elements only of the Pahlavi translation only, but as for the extracting its virtual meaning from the Gāthā line, but he attached much more importance to the Pahlavi gloss to Yasna 9,1 discussed above which emphasizes on men having eaten the meat sinfully offered them by Yima. Bartholomae's rendering of the Avesta is: ‘(Yima) who to please men made ours eat the pieces of meat’¹⁰ evidently assuming that *mašiiāng* ‘men’ and *ahmākēng* ‘ours’ refers to the very same persons, a most clumsy translation which at least should be improved by taking *ahmākēng* ‘ours’ as an apposition of *mašiiāng*: ‘(Yima), who to please men, our people, made them eat pieces of meat’. Taking it as unsurpassable, numerous modern scholars followed Bartholomae's analysis of the line. So did Duchesne-Guillemin, the English version of whose French we owe to Maria Henning: ‘(Yima) who to please men made ours eat of the flesh of the ox’.¹¹

As we see, Bartholomae's rendering of *gāuš bagā x'ārəmnō* as ‘made them eat the pieces of meat’ was just turned by Duchesne-Guillemin into ‘made them eat of the flesh of the ox’, thus smoothing Bartholomae's translation without really improving it.

As I showed many years ago, three most substantial objections must be raised against Bartholomae and Duchesne-Guillemin, who followed him:

First: *gāuš* (PhlT. *gōšt* ‘meat’) is not a gen.sg. meaning ‘of the cow/ox’ or ‘of meat’ as Bartholomae wanted, but it unambiguously is nom.sg. ‘the cow/ox/meat’; and it does not exclusively refer to the bovine genus only, but it includes all the meats of the other animals.

Second: Taking *bagā* (PhlT. *pad bazišn*) as acc.pl. of a hypothetical *baga-*n. ‘share, lot’ and rendering this as ‘pieces (of meat)’ (Bartholomae 921) is an *ad hoc* solution, remarkable for its clumsiness. As a matter of fact *bagā* also can be from well-attested *baga-*m. ‘god, lord’ (voc. or instr.sg.) or from *bagā-*f. ‘portion, apportionment’ (nom. or instr.sg.). In YAv. this fem. *bagā-* (*bayā-*) is attested in the meaning ‘section’ of the holy literature

(PhlT. *baxtārih*, glossed *fragard*; SktV. *vibhajanā* or *vibhañjanā*) which, however, does not exclude the word having a secular meaning as well.

Third: The rendering of *x'ārəmnō* as 'who made eat, lit. making eat' (Bartholomae 1866) is an ad hoc solution as well. In correct OAv. language the meaning attributed to the word would require the form *x'ārəiīas* which looks quite different. Form and meaning of *x'ārəmnō* are still open to discussion.

Accounting for part of these objections Humbach proposed in 1959: '(Yima), the bull who wished to please men, our people, by (apportioning) fortune (to them) through taking a vow'.¹²

Here *gāuš* 'ox', which usually is fem., is taken as masc. in the sense of 'male ox, bull' used as a praising epithet of Yima. As a matter of fact, such metaphoric use of *gau-* is well attested in Y. 46,3-4 where the *Saošyants* are called *uxšānoš* 'bulls' and *gau* 'male oxen', cf. Yt. 5,49 where *Kauui Haosrauua* is called *aṛša airiianam daṛxiunam* 'the bull or stud or ram of the Aryan lands' which has a similar meaning. Yet, 'fortune' is not *baga-* but *bāga-*, and the rendering of *x'ārəmnō* as 'taking a vow' is merely based upon the hypothesis of an etymological connection on the Indo-European level with Engl. to swear, Germ. *schwören* and, with particular regard to the long *ā* in *x'ārəmnō* with Germ. *Schwur* 'oath'.

Lentz, 1962 accepted Humbach's solution partially: '(Yima) who tried to compel our (fellow-country)-men to do obeisance by protesting himself to be god, the bull'.¹³

Lentz availed himself of the possibility of *bagā* being the instr.sg. of *baga-* 'lord, god' and he turned the supposed meaning of *x'ārəmnō* into 'protesting himself to be' but the construction of this with the instr. *bagā* '(to be) god' is not corroborated by parallels.

A new attempt was made by Humbach 1974, taking *gāuš* as a verbal form 'he failed or sinned' (from root *gau/gu*), furthermore by taking *bagā* as instr. sg. of *baga-* 'god' and reinterpreting *x'ārəmnō* as 'arguing with': '(Yima) who in order to please men, our people, sinned by arguing with God'.¹⁴

Yet *gāuš* makes part of the series *gāuš - gaṃ - gāuš - gəuš* in the second half of Y. 32 (32,8.10.12.14) in which the noun *gau-* 'ox' evidently serves as a motif word or theme, and the extension of the supposed meaning of *x'ārəmnō* from 'swearing' to 'arguing' is unfounded.

A completely extraordinary solution is due to Insler 1975: ‘(Yima) he who wanted to satisfy our men (by) swearing: “The cow is a goddess”,¹⁵ a Hinduistic interpretation which is horrible from the Zaratuštrian point of view. This more often than not happens, as Sanskritists take Gāthās as an appendix to the Veda and include typical Hinduistic ideas in interpreting the Iranian texts. By Kellens-Pirart 1988 the crucial *gāuš bagā xʷārəmnō* was left untranslated.

Old attempts at solving the riddle are renewed in Humbach et. al., 1991, ‘(Yima), the ox, who tried to satisfy the mortals, our (people), in swearing by God’,¹⁶ and in Humbach-Ichaporita, 1994, ‘(Yima) who, wishing to gratify the mortals, our people, failed by calling himself God’.¹⁷

Arguments of quite a different nature had been brought forward by Gershevitch as early as in 1987, who did no longer refer the line *yə mašiiəng cixšnušō gāuš bagā xʷārəmnō* to Yima and, thereby, got hopelessly tangled in a syntactical brushwood. The lines:

*aēšam aēnaṅham viuaṅhušō srāuui yimasciṭ
yə mašiiəng cixšnušō ahmākəng gāuš bagā xʷārəmnō*

are rendered by him with numerous fanciful additions:

‘From out of these sinners (in the dock) none-less-than Yima was heard (leading continuously) throughout Thy court-hearing, “O God, the desirer to satisfy our men is the (top) food constituting ox”’.¹⁸

An attempt at restoring correct syntax by untwisting Gershevitch’s twisted sequence of words would result in:

‘the ox which desires to satisfy our men, O God, (is) the (top) food-constituting (male animal).¹⁹

This, however, was no less enigmatic. Note also, that as a generic term Av. *gau-* ‘ox’ is used in the fem. gender which is easily understandable in the language of a society in which production and processing of milk plays a crucial part.

As a whole, Gershevitch in his essay made several steps backward rather than forward. Yet his derivation of *xʷārəmnō* from an Iranian noun *xwāra-* ‘food’ which survives in Oss. *xwār* ‘bread’ is highly meritorious.

He just is sticking too closely at the analysis of *x'ārəmnō* as nom.sg. of a ptc. *x'ārəmna-*, according to him '(top) food-constituting', which prevents him, as it did all of his predecessors, from an acceptable solution. Taking *x'ārəmnō* as gen.sg. of a noun *x'āraman-*, the matter becomes much easier: The gen.sg. *x'ārəmnō* is of the same type as the gen.sg. *airiāmnō* in OAv. *airiāmanascā*. *x'āraman-* is from *x'āra-* 'food' as *airiāman-* 'a clan of Aryans' or 'member of such a clan' (cf. Oss. *limān* 'guest') is to *airiā-* 'Aryan', or also as Greek *daity mōn* 'participant in a meal' is to *daity(s)* 'meal'. By analogy, the meaning of *x'āraman-* either can be 'complete meal consisting of more than one dish', or 'company (at meal)' or 'participant in a meal'.

Seen from this point of view the Gāthic line in question: *yə mašiīōng cixšnušō ahmākəng gāuš bagā x'ārəmnō* simply means: '(Yima) who wished to satisfy men, our people, (by stating): "meat is an (integrating) part of a complete meal", or: "meat is a due share of the company at meal", or: "meat is a due share of the participant in a meal"'.

Between these three solution there is no substantial difference. I prefer the first of them: "meat is an integral part of a complete meal" which in the given context (-- Yima's sin is being discussed) is as much as "let meat be an (integrating) part of a complete meal".

In the beginning of my Gāthā studies and, particularly, in the beginning of my endeavors towards the decipherment of Zaraθuštra's Yima stanza, I was convinced that the Pahlavi translation of the Gāthās at the most is useless, a way of thinking in which I was followed by other scholars, but which I modified in my Bombay lecture 1995.²⁰ There I showed that the Pahlavi translation of Y. 30,3, the passage on the two spirits, does not at all render the Avesta text correctly, thereby giving rise to many mistakes, but that it represented dogmatical views regarding the same subject as held by the Sasanian priests.

In our present study on the Yima passage of the Gāthās, my co-worker Pallan Ichaporria and I can proceed one step further. Unexpectedly, its Pahlavi translation turns out to be ever more near to the Avesta original. As we see now, in an utmost concise form the Gāthic line renders a tenet valid in the prophet's own time and attributed by him to Yima. This was done thoroughly by the Pahlavi translators. It is just the tendency which diverges. Whereas Yima's activity was considered by Zaraθuštra as a sin, the Pahlavi rather sees from the point of view of those later people many of whom had to sustain on barest living with no idea of regaining immortality by remaining vegetarians. On the one hand in the ancient tradition Yima is

blamed for his ‘*draoga*’ -- his attempt at usurping God’s throne, while on the other hand he is blamed for having seduced men to eat meat. These two are linked closely together, both of them describing what the ancient Greek tragedists called as “Hybris”. There just rises the question whether Yima’s activity was considered by Zoroaster as a merit or a sin. The Pahlavi points to a merit, but the context of the Gāthīc line rather points to a sin and eventually Yima’s deed has aspects of both.

Of greater interest is, perhaps, the question of where Yima’s subterranean stronghold has been localized by the tradition. There are two passages of the Bundahišn in which Pārs is mentioned.

First, Bundahišn 29,14 *Var-i Jam-kard miyāni Pārs pad Slwbā; ēdōn gōwēd kū Jam-kard azēri kōf Jamagān* ‘the stronghold Jam-kard is in the center of Pārs at Sruwā/Sarwā/ Srawā; people say that Jam-kard is below Mount Jamagān.’

Second, Bundahišn 32,7, in the description of the *mānihai Kayān kard* ‘of the houses built by the Kayanids’; where the (house) Jam-kard is said to be situated in Pārs: *ēg āni Jam-kard, pad Pārs, kē Jam-kard gowēd*, cf. 32,10 where Jam-kard is described as being situated *azēri zamig pad nihuftāyih* ‘under the earth at a hidden place’.

It is quite natural that the contemporary interpretation identified this Pārs with modern Fārs, but there are traces of an earlier localization of a homonymic region in the Hindukusch, the old name of which is Avestic *Upāiri.saēna*, Pahlavi *Apārsēn* or *Apursēn* (also *Pārsēn* or *Pursešn*), cf. Ptolemy’s *Parisēnē chōra* ‘the land *Parisešneš*’ which escaped scholars’ notice.

Among these traces of the second Pārs is Bundahišn 9,12 *Apursēn gōwēd kōf-i hamāg Pars* ‘they call *Apursēn* the mountain of the entire *Pārs*’. This is not simply an etymological play as is ascertained by a Greco-Bactrian inscription found on the rim of an Arabic coin issued by Salm Ibn Ziyād and published by Walker in 1937. This Bactrian rim inscription ascertains that the juxtaposition of *Pārs* with *Apursēn* is not simply due to an etymological play of words by the author of the Bundahišn, but that it is based on a geographic reality. The correct reading of the Bactrian is not *Sarso* as I proposed in 1966, but it is *Parso*. This can hardly refer to *Pārs/Fārs*, but rather must be the contemporary name of the Hindukush region. It is furthermore to be connected with Ptolemy’s tribe of the Parsioi whom Morgenstierne considered as the name-givers of the Pashto language and the ancestors of the Pashtuns/Pathans. From this evidence I dare to

conclude that the Bundahišn passage which localizes the *Var-ī Jam-kard miyān-ī Pārs* ‘in the center of Pārs’, i.e., in the center of the Hindukusch, originally referred to the famous cave system of *Bamiyān* which, as a matter of fact, invites its visitors to identify it with Yima’s Var.

Notes:

- ¹ The noun *duš.sastiš* ‘blasphemer’ also occurs in Yasna 32,9 which immediately follows the explicit mentioning of Yima’s sinfulness in 32,8.
- ² West, Dd. 39,16, PT II 127.
- ³ mss. *u-š dām-dādārih abar xwēš*
- ⁴ West, ‘and about his administration (*dādārih*) it is said’.
- ⁵ Bartholomae 1866 s.v. x^vār, note 2.
- ⁶ *nijena jvena sundarakṛtena amareṇa* ‘with your (Haoma’s) own well-shaped immortal life/existence’ glossed *kila yena nijo jvaḥ sadvyāpāratayā amaraḥ kṛtāste* ‘you by whom his own life/existence has been made immortal by pious activity’, *na evaṃ yathā taiḥ yair maṃsaṃ yamaṣedasya khādītam* ‘not as (it has been made) by those by whom the meat of Jamshed was eaten’, *tvayaš nijo jvaḥ suddhatayaš antar vapuṣi buddhir amaraḥ kṛtāste* ‘your own life/existence, your intelligence, has/have been made immortal by you by your faultlessness’.
- ⁷ ‘particularly’ better than ‘even’.
- ⁸ Sanjana Vol. 17, p. 102, line 12 ff.; Madan p. 838 line 2 ff.
- ⁹ Sanjana, Vol. 17, Translation p. 78: And about that Yima, the son of Vivanghan, who rendered mankind happy, so when, O Zarathushtra!, in speech he addressed mankind, he spoke thus: -- ‘Ye who are the mankind for cattle, that is, you yourselves through a sub-division (are distinguished) as men, you eat meat, and through that division there is superabundance of meat for you (who) are men; neither owing to greed, nor owing to malevolence do you let the intestinal fat (of the animal) be thrown away when you slaughter (the animal) for the profession of slaughtering, so that thus it may be good for you, and for your domestics’.
- ¹⁰ Christian Bartholomae, *The Gāthās of the Avesta*, Strassburg 1905, p. 29: ‘*der, um die Menschen zufriedenzustellen, den Unsrigen die Fleischstücke zu essen gab*’.
- ¹¹ Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathustra*, translated from the French by Mrs. M(aria) Henning, London, no year, p. 121.

- ¹² H. Humbach, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra*, 1, Heidelberg 1959, p. 97 somewhat clumsily: ‘*der sich der Menschen mit Glücksgabe hatte annehmen wollen, der Unseren, er, der Stier*’.
- ¹³ Wolfgang Lentz, Yima and Khvarenah in the Avestan Gāthās, in A Locust’s, *Leg, Studies in honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, London 1962, pp. 131-134, see p. 132.
- ¹⁴ H. Humbach, Methodologische Variationen zur arischen Religionsgeschichte, in M. Mayrhofer and R. Schmitt, (eds.) *Antiquitates Indogermanicae*, Innsbruck 1974, 193-200, see p. 199 ‘*der im Bestreben, die Menschen zufriedenzustellen (= ihnen gefällig zu sein), die Unseren, sündigte, indem er mit Gott rechtete*’.
- ¹⁵ Stanley Insler: *The Gāthās of Zarathustra*, Leiden 1975, p. 47.
- ¹⁶ Helmut Humbach, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra*, vol. 1, Heidelberg 1991, p. 133.
- ¹⁷ Helmut Humbach and Pallan Ichaporia, *The Heritage of Zarathushtra*, Heidelberg, 1994.
- ¹⁸ Ilya Gershevitch, Yima’s Beef-Plea, in G. Gnoli and E. Lanciotti (eds), *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, Roma 1987, pp 487-499, see pp. 490, 492.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 491 f.
- ²⁰ H. Humbach, *The Gāthās and their Pahlavi translation*, in K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, *Second International Congress Proceedings*, January 1996 (correctly 1995), published Bombay, 1996.

VISION OF ZARATHUSHTRA AS AN INNOVATOR AND A REFORMER

By
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Introduction:

Zaraθuštra reformed many of the diverse religious ideas of the Indo-Iranians, a group of people belonging to the Indo-European family. He was the founder and prophet of the religion of Ancient-Iran, a religion still practiced by a small number of people living mainly in India, Pakistan and Iran, and now scattered through the West. Zaraθuštra's ideas and vision influenced the lives and culture of his adherents for the past 3000 years; and we can thus ask: will they continue to influence religious thought in the next millennium, a millennium of tremendous scientific and technological progress with global diversity? The answer is a definite 'yes'. As with other religions, Zoroastrianism has undergone changes including social changes, but that is to be expected. The core of his message, however, together with the scriptures has survived the ravages of time; although some of the later texts contain incorrect grammar and syntax. The continuity of his teachings, as originally reflected in the *Gaθas*, can be easily discerned in the Young Avesta, Zand and Pahlavi texts. It is, thus, irrational to repudiate the later Avestan, Zand, Pahlavi and Zoroastrian-Persian texts, under the pretext that whatever not found in the *Gaθas* are to be cast off, rejected, abandoned and discarded, as they are not the original ideas of the prophet.

The Religions of Iran -- Pre-Zaraθuštrian Period

The religions of the pre-Zaraθuštrian period can be broadly divided into two categories: (1) The religion of the Vedic *Asuras* and *Devas*, common to Indo-Iranians, and (2) The religion of *Ahuras* / *Yazatās* and *Bagas*, mostly practiced among the Iranian tribes of the pre-Zoroastrian era. The religious ideas of both these groups were reformed by Zarsθuštra with formulated innovations. To understand the earlier religions we have to refer to the religion of the *RigVeda*, which in India was never subjected to radical reform. In the *RigVeda* two types of deities are recognized: the *Asuras* and *Devas* -- the *Asuras* being more concerned with the right ordering of cosmos, while the *Devas* were nearer to man in his endeavors. It is possible that these two types of deities existed side by side, also in Iran, before Zaraθuštra's reforms. This is clear from the *Gaθās* where the *daevas*

[RV, *devas*] are referred to as false gods, with maleficent powers, who refused to obey the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda. Furthermore, the Young Avesta even supplies the names of some of these *daevas*, which correspond exactly to the names of the most important gods of the *RigVeda*. Indra, the war god of *RigVeda*, is portrayed as a demon in the Young Avesta, so is Saurva, corresponding to Indian Sarva or Rudra. Yet Zaratuštra never attacked the other class of deities, the *Ahuras* [RV. Asuras], although he refrained from mentioning any of them by name in his *Gāṅās*. He also speaks of *Ahuras*, or lords, in the plural (vocative) Y. 30.9 and Y. 31.4. Here the term *Ahuras* could either apply to humans (Lords), or to other spiritual deities/divinities, whom he allowed to exist alongside his own supreme God, Ahura Mazda. Thus, the Vedic *Asuras* were accepted as *Ahuras* by Zaratuštra, and the Vedic *Devas* were rejected.¹ In the *Gāṅās* the complete polarization between *Ahuras* and *Daevas*, as good and evil deities, was brought forth by Zaratuštra, but in the later parts of *RigVeda* the reverse polarization took place, with the *Devas* and *Asuras* being considered good and evil respectively. Zaratuštra's reformation was the result of interdependent development and as noted it took place while the Iranians and Indo-Aryans were still in contact with each other. Zaratuštra, thus, formulated his *Ahurā-Daevā* ideology which separated and disassociated the *Mazdayasnians* from the *Deva-Asura* concept that developed in India during the Brahmana period.²

In Zaratuštra's *Gāṅās* the term *Ahuras*, 'lords', is found twice to denote the divine helpers of Ahura Mazda. In Y. 30.9 *mazdāscā ahurāṅho*, in the vocative sense, as 'O Mazda and you [other] Ahuras' and in Y. 31.4 as subject 'the other Ahuras and Mazda'.³ The concept of *Ahuras* as given by Zaratuštra in the *Gāṅās* is debatable, but it can be taken as the personifications of Ahuraic concepts, which are the manifestations of *Ahura Mazda* as *aša* 'truth', *vohū-manah* 'good thought', *speṅta ārmaiti* 'prosperous right-mindedness', *aši* 'reward', and *səroša* 'obedience'. These are also the concepts of Good principle. *Aša* as Truth, Order, Righteousness, etc., has played a leading part in the pre-Zoroastrian religions of the Aryans, cf. to Vedic *ṛtá* 'truth', and to the Indo-European concept of Greek *ētor* 'heart'. *Aša* is also closely connected to *ātr* 'fire', Vedic *agní* and Latin *ignis*. Zaratuštra put *druj* 'deceit/lie', opposed to *Aša*, as the 'evil principle' coming from the *Daevas*. It is clear that he emphatically condemned the Vedic *devas*, together with *druj*, 'lie/deceit'.⁴ Thus, the reformation made Ahura Mazda and his truthful followers *ašauuan*, and the false gods, *Daevas*, and their deceitful followers the *dreguvaṅt*. We know that the pantheon of the young Avesta has a large number of *Yazatas*, the divinities. The word *Yazata* is not found in the *Gāṅās* but occurs in the Yasna Hapatanhaiti, Y. 41.3.⁵ *Yazata* is translated

as adorable, worthy of worship.⁶ The relationship of Avestan *Yazata* with Vedic *yajata* puts its origin to Proto-Aryans. *Yazata* is an Iranian development and its occurrence brings it quite near to Zaratustra's reforms.

The word for lord, god is attested in the Old Persian inscription as *baga*, which is also the Old Iranian word for god, and is related to Vedic *bhaga*, which is used of gods like Indra, Agni, Soma and Savitr. In the Old Persian inscriptions of the Achaemenid rulers, Ahura Mazda is called as *maθišta bagānām*, 'the greatest of the gods'. In the Young Avesta it occurs in Yt. 7.7 *yazāi māñhəm....bay raēuuantəm*, 'I will worship the moon, the wealthy god', and in Yasna 70.1 Ahura Mazda is called '*baga*': *təm bayem təm ratūm yazamaide yim ahurəm mazdəm*, 'we worship that God, that judge, who is Ahura Mazda'. In Yasna 10.10: *θβa (haoməm) ...bayō tatašaṭ huuapā* 'An artisan God has fashioned you, the Haoma', with its Pahlavi translation: *tō...bay tāšd hē ī xwābar* 'a beneficent God has fashioned you'. The Dinkerd 7,2,11⁷ alludes to 'the village that has been fashioned by a beneficent god'. This was revealed to Durdōvā, Zaratustra's mother, on her way to the village of Pouušaspa, whom she is to marry. Thus, it is evident that right upto the Pahlavi times (9 century CE), *baga* refers to the God worshipped by people before Zaratustra's reformation, and before he revealed the true nature of God as Ahura Mazda -- the Wise Lord.⁸

In the *Gaθā Ahunauvaiti* (Y32,8), there is an occurrence of *bagā* in *...ahmākəng gāuš bagā x'arəmnō* 'Even Yima became notorious ...wishing to gratify the mortals failed by calling himself God or swearing falsely by God....' It is debatable whether Yima knew Ahura Mazda, but Yima did worship God under the name of *bagā*. Videvdad 2,2 has Ahura Mazda conversing with Yima as the first mortal with whom Ahura Mazda held conference but, as Humbach has pointed out, this is a 'religious anachronism'.⁹ All these attest to Zaratustra's reformation of the old Iranian concept of God.

Innovation of Zaratustra

One of the great innovation which Zaratustra made in religious thought was to apprehend the highest supreme power, to whom he gave the name of Ahura Mazdā, Lord of Wisdom, as the God, the only eternal Being, self-existing, wholly wise and good. But, with visionary eyes, he saw also another primal being, the Evil Spirit, Angrā Mainyu, likewise self-existing, wholly independent of God and utterly malign (cf. Y. 30, 3-5, and Y. 45.2). It was to destroy this Evil Spirit that the prophet was sent to cleanse the universe of evil. Ahura Mazda, as the supreme Creator, made this world a battleground where good and evil could meet so that evil could be

vanquished and destroyed forever, (cf. Y. 44) and for the exposition of His divine purpose.¹⁰ Ahura Mazda thus created this world and all that is in it, including man, all good; but, in His omniscience He had foreseen that evil would invade the world through the misdeeds of Angra Mainyu, who is the source of all corruption, misery and vice. Angra Mainyu is to be unflinchingly defied and resisted -- consciously by man, instinctively by the rest of the creation. The whole world, animate and inanimate, was thus conceived by Zaraθuštra as striving towards a victory, that would result in salvation from evil in all its aspects.

Zaraθuštra's Reforms

Zaraθuštra's reforms contained lofty religious and moral elements that were advanced and modern, although they were propagated in an historical period that is much earlier than the establishment of the first Iranian empire (Achaemenian). Zaraθuštra developed his new teachings from the Old Iranian religion, which itself was rich in beliefs and observances. The archaic is seldom simple; and Zoroastrianism has some intricate doctrines which are difficult for modern man to grasp. The *Gāθās* incontrovertibly testify to one of the most glorious and boundless beneficent reformation that the world has ever seen. It was a revolution inspired by a flaming zeal, in a religious cause, and by a burning desire to benefit the material, mental and moral sides of human nature. It was a movement which marked a sharp line of demarcation between the new well-defined Mazda worship, and the vague religious principles that then prevailed among the Indo-Iranian people. It established a reformed religion which comprised many modifications of the system which were in vogue upto that time. These modifications could not have sprung up simultaneously; they must have had their source in some legislator of high intellectual and spiritual powers. History has always shown that all new religious systems and new philosophies arise and develop from the action or teaching of an individual.

In the *Gāθas* we witness Zaraθuštra's fears, his complaints to Ahura Mazdā, his struggles, his earnest prayers, his fervent exhortations, his hopes, his faith in Ahura Mazdā all expressed simply and naturally. He was appointed by Ahura Mazdā as the only one who could be the master¹¹ It is worth noting that he was not elected, selected or chosen by his people; on the contrary he was driven away from his home, from his clan, and his near and dear ones in the early years of his ministry.¹² Zaraθuštra was singularly gifted with moral, spiritual and intellectual powers.

Zarathuṣtra's view of the world is rooted in the actual condition of his time. From the old religion he takes over two antithesis -- already found in the *RigVeda* -- of Truth (*asha*) and Lie (*druj*), and in this respect his religion is called an ethical dualism, but unlike the *RigVeda* he puts this in the front of his religious teachings. He does not start from any abstract principle but from the concrete situations prevailing at that time in the Eastern Iranian lands. He sees on one side the settled agricultural pastoral community living a peaceful life, while on the other side he sees a predatory, marauding tribal society which raids the peaceful settlements destroying cattle and men. Their gods were like themselves.¹³ The Zoroastrian reformation had a profound effect upon religious worship, religious practice and also on social life. Although the message of the reformation was addressed to all men and women, and therefore had a clear universal application, its explicit reference to "those who know" *vidva* or *vaēdamna* in the *Gāthās*, and its spreading within the close circles of *urvaṭa* and *frya* (friends and confederates), meant that the new message was addressed to these friends and confederates in restricted communities, which in turn were transmitted to wider and wider circles, thus resulting in their being influenced by new interpretations and subsequent adaptations.

Although Zarathuṣtra's doctrine is markedly universal, it also has features of teachings that are partly initiatory. This is seen from its strong tendency to abstraction, its strict moral tone and its break with the cyclical mythological scenery. But we must not forget that Zarathuṣtra was also a *zaotar*, a priest, a qualification that was not gained without going through a complex traditional training, and thus it is possible that metaphorical meanings of the *Gāthic* language, of the so called symbolism of *gav*- and concepts such as *Gəuš Urvan*, may acquire a certain plausibility if they are used against the background of "pastoral imagery". Zarathuṣtra came from a long line of priests, and the *Gāthic* texts themselves present the proof of his lineage. Furthermore, the *Gāthās* have the identical metrical structure, hemstitches, vocabulary selections with elliptical compact style of composition as that of the *RigVedas*, which were composed by Vedic *hotar* priests. Zarathuṣtra's reforms proclaimed the need for a new social order in which the then prevailing destructive violence would be replaced by good government, and in which the pastoral communities longed for strong leaders who would put an end to the plundering and devastation of their material resources. It would, however, be an error to take this religious reformation as a political or social one; the prophet's message is strictly religious and moral. It is addressed to every individual here on the earth to fight evil, that is, violence and the lie -- *aēšma* and *druj*.

An important theme, much misconstrued in the *Gaṇas*, is that of free choice given to man. Man is faced sooner or later with making a choice between Truth and Lie; to choose between the belief in one supreme God, Ahura Mazda, the highest deity, or in the *daevas*, the false gods. The basic opposition between Truth and Lie was everywhere and on all levels. Zoroaster came to see the whole cosmos, both material and spiritual, existing in a fundamental tension: over against the Good Thought, Bad Thought; against the Bounteous Spirit, the Destructive Spirit; Right-mindedness against Wrong-mindedness; and so on. On every level and at every stage a choice had to be made, and even Ahura Mazda was not exempt. Scholars vary in their opinions about monotheism in the *Gaṇas*. Zoroaster's religion is dualistic *par-excellence*, where evil cannot be traced to God, as it is in other strict monotheistic faiths, but it is somewhat modified as there is no *Daeva* antagonist to Ahura Mazda and the dualistic nature is more of an ethical concept.¹⁴

Freedom of choice also gives us the freedom to make the wrong choice, the freedom to make mistakes. The Avestan word *varena* means 'free choice', but it is interesting to note that its Pahlavi form *varan* means 'heresy' (also: *ahlomōyih*, *dušwurrōyišnīh*, *zandik*). The prophet says, "where there is doubt as to whether it is a man of false words or one of true words, a knowing one or an ignorant one who, following his heart and thought raises his voice, then one's right-mindedness shall take counsel with his spirit".¹⁵ Both such parties (either of true words or of false words) are entitled to proclaim their beliefs and there is no obvious way of deciding which is true unless some universally accepted authority is accepted. This difficulty is fully known to Zoroaster for he asks his God, "This I ask you, O Ahura, tell me truly, Who is truthful? [Are these truthful] with whom I wish to take counsel, or are these deceitful one? Which of the two is it? Is the former harmful or is the latter harmful and deceitful who intends to obstruct your benefactions...".¹⁶ To solve this difficulty he claimed the authority by virtue of him being appointed prophet and the judge (*Ratu*) by Ahura Mazda. *yezī āiš nōit uruuvānē aduuaāibi.darāšta vaxiiā aṭ vā vīspōng āiioi yaṅā ratūm ahurō vaēda.....ašāṭ hacā juuāmahi* 'If the better way to choose is not seen by the faithful, then I approach you for Ahura Mazda has appointed me as the [*ratu*], Judge between two parties so we can live in accordance with truth.'¹⁷

Zoroaster also reformulated the ancient myth of the two spirits in accordance with his own theology. From the myth he projected the concrete situation where, in this world, the followers of Lie represent destructive forces hostile to life, and the followers of Truth represent life-enhancing forces. Here is the basic duality of Truth and Falsehood,

Righteousness and Wickedness, Order and Disorder. He proclaims “the two spirits in the first stage of existence, of whom the holy one shall address the harmful one as follows: ‘Neither our thoughts nor pronouncements, neither intellect nor choices, neither utterances nor actions nor religious views, nor our souls are in agreement.’”¹⁸ The Holy spirit is not identical with Ahura Mazda but can be taken as His Ahurian aspect. The harmful Spirit, Angra Mainyu (later Ahriman) is the destructive spirit.

Gaṇic Rituals

Kellens-Pirart (1989) in their major translation of the *Gaṇas* have inserted the adjective ‘rituel’ to the substantives *actes, existence, emprise, envoi, succès, parole, annonce, place, mention, and désastre*, 102 times, but this seems to be rather far-fetched. Mary Boyce in her latest work (Zoroastrianism-Its antiquity and Constant Vigor-1992) gave her opinion of the authorship of the poet-prophet to liturgical Yasna Haptanhaitii “for use at a regular act of formal worship” (p.88). Several hypotheses are put by her which still need to be proved. Zarathustra gave his youngest daughter in marriage in what is now considered as the Gaṇic marriage ritual found in the last *Vahištoišti Gaṇā*. The ritual for new initiates is alluded in Ahunavaiti Gaṇa 30.2 (Humabach-Ichaporria, 1994, p. 31, ft), but there is a clear indication in the *Gāṇās* of *Drōn* ritual. The reference to the ritual of oblation is found in the *Ahunavaiti Gāṇā*:

dātā vā amərətāscā utaiūtī hauruuatās draonō (Y. 33.8)

Integrity and immortality are offered to you with stability as
[consecrated bread as sacrificial] oblation

Kellens-Pirart give *draonah* [n.nt] as ‘ration’ corresponding to Sanskrit -*drāvīṇas*.

Such an offering of oblation to Ahura Mazda occurs in *Saroš Daron* ceremony, cf. Yasna 3.1 and 7.1.¹⁹ This helps in understanding Y. 33.8 (*Ahunavaiti Gāṇā*). Of particular interest is the *Gaṇic* passage Y. 34.1 for the oblation offered to *Ahura Mazda*.

ayā śīiaoṇanā yā vacaṇā yā yasnā amərətatātəm
ašəmcā taibiō dāṇhā mazdā xšaθrəmcā hauruuvatātō

The action, word and worship through which you acquire immortality, truth and the power of integrity, O Mazdā Ahura, (a share) of these is offered to you by us who are present in large numbers.

By enjoying the spiritual and material offerings presented to Him by the adherents, Ahura Mazda restores His power which will enable Him to win the decisive victory against evil. In the Yasna liturgy, *hauruuatāt* and *amərətāt* (integrity and immortality) represent the liquid and vegetable parts of oblation [*miiazda*]. There is also an indication in the *Gāθās* of equating *hauruuatāt* and *amərətāt* with water and plants (cf. Y. 51.7) ‘*dāidī mōi yə gam tašō apascā uruuāśā amərətātā hauruuatā...*’ The notion of *hauruuatāt* and *amərətāt* as food is further reflected in the Younger Avesta, (cf. the *Zamyad Yašt*). This evidence shows that the *Gāθic* oblation (*Ahunavaitī Gaθa*-Y. 34.11) continued in the later Avestan period.

vanāt hauruuāśca amərətāśca
uua šudəmca taršnəm ca (*Zamyād Yašt*- *Karade* XIV, 96)
 Integrity and immortality will overcome both hunger and thirst.

aṭ tōi bē hauruuāścā xʼarəθai.ā amərətātāścā (*Ahunauvaitī Gaθa*
 - Y. 34.11)
 Both integrity and immortality serve you as food. (Humbach-
 Ichaporia-1994)

Kellens-Pirart, (1989) translate this as ‘Et ces deux, intégré et immortalité, sont destinées à ton alimentation par l’emprise (rituelle) de la divine Pensée...’ (English rendition: Both these two, integrity and immortality are destined to be your food by holding [ritual] divine thought.)

Furthermore *hauruuatāt* and *amərətāt* are depicted as sacrificial offerings in other *Gāθic* passages: Y. 33.8,12; 34.1,11; 44.19; 45.10. Such traditional rituals, also found among the Indo-Europeans and Indo-Iranians and as noted before, have survived in the Young Avesta with the liquid and vegetable parts of the oblation. Humbach in his pioneering work, ‘*The Gāthās of Zarathushtra*’ (1991), elaborated on *hauruuatāt* and *amərətāt* as non-material qualities which *Ahura Mazda* shares with men/women, but in the young Yasna, *hauruuatāt* and *amərətāt* also represent the liquid and vegetable (water and plants) parts of the sacrificial oblations (*miiazda*). We noted that among the Indo-Europeans, the Greeks had *ambrosia-néktar* and the Indo-Aryans had *amíta-* as the food and drink of gods. Just as *ghee/butter* and *soma* with milk are offered to the Vedic gods in the Brahmana rituals, the same (*ghee*, and *homa* with milk) are given to the Zoroastrians supreme deity, Ahura Mazda and to the *yazatas*, as oblations in the various Zoroastrian rituals. Insler alludes to three abstract levels of rituals in the *Gāθās*, with reference to the Vedic once a year ritual of *soma*. But that raises the question as to how, in the later Avesta, the same style of ritual offerings of *drōn* continued. If we take the later Avesta to reflect the rituals of pre-Zoroastrian times, then it raises a paradox: either the *Gāθās*

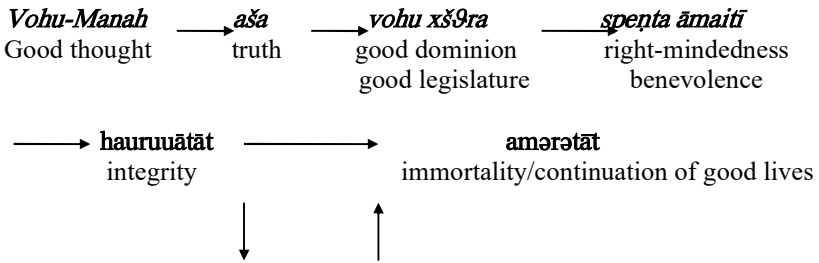
faithfully carried on pre-Zoroastrian rituals and the later Avesta maintained such *Gāθic* rituals OR the *Gāθās* have no rituals, as they were discarded by Zaratuštra, and the later Avesta reintroduced those rejected rituals. The existing *Gāθic* evidence shows clearly that rituals are found among the *Gāθic* texts. Also, from the evidence contained in the *Gāθās*, we know that Zaratuštra, in his own words, declares himself a priest²⁰, and he knew that his highly ethical message could only be transmitted and propagated through the use of those rituals in vogue during his time. He, however, gave different meanings to them. Even during a period when writing was not in fashion, and his message could only be transmitted by word of mouth, his message did get through to pastoral societies. Zaratuštra never rejected the *drōn* and other rituals as generally speculated by some, but gave abstract aspects to rituals alluded in the *Gāθās*. Insler, in the *Gāθic* passage Y. 33.8, stressed that *draonah* “is defined as health and continuing life.”²¹ This is a very subjective interpretation, not substantiated anywhere in the *Gāθic*, later Avesta or any Pahlavi texts and translations. It may be as Insler alluded that “Zarathushtra had to speak in terms of acknowledged forms of rituals that existed from time immemorial.”²² Here the ‘time immemorial’ seems to be the pre-Zarathushtrian period. Zaratuštra, beside imparting highly abstract ethical teachings, innovated different understanding of the sacred rites. By fusing the material offerings in rites and rituals with the spiritual elements, Zaratuštra made rituals and sacred rites a more enduring and lasting form of offerings to Ahura Mazda.

Zaratuštra’s religious reforms contributed immensely to modern religious thought. The prophet understood that there is more than one way to serve Ahura Mazda, and that traditional rituals are links between the past and present. He gave ancient rituals deeper spiritual meanings. His great innovation was understanding God through his Ahurian divine aspects, later called the *ameša spənta*, which operate as the moral and ethical principles for living a good life. Let me elaborate on this further. *Vohu Manah*, ‘good thought/good conception’ is needed to grasp *Aša* ‘truth’. To establish *Vohu Xšəra* ‘good domain/ good rule’, *Aša* ‘truth’, is to be realized first, i.e., there must exist truthful dealings among those who rule us. To achieve *spənta ārmaitī* ‘benevolence/right-mindedness’, we have to establish good rule, good domain. To accomplish *hauruuatāt* ‘integrity/wholesomeness’, ‘good rule/peaceful government’ is necessary, not bad rule and revolt. Then there will be uninterrupted continuation of human lives, i.e., *amərətāt* ‘immortality’. The reverse is also true, immortality (*amərətāt*) which is the continuation of human lives depends on wholesomeness/integrity (*hauruuatāt*) of the rulers and the ruled. Any violation of these divine aspects results in chaos, disharmony, destruction and ensures great human sufferings. These abstract Ahurian aspects were also explained by the

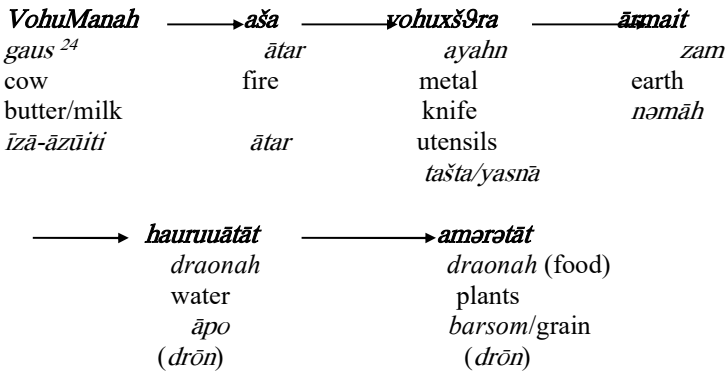
prophet through rituals, which resulted in him successfully getting his ethical message through to the knowledgeable ones and the ignorant, to kings and pheasants, to the high and mighty and the lowest of the low, and to all in the ancient Iran. Zaruštra intertwined the mental and material aspects of his theology with the rituals inherited by his people. As noted, he was himself well versed in these ancient rituals by virtue of him being a priest.

I put forward the following paradigm to help us in understanding Zaruštra's message given in his songs, the *Gaṅās*:

Abstract Entities to Material Concepts and Material Concepts to Abstract Entities:²³



Ancient Rituals (drōn and yasnā and vispered):



All these *Ahurian* entities / aspects, (later *ameša speṇtā*), are presided over by *Ahura Mazda*. The *Zaotar* is the representative of *Ahura Mazda* in the *Yasnā/Drōn/Visperəd* rituals. (See Y. 51 for mental and material levels of ritual thoughts.) The traditional rituals were upheld by

the prophet with customary adjuncts of milk (*īžā*), butter (*āzūiti*), sacrificial bread (*drōn*) and food offerings (*maiizdā*).

Vision of Zarθuštra

Zoroastrian tradition is linked to the work of Zarθuštra, and in the later Avesta he is called the first *āθravañ*, the first *raθēštar*, the first *vāstriiō-fšuiiñs*, (see: Yašt 13.89), while in the *Gāgas* he is known as *zaotar*, *nar* and *vāstar/vāstraii* -- the priest, hero/warrior and tiller of soil/agricultural pastoralist. He is a visionary prophet. Martin Schwartz stressed that Zarθuštra is not only a great religious teacher, but an outstanding poetic genius, operating in all imaginable hierarchies of sound and meaning, within an ultimately very consistent philosophical framework. This together with his championship of the use of thought, sets him among the more remarkable human paradigms of mind and spirit created by the Wise Lord.²⁵ Zarθuštra was not a mere politician or a drug addicted witch doctor as Herzfeld and Nyberg believed; Henning has dealt successfully with these wrong perceptions of the prophet and no further elaboration is necessary. The *Gāgās* are the Heritage of Zarθuštra; his religion of salvation helps to fight evil at every stage ‘by handing it over into the hands of truth’.²⁶ He preaches making the Ahurian concepts of *Amešā Spentā* one’s own, with the help of Good Thought and Right-Mindedness; of making the correct choice with piety, charity, benevolence and compassion to all; of bringing integrity in to every aspects of man’s accomplishments and gaining immortality for posterity; of contributing one’s good deeds towards the establishment of the Desired Dominion with good government, thereby making the existence brilliant,²⁷ under the guidance of the prophet; and of one becoming a *Saoshyant* ‘redeemer’ himself/herself, to bring the world to perfection. These are the universal truths and eternal principles of the *Gāgās* not only for the next millennium but for all ages.

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Notes.

- 1 *Aṭ yuš daeuuā vipāñhō akāṭ manañho stā ciθrəm*
But all you *daevas* are the seeds of evil thought Y. 32.3
- 2 Humbach, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and Other Old Avestan Texts*, 1991, p.23
- 3 Humbach, 1991, p 13 ft, *mazāśca* is monosyllabic in both occurrences making it *mazdā* -nom.sing
- 4 In RigVeda, *druh* ‘lie’ is relatively mild -- see Humbach, 1991
- 5 *humānim θβa īžim yazatəm ašarhacim dadəmaide* ‘we choose you, the blessed, abundant Yazata who in harmony with truth’.
- 6 Rig Vedic *yajata* worthy of worship, adorable, holy, sublime (used for moon, priests and Siva etc. RV v 67,68)
- 7 Sanjana, Dinkard 7,2.11: *ān wis bay tāšid ī xwabar*
- 8 Cf. Humbach, 1991, *baga* worshipped by Yima was most likely Mithra, p. 18
- 9 Op.cit. p.18
- 10 Anklesaria, Iranian Or Greater Bundahishn, 1956, Chapter 1
- 11 Y. 28,1 & 8 where the soul of the cow. It is a mystical concept, cf.Humbach-Ichaporria, 1994, p. 27, ft (‘cow’ metaphorically denotes the earth in the pastoral vocabulary of Zaratuštra) laments for cruelty and desires for the master. The desire was granted and Zaratuštra was appointed as the only one who has listened to Ahura Mazda’s teachings (*sāsnā*). Insler in his ‘The Gāthās of Zarathustra’ 1975, (p.31, Y. 29.7) translates *sasnā* as ‘Commandments’ which sounds more or less like Moses receiving his ten commandments from Yahweh. Similarly he faltered again in Y. 32.8, p. 47, where he introduced the Hinduistic idea of [Yima] Jamsheed swearing: ‘The cow is goddess’, or as Ilya Gershevitch noted in his article “Yima’s Beef Plea” (*Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dictata*, Roma, 1987), it looks like worshipping of cow as a god in Judaic tradition

of Moses' exodus. For further explanation see Humbach's excellent article, 'Jamsheed in The Gathas and the Pahlavi Texts', in this publication.

¹² See the famous "Kam nemoi zaṃ" Y. 46.1 passage where Zaraθusta laments against the family and tribes for forsaking him and he wants to flee but does not know where to go.

¹³ Insler, 1975, p. 253, alludes to 'the collaboration of the deceitful rulers and deceitful priests'.

¹⁴ Humbach-Ichaporria, 1994, p. 12

¹⁵ op.cit. Y. 31.12

¹⁶ op.cit. Y. 44.12

¹⁷ op.cit. Y. 31.2

¹⁸ op.cit. Y. 4.2

¹⁹ *xʷarəθəm miiazdəm* as sacrificial food is to be found in Yasna 3.1 and Yasna 7.1:-

xʷarəθəm miiazdəm aiiese ysšti hauruutat aməratata gāus hudā (Y. 3.1)

With reverence I fetch water (*hauruutat*, lit. integrity) and plants (*aməratata*, lit. immortality) and (the flesh of) a munificent cow as sacrificial food.

ašaiia dadāmi xʷarəθəm miiazdəm hauruuta aməratātā gāus hudā [Y. 7.1]

Truthfully I offer water (*hauruuta*, lit. integrity) and plants (*aməratāt*, lit. immortality) and (the flesh of) a munificent cow as are past and sacrificial food.

²⁰ *yə zaotā aša ərazuš-* 'As a leading priest straightforward in truth', Y. 33.6, Humbach-Ichaporria, 1994 and H.Lommel, 'Zarathushtras Priesterlohn' in Zarathustra, ed Schlerath, Darmstadt, 1989, also M.Boyce in almost all her works. Mostly all the learned scholars agree on the priesthood of Zarathushtra as but few insists in making Zarathushtra an invoker by pointing that *zaotā* is glossed as an invoker, forgetting that the priest also is an invoker of God.

²¹ S. Insler. 'Abstract Levels in the Gathas of Zarathustra' 1989

²² op.cit

²³ see: J. Kellens, *Le panthéon de l'Avesta Ancien*, IV-I, p. 89, Wiesbaden, 1994

²⁴ see: J. Narten, *Die Aməša Spəntas im Avesta*, Harrossowitz, Wiesbaden, 1982, p. 134

...an den yazamaide-Stellen vorgeschaltet ist, daß sie vom Opferer x^vareθəm miiazadəm, als Speise, als Opferspeise dargebracht werden, sin Ahura Mazdā, den Aməša Spənta sowie dem Sraoša gewidmet (Y.3,1,20, Y7,1,21, vgl. auch Y.6,18)

²⁵ M.Schwartz, 'Coded Sound Patterns, Acrostics and anagrams in Zoroaster's Oral Poetry' in *Studia Grammatica Iranica. Festschrift für Helmut Humbach*, Munich, 1968, p. 392

²⁶ Y. 30.8 *yōi ašai dadən zataiiō drujem* and Y. 44.14 *kaθa ašai drujəm diiām zastaiio*.

²⁷ Y. 30.9 *aṭcā tōi vaēm xiiāmā yōi im fərašəm kərənaon ahūm*- 'Thus may we be those who make existence brilliant'

THE GATHIC VISION AND ITS RECEPTION IN FUTURE GENERATIONS

By
K. D. Irani

One must consider the form of a religious vision (i.e., the form of religiosity) to assess how it will be received, and whether it will flourish in the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual climate of the future. In the last century some philosophic commentators such as Caird, Harnack and Scheler distinguished, implicitly or explicitly, Pre-Enlightenment religious views and attitudes from Enlightenment religious views and attitudes. The former called for an intense act of faith to accept the doctrines and creeds prescribed to the believer, since they were unrelated to, perhaps inconsistent with, the general worldview of the times. An extreme version of such attitude was manifested by the early Roman theologian, Tertullian, who wishing to exalt the power of his faith above human reason is reported to have said: "I believe because it is absurd." The other (Enlightenment) view takes the religious vision to be held by an act of faith which does not require jeopardizing or repudiating one's beliefs based on reason and experience.

I shall present here the position that the Gathas of Zarathushtra offer a religious vision which is undoubtedly an Enlightenment view. I shall confirm this by examining Gathic theology on the one hand, and the ideals of the Enlightenment on the other. Thereafter, I shall indicate the combination of beliefs and attitudes likely to remain stable and flourish, and those not so likely in a culture with an Enlightenment world-view in the foreseeable future or until the unlikely advent of the next dark age.

The doctrine of Gathic theology is presented, as in the case of most doctrinal religions, as a fusion of a *View of the World* and a **Way of Life**. The view of the World is based upon an abstract notion, an Ideal Conception of the World, i.e., the Ideal Truth, *Asha*. The material world is to be taken as a creation by Ahura Mazda meant ideally to unfold in accordance with *Asha*. However, this creation became a field of conflict between two forces or attitudes, good and evil. The good vector is directed toward realizing *Asha* in this world, and the evil vector is directed toward frustrating *Asha*. The world we experience is this conflicted world, according to this theology. And that, in fact, is what Zarathushtra asks us to accept as our religious world-view. Although such a world-view is

scientifically not provable, it does not contradict our experience of the world, it does not place a burden upon reason, nor does it require the acceptance of the miraculous or anything violating reason or experience. Zarathushtra specifically asks each believer to reflect on the view and make a choice. The use of the clear mind to reflect and the consequent exercise of the freedom of choice are the hallmarks of enlightenment thought.

To complete the theology we must explore the *Way of Life* related to the *View of the World*. It is this: Each human being is endowed with the Good Mind (*Vahu Mana*), the faculty capable of grasping Asha, and also capable of comprehending the moral quality of whatever situation we face in life. Thus we can recognize how a situation is flawed, and also in what state it ideally should be. This is what has been termed Good Thought, *Humata*. This must be communicated honestly and without injurious intent to those who are, or would be, affected in the situation concerned. And communication from them should be received with an open mind. This is Good Word, *Hukhta*. And then inspired by the spirit of Right mindedness, *Spenta Armaity*, one should proceed with firm resolve to that which our reflection and communication informs us is right, i.e., according to *Asha*. This is how Zarathushtra directs us to choose our Way of Life.

But the choice is ours and each one of us bears the responsibility for that choice. The Gathas emphasize the choice as individual, each one for himself or herself. This explicit articulation of individual choice distinguishes Gathic religion as fundamentally individualistic from the prevailing religions of that period which were tribal.

That this is the religious view is confirmed by noticing that it provides for conceptions of individual and cosmic destiny. The individual at death judged for the righteousness of his or her actions proceeds to the Abode of Songs in a state of Best Consciousness, or, if evil, proceeds to the darkness of the house of Falsehood in a state of Worst Consciousness. The universe itself will finally triumph over evil, when evil is not chosen, and shall be in accord with *Asha*.

It should be clear to all that this is an Enlightenment religious view. However, a clear formulation of the Enlightenment ideal needs to be formulated.

What then is Enlightenment?. We can do no better than obtain the answer from its most celebrated formulation “What is Enlightenment?” by the great philosopher Immanuel Kant. According to him “Enlightenment is humanity’s emergence from self-imposed immaturity.” Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding based on reason, without guidance from another, due to negligence or lack of resolve, hence selfimposed. “Rules and formulas, those mechanical aids to the rational use, or rather misuse of one’s natural gifts are the shackles of a permanent immaturity.” Nothing is required for this enlightenment except freedom and reason. The freedom to use reason is private and in public.

Enlightenment as an ideal and basis for social policy is taken to be a phenomenon of the 18th century in Europe. But I would urge here that there was a much earlier emergence of it in the religious or quasi-religious ideas of thinkers in the Eastern world, especially in early but not later, Buddhism, and in the teachings of Zarathushtra.

Notice that Zarathushtra. explicitly asks his hearers to listen with an illumined mind to his remarks and decide to accept them or not. Firstly, this respects the freedom of the individual to think and choose. Secondly, the doctrine he offers imposes no burden upon rationality. There are no fantastic, miraculous or unbelievable pseudo-facts offered for belief. He asks you to look at the world as a moral reality, and if you so regard the world, recognize it as a field of conflict between good and evil. One may accept this vision or one may not, but it does not strain credulity, in fact, it appears as a reasonable moral perception of the world we live in and our experience of it.

It is the absence of social, ideological, religious or political imposition that makes the Gathic doctrine a reflective religion, and regards each individual, whether living, in accordance with, or contrary to, this vision, individually responsible for that choice. Such a conception makes the Gathic religious vision of Zarathushtra a genuine enlightenment religion. The enlightenment attitude does not necessarily remain unaltered in the history of the religious tradition. The attitude manifested in the Gathic religion was certainly not maintained in the medieval period of Zoroastrian history where practices were prescribed which reputedly had quasi-magical effects and which were imposed with social and legal pressure.

Similarly, in Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha relied on the gaining of insight into the nature of human existence in order to escape the state of suffering. The enlightenment attitude implicit in this vision was transformed into a set of quasi-magical practices, recitations and wheel-turnings, as the technology of salvation and escape from re-births and suffering.

The message of Jesus in his sermons and parables teaches an attitude of accepting the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man. And emerging therefrom was the ethic of love-of complete openness of the self to the other and acceptance of the other. This is an enlightenment religious vision. However, the Christianity of the Church developed within a century or two after Jesus, relied on the mystery of the sacraments; and with those magical requirements became a non-enlightenment vision. It was mainly some 19th century Christian theologians who by focusing on the teachings of Jesus restored, in some quarters, the enlightenment faith of the founder.

That these intellectual issues arose in the history of ideas in Europe is no accident. The extraordinary levels of bigotry and rabid intolerance manifested in the religious wars of 16th and 17th century Europe so degraded the notion of religiosity in the minds of thoughtful persons that many abandoned religion altogether. And there are persons today who believe that the Enlightenment attitude is essentially agnostic. But as we saw above, the attitude rejects not religious vision per se, but the religious conception embedded in the technology of mystery and the somewhat infantile faith of asking and giving.

We may crystallize this discussion by examining the two forms of religious visions -- pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment -- by contrasting them in two areas: regarding the *Content* of the religious vision, i.e., its theology, and regarding the *Mode of its Acceptance*. We must make these distinctions not just in the *theology* but also in *ethics*. For without an ethical component incorporated in it, a religion loses relevance in life and becomes either a form of spiritual aestheticism or a technology of self-preservation and possibly salvation.

With respect to the Content of the theology, most traditional religions with a clergy require some religious performance which may be ritual, and/or recitation, and/or devotional acts. Performing them is what

THE GATHIC VISION AND ITS RECEPTION IN FUTURE GENERATIONS

makes one religious. In contrast, the Enlightenment religious vision calls for a commitment to a Way of Life and requires the believer to view the world in such a way as to make such striving appear significant. In the following Chart, these two types of contents are symbolized as Rc¹ and Rc², i.e. Religious content type 1 and type 2.

	Religions (R)	Ethics (E)
Content	Rc ¹ : Performance: (i) Ritual (ii) Recitation (iii) Devotional Acts Rc ² : Commitment to Way of Life	Ec ¹ : Precepts, Rules, Codes Ec ² : Deliverance of Conscience
Mode of Acceptance	Ra ¹ : Obedience (Source): (i) Scripture (ii) Authority (iii) Tradition Ra ² : Considered Assent, Reflective	Ea ¹ : Obedience. Acceptance through: (i) Authority (ii) Tradition Ea ² : Reflective. Acceptance through: (i) Rational (ii) Intuitional

The Mode of Acceptance for each of the types may also be distinguished. In the first it is essentially obedience to scripture, authority or tradition. Whereas in the second type, the believer is called upon to give his considered assent upon reflection. Hence such a religious view is called reflective religion. In the Chart we symbolize the modes of Acceptance as Ra¹ and Ra².

We may now make the analogous distinctions for Ethics. In prescriptivist religious ethics the Content consists of certain given Precepts, Rules or Codes. Whereas the Enlightenment ethical thought treats ethical content as given in the conscience of the human agent. Symbolically, these are Ec¹ and Ec².

And the Mode of Acceptance in Ethics may be contrasted thus. In the first type, acceptance is through obedience to authority or tradition. In the second type, acceptance comes through reflection of one's moral consciousness. This reflection may proceed through construction of rational criteria for moral judgment, as in the ethics of Kant, while others rely on internal insights into our consciousness of values, exemplified in the works of M. Scheler, N. Hartmann. We may symbolize these two as Ea¹ and Ea².

From all these possibilities we may combine the religious and ethical types in each of the areas we are interested in -- Content and Mode of Acceptance. Some combinations are stable, others are unstable because the combination is inherently incoherent. And even though, in matters of religious belief, human beings have shown themselves to be highly tolerant of incoherence and even inconsistency, it is the case that incoherence in belief systems is a powerful indicator of change. Sometimes it is just change in the belief system that ensues, but often it is change in the cultural complex. What happens is that a whole complex of shared beliefs and practices manifest cracks and erosion, and either a coherent replacement is achieved or the entire institution of the belief structure is washed away.

This is the way I looked at the problem when the topic of the conference in its original form was presented to me. And in terms of the concepts developed here I suggest an approach to the problem.

The two stable combinations, regarding Content, of Religious and Ethical structures are:

I	$Rc^1 \ \& \ Ec^1$	→	Pre-Enlightenment
II	$Rc^2 \ \& \ Ec^2$	→	Enlightenment

And stable combinations regarding Modes of Acceptance are:

III	$Ra^1 \ \& \ Ea^2$	→	Pre-Enlightenment
IV	$Ra^2 \ \& \ Ea^2$	→	Enlightenment

Of these four, my reading of the Gathas leads me to the firm conviction that combination II and IV represent Gathic religion in content and mode of acceptance.

Later states of Zoroastrian belief may be represented by I and/or III. Those are stable combinations, but they reflect a religion not quite compatible with the Gathas.

The unstable states are combinations where the Content of the theology and the ethic have different numerical superscripts, they are Rc^1 and Ec^2 , or Rc^2 and Ec^1 . Here though there are variations in attitude, the incoherence is generally tolerable. But combinations in modes of acceptance with super-script difference, Ra^1 and Ea^2 or Ra^2 and Ea^1 become utterly unacceptable.

Variations in religious content as well as attitude have been noticed by many scholars but there does not seem to be a full grasp of the implications of the incoherence for the beliefs and practices of Zoroastrian communities, even by historians of the religion. Analysis of this kind is an aspect of the study of the philosophy of culture, but it has not found use in the history of ideas.

Historical treatments of Zoroastrianism generally provide us with chronicles of beliefs and practices and how they were influenced. Too often beliefs and practices are not recognized as indicators of changes in notions of religiosity and in the attitudes toward acceptance. These remarks are not to be taken as a criticism of historical writing in this field. Historians are not expected to be philosophers of culture. The point to note is that when historical information is employed for prognosis regarding the future belief structures of the community, the judgments become quite simplistic in the absence of analysis indicating through stability or instability the possibility and direction of change.

In this day and age when most educated persons are raised in an all-pervading Enlightenment atmosphere, the religious vision of the Gathas imposes no strain of incoherence with the accepted contemporary worldview. If, however, the Zoroastrian faith is presented by its priests, teachers, scholars and commentators as having a Pre-Enlightenment form, associated with its late medieval form, cognitive and attitudinal dissonance will ensue. But over and above that we shall witness the tragedy of misrepresentation of the message of one of the earliest Enlightenment teachers of humanity.

**COMPREHENSION OF THE GATHAS - A DIALECTIC
STUDY BY THE GATHA GROUP OF THE ZOROASTRIAN
ASSOCIATION OF THE GREATER BOSTON AREA**

by
Khorshed F. Jungalwala

The religions of the world provide a great record of human thought and sublime expression. From earliest times people have expressed their deepest convictions about the universe and mortal life in worship and symbol. All the arts and sciences of the world have been brought into the service of religion.

In this century thousands of Zoroastrians have left their homelands and ancestral abode in search of a materially fulfilling life. Some of us have continued our traditional ways with minor adjustments in order to fit into an evolving society; and at the other extreme some of us have decided that in the interest of practicality many rituals are now irrelevant and should be hastily disregarded.

Each Group has its elements and degrees of extremism. A "Fanatic" cannot change his mind and refuses to change the subject. Trying to change each other's beliefs is an exercise in futility. In fact, a healthy respect for one another's ideology will in time make the differences inconsequential. The peak of tolerance and understanding is most readily achieved by those who are not burdened with rigid convictions. Let us not heed the prophets of doom and gloom, but channel our thoughts and energies in ways that could bring about harmony in spite of diversity.

In the long run we can hope that religion will change the nature of man and reduce conflict. But history has not been encouraging in this respect. The fiercest wars in history have been fought in the name of religion.

Apathy, in any situation, is undesirable. It brings to mind what philosopher Edmund Burke wrote to a friend in 1795, "Nothing is so fatal to religion as the indifference of those born into it". I hardly think he was referring to us Zoroastrians, but today it can certainly be applied to us! There exists a "Silent Majority" today that is indifferent to the changes that are being brought about and confused about their role in preserving the religion. Our energies should be positively directed towards educating this "Silent Majority" -- whether it be in India, Iran, Asia, Europe, Africa,

Australia or the Americas. If we miss this opportunity, history will judge us harshly. We must make the effort to generate interest in those who are ambivalent about their beliefs. *Religion Has Nothing Greater to Fear Than Not Being Sufficiently Understood.*

A study of Zoroastrianism includes not just the philosophy in the Gathas, but also the relevant scriptures like the Yasnas, Visperad, Yashts, Vendidad, Khorde Avesta, Nirang etc. Traditions and rituals are an integral part of every religion. The study of the Gathas is most critical to the understanding of the religion. It is the first step. The most important step!

Most of the oral and about 1/4 of the written works and traditions have survived through wars and persecutions due to the prodigious efforts of our valiant and dutiful priests throughout history! Priests such as Tansar and Kirdar during and after the Sassanian Era have made it possible for us to preserve and protect a lot of our religious heritage. Let it not be forgotten that the role of priests in our lives today is as important as our own survival as Zoroastrians in every part of the world!

Zarathushtra's prophetic vision, propelled by a poetic ingenuity has made it possible for us to understand Ahura Mazda's message to the universe through the medium of the Gathas. A mere 6000 words of philosophical pearls of wisdom, with no Parables, no Prescriptions, and no Commandments! The message is eternal and universal, respectful of man's intellect and conscience, but at the same time immensely thought provoking.

Scholars have presented diverse translations and interpretations of the Gathas over the past several centuries; they are doing so today; and will continue to do so in the years to come.

An optimum responsibility lies with all scholars to interpret the broad and finer nuances of the celestial hymns objectively, by understanding the paradigms and concepts of the vision that impelled the prophet's thoughts. I am neither a philologist nor do I have an extensive knowledge of religious philosophy. My mission is that of a humble Zoroastrian desiring to make it possible for every man, woman and child to be enlightened through an adroit process of the study of our poetic heritage and rituals.

We surely do injustice to Zarathushtra by presenting Coptic implications and highbrow explications that only the elitist scholar could possibly comprehend.

COMPREHENSION OF THE GATHAS

Our education and expertise in modern times should make us even more receptive to the profundity and complexity of the Gathic Verses and their bearing on rituals.

In October of 1994, the Gatha Group of Boston was established for the study of the Gathic Scriptures, meeting at Harvard University the first Sunday of every month. Participants in this Group are individuals whose interest lay in arriving at the closest possible interpretation after a microscopic examination and discussions of each and every syllable, word, phrase, and verse.

I will now be briefly discussing the methodology, resources and cumulative effort that have made cognizance and understanding of the message of Zarathushtra possible. This Boston Group comprises of 8-12 people. Each month we study and analyze one or two verses at a time, using various translations and come prepared for an in-depth discussion in which every member of the Group participates. The group has developed a study protocol in which the literal and implied meaning is thoroughly debated and discussed. A consensus is reached and what is finally interpreted is documented. We have been fortunate to have several scholars who are present at this conference guide us in our study endeavors.

Our studies started with the origins, historical development and preservation of the Gathas through the ages during various eras, such as the Kayanian, Achaemenian, Greek, Parthian and Sassanian times, continuing through Arab invasions to the present times. We try to acquaint ourselves with the alphabet and script of the Old Avestan language, and the relative importance of the Gathic Verses in the total Avestan Scriptures.

All participants at each session are given a handout of various translations of a couple of verses. They do their homework by studying the translations; then return to the class the following month to participate in the discussions, analyzing thoroughly every syllable, word, phrase and verse. We put our thoughts together and come up with an INTERPRETATION -- not a TRANSLATION. As you can see in the translations that have been handed out to you, there are some variations in the translations, but we have found that the fundamental essence of each verse has been uniform in all the translations to a greater degree.

A Gatha Study Group should be started in every local Association, which would ultimately lead to study of all the scriptures and rituals. Each Association should document its unbiased research for the benefit of those

who come after them. Philosophy alone does not constitute religion. Peripheral scriptures, traditions, and ceremonial renditions play a major role in the development of any religion. Arbitrary exclusion should be unacceptable without proper study.

Let us not attempt to isolate the Gathas from the rest of the religious tradition but focus our attention on the guidelines laid down in the Gathas, and try to understand the significance of ceremonials and rituals in relation to the Gathas.

Lately, there have been well-meaning Western and Zoroastrian scholars who have leaned towards cautioning the average Zoroastrian, who shows a desire to study the comparative translations, by pointing out the variations in each translation that arise primarily due to the lack of relative objectivity of the scholar and his or her field of expertise, i.e. theology, philosophy, philology or linguistics. The study does not involve a hypothesis, investigation and a definitive conclusion -- in that order. It is fundamentally an objective research on the part of the scholar and an objective-cum-subjective study for any Zoroastrian or non-Zoroastrian for whom faith and religiosity are the essential pre-requisites for the study.

A consensus of the scholars is not what we should be searching for. Our own interpretive intelligence and innate sense should guide us as we progress along the study path. It is infinitely better to have at least a peripheral knowledge of the Gathas than not to attempt any study at all.

Our rituals and traditions have sustained us all along. Let us enrich our understanding of the Scriptures, so that we may emerge as the kind of Zoroastrians who had the faith, performed the rituals, and attained a level of understanding of the tenets of the religion and the wealth of religious literature that followed.

Most of us will never perform great deeds but we can do small deeds in a great way. We may be disappointed if we fail, but we are doomed if we do not try.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us educate ourselves without bias, so that generations to come may learn from our understanding and continue the task of preserving the work of Zarathushtra till the time of Frasho-Kreti -- which is the Ultimate Refreshment and Renovation of the world!

**CONCISE INFORMATION ON AVESTAN
LITERATURE**

The Avestan literature consists of:

YASNA: i) Original Gathas, ii) Haptanghaiti Prayers, iii) Later Yasna.

VISPERAD: Minor liturgical works.

YASHTS: 21 Hymns of adoration to the Yazatas.

VENDIDAD: 22 Chapters of priestly code of protection against impurities.

KHORDE AVESTA: Collection of short prayers for the laity.

NIRANG: Priestly ritual code.

The Gathic Language is the Old Avestan Language which has a strong affinity to Rig Vedic Sanskrit.

YASNA consists of 72 Chapters (Has) of which 17 are devoted to the Gathas.

The Gathas were composed by Zarathushtra around 1750 B.C. and transmitted “orally” over a thousand years till they were put down in written form during the Achaemenian Period (600 B.C. to 200 B.C.)

Gathas are sacred hymns composed by Zarathushtra.

They constitute a small book containing 6000 Words.

They are divided into 5 Sections and 238 Verses.

- 1) Ahunavaiti: Chapters 28-34. (100 Verses).
- 2) Ushtavaiti: Chapters 43-46. (66 Verses).
- 3) Spenta Mainyu: Chapters 47-50. (41 Verses).
- 4) Vohu Khshathra: Chapter 51. (22 Verses).
- 5) Vahishto Ishti: Chapter 5. (9 Verses).

In order to begin to understand Gathic Concepts one must endeavor to comprehend certain words and phraseology.

Ahura Mazda - Wise Lord.

There are aspects of Ahura Mazda which are known as the 6 Amesha Spentas.

- 1) *ASHA VAHISHTA - Highest form of Truth and Righteousness.*
- 2) *VOHU MANA - Good Mind.*
- 3) *SPENTA ARMAITY - Spirit of Benevolence.*
- 4) *KHSHATHRA VAIRYA - Ideal Dominion or Kingdom of Heaven.*
- 5) *HAURVATAT - State of Spiritual and Physical Perfection on Earth.*
- 6) *AMERETAT - State of Immortal Bliss.*

There is a consistent philosophy throughout of two opposing Spirits, Principles or Mentalities. These opposing forces are Dualistic in concept and not Dyotheistic (two Gods).

- 1) *Spenta Mainyu - Good, Bountiful and Progressive Spirit.*
- 2) *Anghre Mainyu - Spirit of Destruction and Evil.*

Of the whole Avestan Literature only the original Gathas and the Haptanghaiti Prayers that were composed in prose by the disciples and followers of Zarathushtra are from the OLD AVESTA. The rest of the material is all in the YOUNGER AVESTA.

The YOUNGER AVESTA gives the genealogy of Zarathushtra in detail. Miracles have been attributed to Him. There is an abundance of information on rituals. Rituals currently performed by Zoroastrians are the liturgy incorporated by the “Magi” in the YOUNGER AVESTA. Concepts like “life after death” are detailed in the YOUNGER AVESTA. Mention is also made of 3 prominent men before Zarathushtra, i.e. Gaya Maretan, Hoshanga and Yima Vivenghat (King Jamshid of the Peshdanian Dynasty).

AN EXAMPLE OF THE STUDY FORMAT OF YASNA 28.4 BY THE
GATHA GROUP OF BOSTON

*Ye urvanem men gaire vohu dade hathra manangaha
ashimcha shaoyhananam vidush Mazdao Ahurahya
yavat isai tavacha avat khsai a-aeshe Ashahya.*

Yasna 28.4 Ahunavaiti Gatha.

Interpretation

I lead my soul to the House of Song through the power of Good Mind
And Righteous Deeds known to You, Ahura Mazda
As long as I have the will and the strength
I shall teach others to strive for Righteousness.

[The “*gaire*” (**House of Song or Mountain Top**) is interpreted as “*behest*” (**Paradise**), which can be accessed in the present life as well as be a reward in life after death.

How may one reach the **Mountain Top**? Zarathushtra states that in the simplest of terms, starting with the **Good Mind**, which may verbalize the thoughts as **Good Words** and culminate in **Righteous Deeds**. The **Mountain Top** is reached through contemplation and moral actions. One is expected to foresee the consequences before discharging the words and rendering the deeds.

Zarathushtra declares that if one leads one’s soul and conscience to a higher elevation, now during this limited life, then the way to do it is the **Path of Asha**. Ashavan Souls are rewarded with **Ameratat (Imortality)** and **Haurvatat (Perfection)** and continue to live in our hearts and minds forever.]

Explanation:

Ye urvanem men = my soul, *yavat* = as long as I live, *Vohu* = Good, *tavacha* = strength, *dade* = lead, *hathra* = through, *khsai* = reach, *avat* = until then, *anangha* = Mind, *a-aeshe* = to strive for, *Ashimcha* = Righteous, *Ashahya* = Righteousness, *shaoyhananam* = deeds, *vidush* = know, *Mazdao Ahurahya* = O Ahura Mazda.

Translations:

I who have set my heart on watching over the soul, in union with Good Thought, and as knowing the rewards of Mazda Ahura for our works, will while I have power and strength, teach men to seek the Right.

- Bartholomae

Inspired by Good Thought and being a witness for Ahura Mazda, I have in mind (one's) soul for (his commendation by my) song, as well as the rewards for his actions. For as long as I can and able I shall look out in (my) search for truth.

- Helmut Humbach- Pallan Ichaporia

With the soul lifted high and tuned to Good Mind, I will lead with awareness of rewards for our actions and in witness to Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord), that as long as I am able and strong, I shall seek and strive for Truth.

- Pallan Ichaporia

I who thoroughly bear in mind to uplift myself with good thinking, and who knowingly bear in mind the Wise Lord's rewards for (our) actions (be they good or bad), as long as I shall be able and strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth.

- Stanley Insler

I shall take the soul to the House of Songs, with the help of the Good Mind; Knowing the blissful rewards of the Wise Lord for righteous deeds, As long as I have the power and strength, I shall teach all to seek for Truth and Right.

- Dinshaw Irani

Who am attuning my soul to Good Mind, know that the actions done for the Wise God have their rewards. As long as I continue to have the will and the power, I shall teach others to strive after Righteousness.

- Ali Jafarey

All Supreme Wise, show me Thy Blessed abode teach me Thy sacred Word, that ever stands, That I may propagate Thy moral code, and spread Thy glorious name throughout all lands, and foil the evils of all wicked bands.

By eloquence of tongue by Thee inspired, Enable me to preach Thy sage commands,

COMPREHENSION OF THE GATHAS

That men with sense of duty may be fired, the happy world attain the goal desired.

- Sorab P. Kanga

Soul, in living Companionship with Vohu Mano - Wisdom - Virtue - Love
Shall I elevate to Soul's Height's Sublime!

Being conscious of the Consequences of Deeds done selflessly in Thy name!

As long as I am in full possession of the Powers of Body - Mind and Spirit,
So long as I teach Mankind E'er to yearn for Righteousness and Truth!

- N. Minocher-Homji

To their Exalted Home shall I, indeed lead Souls attuned to Vohu Mana's Love:

Being aware of blessings pouring down on deeds performed in Mazda Ahura's name,

As long as I have will and wield the power I'll teach mankind to love and strive for Truth.

- I. J. S. Taraporewala

I shall lead my soul towards Heaven by pure thought, and being well aware of the blessings which the Almighty, Ahura, shall pour down upon good deed, I shall teach the people to strive for truth and follow righteousness.

- Mobed Fariborz Shahzadi

Knowing the deeds of Ahura Mazda as blessings, I take my soul, through the help of Good Mind to Divine Heaven. As long as I have the strength and the vitality, I will teach others to strive for Righteousness.

- Kavasji Kanga and F.B. Jungalwala (Gujarati to English)

An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra.

Edited by Dina McIntyre

THE WRITTEN PERIOD OF TRANSMISSION OF THE AVESTA

By
Jean Kellens

The most ancient Avestan texts may have been composed as early as 1200 B.C., where as the manuscripts which allow us to know these texts all date from our millennium. That is to say, the philologist of the Avesta finds himself from the outset confronted with the problem of transmission. How to follow the long trail back from the copyists to the authors of the texts? At first one should analyze the starting point by re-reading the *Prolegomena* of Geldner's critical edition and his chapter on Avestan literature in the *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*. These works are founded on the traditional division of the Avesta, since Anquetil du Perron, into five parts (Yasna, Visprad, Xorda Avesta, Yašts and Videvdad). We must emphasize three points at the outset:

1. The editions of Westergaard and Geldner are based on manuscripts none of which contains the complete text of the Avesta. They give us only part of two textual collections. The first could be defined as the recitation of the long liturgy (Yasna, Visprad, Videvdad), the second as the collection of brief liturgies (Xorda Avesta, Yašts)

2. In a general manner the Avestan manuscripts should represent a double distinction. The first is that of provenance, whether the copy was made in Iran or India. Even though Iranian manuscripts are few (only 10% of the total 150 examined by Geldner), often recent and even though all the Indian manuscripts ultimately derive from an Iranian prototype, one should not underestimate the importance of the Iranian manuscripts. The second distinction is one of content. Certain manuscripts are called "pahlavis" because they give Middle Persian translations and commentaries on the text. Others are called "sades" (pure) because they only contain the Avestan text, however at times with ritual indications in Middle Persian if they are Iranian (nirangs) or in Gujarati if Indian (kiryas). The first respond to a desire to make the texts understandable, the second concentrate on practice to assure the quality of the liturgy. The first group of manuscripts frequently are devoted to one book of the Avesta while the sades tend to reproduce the texts of the entire ceremony.

3. The great majority of extant manuscripts constitutes what Geldner called “the Indian Vulgate”. Copies of the two liturgies (long and short) were multiplied in India for practical reasons. These are recent with only a few dated before the 18th century. Attempts to create a history of transmission of the Avesta must be based on a small number of manuscripts different from that of the Indian Vulgate and much older. We are talking about all the Iranian manuscripts together with the Pahlavi Indian manuscripts of the long liturgy and the Indian sade tradition of the Yašts for the short liturgy. Although difficult to use because of its chaotic and disturbed character nonetheless the Indian Vulgate is a separate part of the transmission of the Avesta.

I. The collection of the short liturgies

It is transmitted by three types of manuscripts:

1. The manuscripts of the Indian or Iranian Xorda Avesta varied by the order of texts as well as by contents. In general, they represent the recitation of private cults uttered by the laity, as well as a number of Yašts. Geldner mentions O3 as the most complete and normative, containing an alphabet, 5 Niyayišns, 3 Afrinagan out of 4, 5 Gahs and Yašts 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21. One may note the absence of 5, 8, 10, 19, the oldest and most important from literary and religious points of view. Yašt 13 is only found in the Iranian Xorda Avesta. Some Iranian manuscripts contain a Pahlavi translation and some Indian a Sanskrit one.

2. The Indian sade Yašts have the complete collection of the 21 Yašts, hymns to deities other than Ahura Mazda, and in all probability represent the book Bagan Yašt of the Sasanian Avesta. They contain no part of the Xorda Avesta save in some the Siroza and the five Niyayišns, four of which are only extracts of the Yašts. All are copies of F1 finished at Nausari on 21 January 1591, by Asdin.

3. Some manuscripts of which Pt1 is the prototype mixed the two traditions above.

So the transmission of the short liturgies is divided into three: (1) the Indian Vulgate, of which one, Jm 4, is remarkably old (1354), (2) the Iranian Xorda Avesta represented by several signed manuscripts of the 18th or 19th centuries, and (3) the Indian sade Yašts. In regard to this last, the

THE WRITTEN PERIOD OF TRANSMISSION OF THE AVESTA

majority of the manuscripts can be traced back to one single ancestor which is still preserved (F1) and all to a lost archetype which is not far removed from this. The task of the philologist is clear. He should base his work on F1 corrected by J10 and compare the Xorda Avesta in those passages which permit it. The most revealing results have been obtained for Yašts 13 and 14.

II. The recitation of the long liturgy

The situation is much more complex. Three traditions may be joined to the Indian Vulgate: the Indian Pahlavi, the Iranian Pahlavi and the Iranian sade one.

1. The Indian Pahlavi tradition is represented by four ancestral manuscripts all by the same copyist Mihraban II, and which were finished between 26 January, 1323, and 17 May, 1324. Mihraban II took as a model for his copying a manuscript of his great grand uncle Rustam. This Rustam is well known. He signed the colophon of a Pahlavi book in Iran in 1269, and one of the Avestan Visprad in India at Anklisar. Perhaps the latter is our manuscript K7b. If it is not due to a later copyist who simply reproduced the colophon of his model, we have here by far the oldest Avestan manuscript in existence. The date of K7b, or its original, is 28 December 1258, 1268, 1278 or 1288, according to different ways of lecture or calculation.

2. The Iranian Pahlavi Tradition is represented by three recent manuscripts. Mf1 was finished in Iran by Rustam Ardasir on the 18th May 1741. Pt4 is anonymous and undated, but Pesotan Sanjana remembered that it had been copied for his great grandfather by Mihirji-rana at Nausari in 1779-80. Mf4 is a still younger copy. The copyist of Pt4 reproduced the introduction in Pahlavi of his model Hošang (1478), who copied Mihraban I, nephew of Rustam and grandfather of Mihraban II, who himself copied a certain Mahpanah. This tradition suffered three lost occasions:

1. Geldner could not utilize Pt4 until the first pages of his Yasna were in press and Mf4 only after the whole book was printed. So the influence of this tradition on his edition is inaccurate.

2. The manuscript of Hošang, which was the common ancestor of this family, was brought to India after 1741 and existed until 1800.

3. The introduction of Hošang, reproduced in Pt4, gives a detailed history of the transmission of the Pahlavi tradition, but Geldner writes that everything is not “quite clear” about the predecessors of Mahpanah. It would be interesting to read again this introduction, but where is Pt4?

Thus, the bifurcation of Iranian and Indian branches of the Pahlavi tradition happened between 1269 and 1323, in a line going from Rustam and his nephew Mihraban I, to the grandson of the latter Mihraban II. From Mahpanah, the second prolonged the Iranian tradition, while the first, followed by the third, gave birth to the Indian tradition.

3. The Sanskrit tradition. One should not suppose, however, that the Indian communities had ignored the Pahlavi tradition before it was brought in India by Rustom and Mihraban II. Two undated and anonymous manuscripts, S1 and J3, which according to the state of the paper should have been copied at the end of the 14th century, have a Sanskrit calque almost word for word of the Pahlavi translation. According to the genealogies of his descendants, the Sanskrit translator Neryosang should have lived circa 1200. This calculation of course is very rough, but it accords with textual criticism. It leads us to drive Neryosang’s version from a manuscript Y of the Pahlavi tradition imported into India before the manuscript X of Rustom was copied. It remains to decide whether it was a copy of Mahpanah or of his direct model Farnbag. One may conclude that the Indian communities had a version of the Pahlavi tradition before 1250 and that it derives from the manuscript of Farnbag, via Mahpanah or not. Geldner gives no justification for the approximate dates for Mahpanah (± 1200) and Farnbag (± 1110). We do not know whether these dates are based on the presumed date of Neryosang or otherwise. On the other hand, the Pahlavi source of Farnbag, Mahvindad, can give us a firm date: this Mahvindad signed a colophon of the Denkard in 1020. This places us at a time when copyists did not simply copy, but edited the texts. If Mahvindad is cited several times in the Pahlavi commentary to the long liturgy, it is because the latter was still retouched by Farnbag.

4. The Iranian sade tradition is represented by three recent manuscripts of high quality: Mf2, finished at Turkabad on 29 May, 1618, by Xosrau, Jp1, finished 18 July, 1638, by Feridun at an unknown place, and K4, finished in Kirman 26 July, 1723, by Vehmard. They had as a common ancestor a manuscript of Shahryar, who signed a colophon of the Denkard in 1516. Aside from the various routes of transmission the Iranian sade tradition and

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the Indian Vulgate must go back to a common archetype older than the oldest manuscript of the Pahlavi tradition. Geldner came to this position for reasons of textual criticism. It is clear that the differentiation between the Pahlavi tradition and the sade one necessarily took place before Farnbag's manuscript.

Geldner did not deal with the problem directly to know whether the Pahlavi tradition and the sade one had a common ancestor, which was that one of all the versions of the long liturgy without exception.

SELECT RITUAL ASPECTS OF THE GATHAS AND THEIR CONTINUITY IN THE LATER TRADITION

By
Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal

Distinguished scholars and friends, I would like to begin my talk titled, “Select Ritual Aspects of the *Gathas* and their Continuity in the Later Tradition”, with an invocation in prophet Zarathushtra’s own words:

***at tā vakshyā ishəntō yā mazdātha hyatchit vidushə.
staatāchā ahurāi yəsnnyācha vanghəush manangho.
humazdrā ashā yəchā yā raochəbish darəsatā urvāza***

“O desiring ones, I shall now speak of (these) Beings which are to be kept in mind by the knowing one: Praise for Ahura, the Yasna and the beneficent Holy Word of the Good Mind through Righteousness; I consider them worthy of instruction and delight (in them) throughout the days.” (Y. 30.1).

This early passage in Zarathushtra’s sublime hymns, the *Gathas*, reflects the main theme of my talk. I have focused upon select passages which I believe offer ritual insight, either directly or by means of application through the performance of rituals, as established by the later priestly tradition. As a priest pledged to the sacred skill of ritual orthopraxy, I stand before you, not as a philosopher or philologist, but as a man deeply committed to uphold and promote the ritual dimension of praise and worship as found within the Zoroastrian faith; for in times of difficulty, I believe, that one turns to Ahura Mazda with a prayer and not to the metaphysics of the religion.

My paper rests upon the evidence brought to the fore, that the *Gathas* are intrinsic to the millennia long ritual dimension of the faith and that the exegesis or commentaries on the *Gathas* (save the *zand*), are of a relatively recent phenomenon beginning with the western advent of philological and linguistic studies appertaining to the Avestan language, starting with the work of Anquetil du Perron, some 250 years ago.

The *Gathas* In Isolation...

The *Gathas* of Spitama Zarathushtra are hymns of praise, imbued with a philosophical message, to the prophet from Ahura Mazda -- The Wise Lord. It is clear to scholars now, that the *Gathas* were orally

transmitted through the centuries by Zoroastrian priests and were probably committed to a written form as late as the 5th-6th centuries C.E. This means that for around 2000 years, these revelations were kept alive, not through mere philosophical interpretations, but through constant ritual usage, as I shall discuss in my talk, later. It is solely because of the faithful preservation of Zoroastrian rituals by the priests, that we have for posterity, the richness of the prophet's hymns which have accurately and with astonishing precision been passed down to the present times, making our ceremonies some of the oldest, continually practiced rituals in the world. This, no way, implies that I am decrying the philosophical genius of the prophet and his teachings; in fact I am of the opinion that his teachings as experienced through the ritual dimension give a Zoroastrian, a deeper insight and love for the religion.

The *Gathas* clearly outline the main teachings of prophet Zarathushtra but it is essential to note that these same beliefs can be traced in the Older and Younger Avesta and thereafter, in the *zand* and later in the important Pahlavi tradition, from which emerges "the Zoroastrianism" which our immediate forebears practiced both in Iran and in India. One has to recognise this continuity and therefore, I believe, that one has to work back with the textual material, if one wishes to unravel the profundity and greatness of the prophet's teachings. The great Iranist, Darmesteter, opposed the singling out of the *Gathas* and studying the same in isolation when he stated, "... *that crucial parts of an edifice of thought set out for us in detail in the later literature, are indissolubly and necessarily linked with others which are earlier attested. Rather, it is often the case that shadowy indications of such systematic connections are actually present in the oldest texts, but cannot be recognized, if the Gathas are studied in isolation.*" (See M. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism -- Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, p. 78, note 5).

This fundamental transgression of viewing the religion from "the *Gathas* alone" point of view should not find its place in serious scholarship, as is the trend in the community, today. Why is it that the earlier Avestan and Pahlavi authors did not find it critical to their study of the prophet's teachings, to translate the *Gathas* only, at the expense of the literary and ritual traditions of the faith? The answer lies in the fact that it was the tradition which was the main "locomotive" of the religion and which was experienced by the follower, as versus the metaphysical complexities of the prophet's hymns. It is important to reflect that lofty as Zarathushtra's hymns are, their use and application, right up to the present times, have been through the continuity of the acts of worship doggedly preserved within a ritual framework.

Perhaps, it is a mark of its esoteric strength that no one translation of the *Gathas* can be termed as being the right one, as the prophet's words often lend themselves to multiple interpretations; whereas countless. priests, over the millennia, have performed, say the *yasna* liturgy, in which the *hōm* libation has been prepared, and have enjoyed the experiential dimension of celebrating the prophets teachings through a *mantric* formula, both time tested and in a sense, proven!

The Two Spirits...

Zarathushtra abstracted from the conditions of the society in which he lived, a set of two principal alternatives, existing within the social structure of his time, and which was reflected through the belief of the Good Spirit (*Spenta Mainyu*) and its antithesis, the evil spirit (*Anghra Mainyu*). Zarathushtra recognized that the whole of creation lay within this dualistic paradigm of Good and evil not stemming from the same source, and with Man being exhorted to choose, rightly, in order for evil to be made ineffective at the end of time. (Y. 30.3/4/5 and Y. 43.5).

This theme of cosmic dualism which in no way means the worship of two gods, but the recognition of one force which is totally good and the other, its antithesis, which is totally evil and so to be rejected, is at the heart of Zoroastrian theology and ritual practice. The prophet himself extols:

*"at fravakhshyā anghəush mainyu paouruyē,
yayāo sparyāo uiti mravat yəm angrəm
noit nā manāo noit sənghā noit khratavō
naədā varanā noit ukhdhā naədā shyaothanā
noit daənāo noit urvāno hachaintē."*

"Yes, I shall speak Of the two spirits, Of whom the Holier .said unto the evil one, at the beginning of existence: Neither our thoughts nor doctrines nor intellects, neither our preferences nor words, neither our actions nor consciences nor souls are in accord". (Y. 45.2).

It follows that the two spirits, Good and evil, could never stem from the same source as they are intrinsically opposed to each other in all respects, and hence we have a string of theological opposites like light-darkness; knowledge-ignorance; truth-falsehood; happiness-misery; pleasure-pain; prosperity-poverty; charity-greed; purity-impurity and life-death. It is not enough merely to recognize these differences, but the task of

a Zoroastrian lies in the conscious acceptance of the world of Ahura Mazda and the total rejection of its antithesis, namely, the forces of Darkness and the Lie, in order to promote harmony in the world.

Praise And Worship...

How then, does one strive to reject the Lie as seen through Zarathushtra's teachings? The answer lies in both an ethical and a ritual awareness. Interestingly, in *Yasna* 33.6, Zarathushtra calls himself a "zaothar", "one who invokes", i.e., a chief officiating priest and therefore, a performer of rituals. "**yē zaotā ashā arəzush...**". "As an upright priest, would learn through righteousness ...". (Y. 33.4). Clearly, the role of a priest would have been that of a ritual practitioner and therefore, in the same chapter, Zarathushtra declares, "**yē thwāt mazdā asrushtim akəmchā manō yazāi apā ...**". "O Wise One, I through worshipping, shall turn away ill intentions and the bad mind from Thee ...". (Y. 33.4). In other words, some form of worship is required to turn away ill intentions (*asrushtim*) and the bad mind (*akemcha mano*). It follows that the role of rituals is implied in the prophet's hymns, for surely, the act of worship cannot include philosophical discourses of any form whatsoever.

In the next chapter (Y. 34) Zarathushtra again exhorts "**yā shyaothanā yā vavachanghā yā yasnā ...**". "By whichever action, by whichever word, by whichever prayer ..." (Y. 34.1) and later he chants, "**at toi myazdām ahurā nāmanghā ashaichā dāmā ...**". "Therefore, let us reverently give an offering to Thee O Lord and to Righteousness ...". (Y. 34.3). A ritual offering (Av. *myazda*; Sk. *miyedha*, *medha*) as referred to by the prophet, implies that an act of worship had to be enacted, often under the general protection of Mithra, the Lord of Contract. (See M. Boyce, *BSOAS* XXXII, 1969, 26-7; *History of Zoroastrianism* Vol. I, 1975, p. 148, n. 4). The term 'myazda' is a hapex in the *Gathas* and it could have been given as an offering in solid or liquid form, "... as being of flesh and wine ..." (Av. *Gaomant*, *madhumant*) (Vd. 8.22 -- *ibid* p. 149). In *Yasna* 8.2, the assistant priest (*rāaspi*), declares that the *myazda* should be partaken of by those who deserve it on account of their Righteousness (Av. *asha*) and veneration (Av. *freretī*). In priestly parlance, the term 'mej' is used for fruits to be offered in the *afringan* and the other ceremonies. The usage of *myazda* is borne out quite clearly in the *Afringan-i-Ghambar* which is recited in Avestan, by both the Parsi and Irani priests, when they declare: "He who celebrates this *gāhāmbār* or partakes (of the *myazda*) or gives it (in charity to others), will have as much of its merit as if in the material world, he would have given a thousand ewes with lambs, in gift ...". (See

B. N. Dhabhar, *Zand-i-Khurtak Avistak*, 1963, p. 294-295). In other words, a ritual offering of *myazda* is greater and more praiseworthy than the gifting of a large number of sheep as an offering, towards the salvation of one's soul. In fact; there is also a mode of gesture when such acts of worship are undertaken for the prophet in his first opening verse, proclaims: "*ahyā yāsā nēmanghā ustānazastō rafadhrahayā ...*". "*With hands outstretched in reverence of Him towards this support I pray ...*". (Y. 28.1) and that he shall praise and glorify Him "*təm nē yasnāis ārmatoih mimaghzo ...*". "*I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of Piety/Devotion ...*". (Y. 45.10). It follows that reverence or worship entails praise, for Zarathushtra declares, "*at vāo yazāi stavas mazdā ahurā ...*". "*I will worship you with praise O Wise Lord ...*". (Y. 50.4). In *Yasna* 53.2, Zarathushtra brings to the fore, the importance of knowledge, adoration and praise of Mazda when he avers: "...

mananghā ukhdhāish shyaothanāishchā, khshnūm mazdāo vahmāi fraorət y asnachā ...". "... (They are eager) to glorify Mazda with faith in the inspired knowledge (khshnūm) and worship (yasnascha) through (good) thoughts, words and deeds ...". (Y. 53.2).

Do these *gathic* strophes not show that praise and worship are quintessential to the faith and the performance of rituals is the solemn duty of every Zoroastrian? On what basis, do I humbly ask, can one postulate then, that the *Gathas* should be viewed in philosophical isolation when the weight of evidence to the discernible seeker reveals otherwise?

How To Pray...

Furthermore, the priest is even instructed as to how to pray correctly in order for the ceremony to be well performed. For example, in both the *Visperad* and the *Vendidad* liturgies, the 72 chapters of the *Yasna* including the five *Gathas* and *Yasna Haptanghaiti* are recited and periodically interspersed with the passages from the *Visperad*. Once again this shows the importance of the prophet's hymns within the ritual dimension of the ceremony. In the *Visperad* liturgy, soon after the recitation of the last chapter of the prophet's hymn (Y. 34), the priest chants, "... *mat-afzmanam, mat-vachastashtim, mat-āzaintim, mat-pərəsvim, mat-paiti-pərəsvim, māt-vaghzəbyachā padhəbyaschā*". "... in metric line by line, verse by verse, with commentary, with inquiry, with catechism, syllable by syllable, metric foot by foot". (*Visperad* Ch. XIV.1). This he repeats after the other four collection of hymns (the *Gathas*) and the old Avestan prayers of *Yasna Haptanghaiti* and *A Airyema Ishyo*. And why should this be done? Because it is said that a continuous good recital

(*huframaretam*) of *gathic* texts renders the ceremony well-celebrated (*hufrayashtam*). (Vs. XIV.1).

Fire...

The reverence for fire is central to the faith. Fire is not a mere symbol as some people suggest, but I affirm that it is recognized to be strongly allied to the Truth and therefore, to Ahura Mazda. Moreover, the prophet worships in a raised voice; “... *yē mathrā vāchīm mazdā baraiti ...*”. “... *lifting my voice with veneration O Wise Lord ...*”. (Y. 50.6), and he does this in the presence of Fire which has a unique role in the living tradition. Zarathushtra himself proclaims, “...*ahyā fērasəm kahmāi vividuyē vashi at ā thwahnāi āthrē rātām nēmang hō. ashahyā mā yavat isāi manyāi ...*”. “... *to his question, To Whom will Thou address thy worship? I made reply: To Thy fire, while I offer my veneration to it, I will think of Truth to the utmost of my power*”. (Y. 43.9). The connection between fire and Ahura Mazda is amply reflected when Zarathushtra declares, “...*at toi ātrəm ahurā aojonghvantəm ashā usəmahi asishtəm əmavantəm ...*”. “Now, we desire O Lord, Thy Fire (which is) mighty through Truth, swiftest and forceful ...”. (Y. 34.4). Entire verses of the *Gathas*, namely, *Yasna* 33.12/13/14, starting from “...*us moi uzārəshva ahurā armaiti təvishim dasvā ...*”, right up to “...*yāchā ukhdhakhychā sərəoshəm khshathrəmhā*”, are to be found in the opening passages of the *Atash Niyasht* which is the basic litany to fire, recited in the performance of every act of worship. Here again it is the transmission of the prophet’s words which have been woven into a later compilation suggesting a strong continuity of ritual tradition. The sacred fire is an important vehicle of religion experience for the modern Zoroastrian, as well.

Purity...

Within the dualistic paradigm of Good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, Zoroastrianism also promotes the importance of purity, as versus impurity which is considered to belong to the world of evil. In *Yasna* 48.5, the prophet proclaims, “...*yaozhdāo mashyāi aipi zathəm vahishtā ...*”. “Purity is best for man since birth”. Keeping the entire creation pure is the main duty of a Zoroastrian priest who is called a *yaozdāthragar* -- ‘a purifier’ derived from the *gathic* word ‘*yaozhdā*’ -- ‘to purify’.

The Club Wielding Sraosha...

Sraosha is the main *yazata* or ‘adorable being worthy of worship’ and the one who removes impurity from both the physical and the spiritual world. Sraosha has the ability to combat evil effectively, without the risk of himself being polluted and is also invoked by Zarathushtra, when he proclaims, “*yastē vispē mazishtəm sraoshəm žbayā ...*”. “*I who shall invoke thee Sraosha as the mightiest of all ...*”. (Y. 33.5).

Likewise, Sraosha is invoked in both daily worship and in the inner and outer rituals appertaining to both the living and the dead. Sraosha plays the role of mediator in both the seen and the unseen worlds as well as he is the ‘club wielding’ smiter of evil doers, for Zarathushtra asks, in what came to be known as the *Kēm Na Mazdā* prayer, “... *kē vərəθrəm jā thwā poi sənghā yoi hənti chitrā moi dam ahumbish ratum chizdi at hoi vohu sərəshō jantu mananghā mazdā ahmai yahmai vashi kah māi chit ...*”. “...*Who shall smash the obstacles (of deceit) in order to protect the living by Thy teaching? By vision assure me how to set up the judge that heals the world and let Sraosha come to him through the Good Mind unto every man, O Mazda who desires it ...*”. (Y. 44.16). In other words, the prophet’s words are always being recited in one prayer format or another, clearly, showing the ritual link with Zarathushtra’s celebrated hymns. In fact in the *Gathas*, the prophet invokes Sraosha on another four occasions (Y. 33.14; Y. 43.12; Y. 45.5; Y. 46.17). He is also recognized to be the Lord of the “Holy Word” or “Prayer”. The prophet avers, “...*ahurāi səvishtāi sərəoshəm mazdāi anā mathrā mazishtəm vāuroimaida khrafstrā hixrāo*”. “... *the most powerful Ahura Mazda and Obedience (Sraosha). Through this Holy Word and through the tongue, may we turn away the wicked ones unto the Greatest (Resurrection)*”. (Y. 28.5).

In the Younger Avesta, in the *Yasna* dedicated to him, the worshipper recites, “... *with propitiation of Sraosha, accompanied by rewards, the brave, who has the sacred word for the body, with a bold club, the Ahurian, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise ...*”. (Y. 57.1). In *Yasna* 57.8, it is said that Sraosha, the Lord of Ritual, was the first to chant the five *Gathas* of Zarathushtra, for the worship (*Av. yasna*), adoration (*Av. vahma*), satisfaction (*Av. khshnaothra*) and glorification (*Av. frasasti*) of the Bounteous Immortals (*Av. Amesha Spentas*). This suggests that since ancient times, the *yazata* Sraosha was invoked for ritual purposes and was also recognized to be the key *yazata* who has the righteous authority over the good creations of Ahura Mazda (Gr.Bd. Chp. XXVI, 46-49).

In the Vendidad, Chp. IX, V. 56, Sraosha is shown with his dual skills of not only combating evil directly, but of remaining unsullied whilst guarding man from the evil forces of pollution. This is why, ritual observances like purificatory baths, since early times have been dedicated to Sraosha.

Sraosha And The After-Life Doctrine...

During the Zoroastrian funeral ceremony (Guj. *gēh-sārnu*), two priests in *paiwand* (ritual connection), are expected to take the *Baj* of Sraosha and then recite the entire *Ahunavaiti Gatha* from Yasna 28 to 34, indicating the power and efficacy which the prophet's words have against what is considered to be the most impure ritual situation, namely of having to deal with a corpse, before it is placed in the Tower of Silence (Av. *dakhma*).

Moreover, Sraosha's role during the first four days after death, can hardly be underrated and is in fact elaborated, substantially, in the Pahlavi tradition. According to the *Dadestan-i Denig*, Chp. XXVII, V. 6, it is considered to be the rightful role of Sraosha, to take part in the individual judgement of the soul, which takes place upon the fourth morning after death, which is the temporary triumph of Evil. It is for this reason, that Sraosha is invoked and propitiated for three days and nights. A *Yasna* ceremony in honour of Sraosha is done during the *Havan gāh* in a fire temple. An *āfringān* in honour of Sraosha known in Gujarati as '*sarōsh-nu pātru*' is also performed every evening after sunset, until the third day. The *Baj* of Sraosha is taken for ritual protection, by the priests performing the funeral ceremony, as well as by the family and friends who accompany the bier to the Tower of Silence and indeed, by the corpse bearers, themselves. They all require the protection of Sraosha during this important period when evil (Av. *nasush*) is in a heightened state of activity and so the soul seeks the additional protection from Sraosha. (See F. M. Kotwal, *The Supplementary Texts to the Shayest-ne-Shayest*, Chp. XVII.3, p. 70-71).

The role of Sraosha in Zoroastrian eschatology is further alluded to by the prophet himself, when he proclaims, "...*səraosho ashi mazārāya hachimnō, yā vi ashish rānoibyō savoi vidāyāt*". "... *Sraosha was to come to me accompanied by wealth-granting reward ... according to which one should distribute the rewards to both felons at the time of (our) salvation*". (Y. 43.12). This theme of the "turning point" or "end of time", is to be found in the later Khorshed and Mihr *Nyaish* (V. 5) and is exactly the same as the

gathic phrase: “... *yahmi spəntā thwā mainyu urvaəsē jasō ...*”. “... at that turning point to which Thou comest with Thy Holy spirit...”. (Y. 43.6).

The Continuity Of The Tradition...

The purpose of discussing the role and position of the *yazata* Sraosha in this paper, is to show how ‘Sraosha of the *Gathas*’ continues to feature in the later and Younger Avesta and from there into the Pahlavi tradition, and in fact, right down to modern times, in our daily rituals. This continuity of tradition, as found scripturally, as well as incorporated in our rituals, brings to the fore, a unique blend of religious experiences, for with the act of worship the priest or the celebrant continues to reaffirm the theology of the religion through the ritual dimension of reality.

The *Yasna*...

Since ancient times, highly trained Zoroastrian priests have been performing the *yasna* (Guj. *Ijeshne*) ceremony in which the *hōm* libation is prepared as an offering to the physical and spiritual worlds of Ahura Mazda. *Hōm* is both the name of a plant and the name of a *yazad* (adorable being worthy of worship). (Y. 10.5). Once consecrated, it is the “giver of healing”, of physical power, strength and victory. (Y. 9.17). In *Yasna* 11.4, Ahura Mazda is referred to by *Hōm*, as “my Father”, for this *yazad* is also associated with health, life, immortality and the final victory -- victory over decay and death.

During the *yasna* ceremony, 72 chapters are recited including all the 17 chapters of the *Gathas*, sandwiched in-between. In the central part of the *yasna* service, the *hōm* twigs are pounded in a mortar with pomegranate twigs, goat’s milk and pure well-water, upon the chanting of prayers taken from the chapter preceding the *Gathas*, namely *Yasna* 27. The twigs are pounded during the chanting of Y. 27.4, 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11, when evil is cast out from the mortar and a strength-giving force is released from this ritual act. (During the recitation of *Yasna* 27.6-7, the pounding is stopped temporarily). The translations of these verses correspond exactly to the *gathic* verses, 34.15, 54.1 (ex-*Gatha*), 33.11/12/13/14, respectively. It would seem that the focus of these verses is to generate a special strength from the *hōm* libation which will help, it is said, to bring about the healing of the world. (Y. 34.15); reward at the end of time (Y. 33.11); all leading to the Bounteous Immortals blessing the righteous man (Y. 33.13) and with Zarathushtra himself, offering the breath of his own life to Ahura Mazda (Y. 33.14), symbolized through the consecration of this libation. Interestingly, the most efficacious pounding of the *hōm* and pomegranate

twigs occurs while the chief priest (Av. *zaotar*) chants the *Gathas* from *Yasna* 31-33. In short, key passages from the *Gathas*, are used to bring about a ritual alchemy when the chief priest chants, in the prefatory service to the *yasna*, called the *paragnā*: “... **yazatanām thwā ashaonam kukshnisha us biḷbarāmi rathwascha bərəzatō gāthāoscha srāvayoit**”. “... of the righteous yazatas, I desire to please Thee (Ohrmazd); I dedicate (the *hōm* libation) to the exalted lord and he (the chief priest) should chant the *Gathas*”. (See F. M. Kotwal and J. W. Boyd, -- *A Persian Offering - The Yasna A Zoroastrian High Liturgy*, p. 75). This is a clear reference which shows how central the recitation of the *Gathas* is to the act of worship, praise and propitiation.

The Kusti Prayers...

Why does one perform the *kusti* ritual? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the tying of the *husti* brings about a fulfilment of that which is “most furthering”, through the rejection of all that is evil in the world. In other words, every time the *kusti* ritual is performed by a Zoroastrian, there is an unswerving commitment to promote the Will of Ahura Mazda. Moreover, towards the end of the Pazand *Hormuzd Khodae* prayer, when the *kusti* is placed around the waist, the celebrant recites the *gathic* strophes: “... **haiṭhyā varshṭam hyat vasnā fərashotəməm...**”. “... the desire of those who work for the truth is most furthering ...”. (Y. 50.11). The profusion of *gathic* verses in most Zoroastrian prayers used for rituals, is indicative of the firm Zoroastrian belief that the words of the prophet ensure the proper efficacy of the ritual. Hence, even the *Kem Na Mazda* prayer which forms part of the *kusti* ritual, comprises in the main of two *gathic* verses, namely, *Yasna* 44.16 and *Yasna* 46.7.

If *gathic* strophes are recited for any given ritual, it logically follows, in my mind, that the ritual itself has a scriptural sanction from the prophet himself, or why would our distant forebears use the words of Zarathushtra loosely within the ritual framework, if the *Gathas* were to be seen as the mere philosophical outpourings of a great sage?

Thus, the role of rituals, far from being underplayed and discarded, as is somewhat fashionable to do in modern times, should be reinforced and indeed, be taught to the practitioners of the faith. Just as one has *Gatha* classes and discussions, there should also be informative classes conducted for the study and experience of rituals as well, difficult as it may seem in this day and age.

The Ahunavar & The Ashem Vohu...

Of course, the use of the *Ahunavar* and the *Ashem Vohu* prayers are at the foundation of every single ritual act. These two prayers are recited, repeatedly, from the highest and most complex to the simplest and most basic acts of praise and worship. So important are these formulations that after the chapter of the *Ahunavati Gatha* ends (Y. 28-34), four *Ahunavar* and three *Ashem Vohu* prayers are recited, while each chapter of the other four *gathic* hymns end with the recitation of the twelve words of the *Ashem Vohu* repeated thrice. The relevance of the *Ahunavar* is also to be found in the *Hōm Yasht* where it is stated: “O Zarathushtra, you first chanted the *Ahunavar* loudly with scansion and four times and with louder intonation you have made all the demons disappear under the earth”.. (Y. 9.14-15). In the Pahlavi rendering of the “Story of Creation” -- The *Bundahishn*, it is said that this prayer has its own spirit. (G.Bd. 1.50) and so powerful is its *mantric* or vibratory effect, that Ahura Mazda Himself chanted the *Ahunavar* and rendered the evil spirit unconscious and ineffective. (ibid 29-30). In the later *Persian Rivayats* translated by the great Parsi scholar, Ervad B. N. Dhabhar, it is stated that the three lines of the *Ahunavar* comprising of twenty one words, form the basis of the religion. (See B. N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazdar Framarz and Others*, p. 2).

According to the *Rivayats*, for those who do not know how to recite the *Yasht* or *Nyaish* litanies, there is an alternative formula available. It is stated that a combination of 103 *Ahunavar* and 10 *Ashem Vohu* prayers may be recited in lieu of the entire *Hormazd Yasht*, (ibid p. 15). Thus, it follows that the prophet’s short formulations are as efficacious as indeed the entire *Hormazd Yasht*, within a non-ritual format of worship.

Moreover, the *Ahunavar* and *Ashem Vohu* formulations are also recited whilst tying the two reef knots during the enactment of the basic *kusti* ritual; the tying of knots is a very important ritual gesture, namely, of cementing one’s commitment to the faith, symbolically, and what better way to do it than with the words of the prophet himself!

Conclusion...

In conclusion then, I have discussed in this paper: a) why it is essential not to view the *Gathas* in isolation and at the expense of the ritual tradition; b) I believe that I have shown how themes such as worship, praise and propitiation are replete in the *Gathas*; c) I have developed the role and importance of the *yazata* Sraosha as reflected in the ritual aspects of the

after-life doctrine; d) I have indicated how various *gathic* verses have been used within a ritual framework from the most basic *kusti* ritual to the most complex *yasna* ceremony. Finally, I have shown how the *Ahunavar* and *Ashem Vohu* prayers are indeed at the very foundation of every ritual act of praise and worship.

Ladies and gentlemen, exalted and lofty as the hymns of our great prophet Zarathushtra, undoubtedly are, if Zoroastrianism is to flourish in North America, then it is the next millennium of ritual observances which will sustain the faith. For the teachings are the thoughts of Ahura Mazda, woven into the words of Zarathushtra to be enacted into good deeds by every righteous Zoroastrian. Let us this day, fellow Zoroastrians, make a pledge to ourselves, in the words of our prophet, who proclaimed:

***“yəhyā moi ashāt hachā vahishtəm yasnē paīta, vaədā mazdāo ahu
rō yoi āongharəchā həntichā, ta yazāi khwāish nāmənish pairichā
jasāi vantā.”***

“I know that my greatest good is to worship the Wise Lord and those that have been and are. By their names will I worship them and come before them with praise”. (Y. 51.22).

“ATHA JAMYĀT YATHĀ ĀFRINĀMI!”

“MAY IT COME ABOUT, AS I BLESS!”

ARCHAISM AND HISTORY IN GATHIC STUDIES

By
William W. Malandra

The twenty-fourth *kardah* of the Frawardīn Yast continues a series of declarations of worship of the *frawasis* of divine beings beginning with that of Ahura Mazda himself. The list of divine beings is followed by Gaya Marətan (Gayōmard) the primal man “who first listened to the thought and teachings of Ahura Mazda; from whom (Ahura Mazda) fashioned the families of the Iranian countries, the seed of the Iranians.”¹ The worship of his *frawaši* is immediately followed by that of Zarathuštra. Like Gaya Marətan, Zarathuštra is no ordinary man, for we learn that he was “the first priest, the first warrior (and) the first agriculturalist.”² He was the first Mazda-worshiper and the first Zoroastrian (*mazdayasnō zaraθuštrīš*), and the first to vilify the *daiwas*.³ Moreover, “at (his) birth and growth the plants and waters recovered (and) grew.”⁴ Obviously, we are dealing here with someone who is no ordinary flesh and blood prophet, but, as is well known, with a whole theology of Zarathuštra as a primordial man. The details are to be found in the Pahlavi literature, especially the seventh chapter of the Denkart, but it is not my intention to go further into these matters here. What I want to suggest is that the question “Who is/was Zarathuštra?” is an old one, whose unequivocal answer is that he was the “first”. Several thousand years ago, when Zoroastrian theologians took up the question, they had in mind that their prophet was not just an historical figure, but rather, as we have just seen, the manifestation in history of something primordial. In interesting ways, modern scholarship has also concerned itself with questions of Zarathuštra’s place in history and the nature of his primacy. I shall address an aspect of the problem.

Even though all engaged in Zoroastrian studies are eager to know when Zarathuštra lived, whether it was 3800 years ago, or at the time of Cyrus the Great, or somewhere in between, there will be some who may be convinced of one time-frame or another, while others may already have despaired of finding any solution to this vexing, if not embarrassing, riddle of Zoroastrian studies, I should say at the outset that I have no solution to propose. Instead, what I want to focus on is the generally accepted dogma that the Gāthās are archaic and some of the problems the dogma brings with it in terms of the historical placement of the Gāthās and their author. I shall examine three aspects of the Gāthās: dialectology, prosody and theology.

Dialectology

The dialectical features that set Gathic apart from the Younger Avesta have been documented.⁵ The differences in phonology are immediately striking to even a casual observer, for example, the absence of spirantization of voiced intervocalic stops⁶ or the preservation of Bartholomae's law.⁷ Aorist forms of the verb abound in Gathic, while they are rare in Younger Avestan. There are also differences in vocabulary. Where the Younger Avesta has social groupings in ascending order of size: *nmāna*, *vis*, *zantu*, *dahyu*, Gathic has *x'aētu*, *wərəzəna*, *airyman*, *dahyu*. There are also cases where what appear to be obvious differences are probably not really dialectical, but rather are the result of different traditions of recitation. An example of this is the genitive singular masculine/neuter, in Gathic *-ahyā* (corresponding to OPers. *-ahya*, OInd. *-asya*) in most places, but *-ahə* in Younger Avesta. Here the preservation of *-ahyā* is due to a tradition of slow deliberate recitation that safeguarded the sanctity of the most sacred texts. Yet, in some cases we do find Gathic *-ahē* and such other contaminations as *hai 9m* beside *hai 9yēm*.

Probably the most striking grammatical difference between Gathic and Younger Avestan is in the use of the aorist. In Younger Avestan its occurrence is rare, while in Gathic aorists appear frequently as both preterites and as injunctives. As Jean Kellens⁸ has emphasized both Old Persian and Younger Avestan show a nearly completed movement to a verbal system based on the present stem, the system (with the past participle) which became generalized throughout Middle Iranian. Gathic, with its predilection for the aorist, then, clearly represents a more archaic point in the historical development of the Iranian languages.

The Indo-Iranian languages inherited from Indo-European a means of indicating action in the past through the prefix of short *a-* (IE *e-*) to the appropriate stem of the verb. If prefixed to the present stem with secondary endings, *a-* indicated the imperfect, that is, action that was ongoing in the past; prefixed to an aorist stem it indicated completed action in the past. By suppressing the augment one could obtain an injunctive (the gnomic aorist in Greek) whose function it was to indicate timeless action such as commands, wishes, gnomic statements particularly in maxims, etc.⁹ While Vedic and Old Persian maintained this method of differentiating the indicative from the injunctive, in Avestan the augment has all but disappeared, though not entirely, a development that often leads to ambiguity in the texts. That is, indicatives and injunctives are mostly indistinguishable on formal grounds. Usually the context, though, will be a guide to understanding what was intended by the author. Compare, for example, Darius' proclamation of Ahuramazdā's creative power (DNa 1-3)

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<i>baga wazrka ahuramazdā</i>	<i>A great god is Ahuramazda</i>
<i>haya imām būmīm adā¹⁰</i>	<i>who created this earth</i>
<i>haya awam asmānam adā</i>	<i>who created yonder heaven</i>
<i>haya martiyam adā</i>	<i>who created man</i>
<i>haya šyātim adā martiyahya</i>	<i>who created the happiness of man</i>

with Zarathuštra's similarly phrased rhetorical query (Y 44.5)

kē hwāpā raocāscā dāt tāmāscā
What craftsman created days and nights

kē hwāpā x'afnəmcā dāt zaēmācā
What craftsman created sleep and wakefulness

Here the augmentless root aorist in the Gāthā is shown to be a preterite by the corresponding formula in Old Persian.¹¹

In Vedic, while the imperfect and the perfect have overlapping functions as tenses of general narration of the past, the aorist is reserved for actions that have just taken place from the point of view of the speaker. Thus, in the same pāda of a triṣṭubh we find juxtaposed imperfect and perfect: *ákan áhim ánvapás tatarā* “(Indra) slew the snake, he bored through to the waters” (RV 1.32. 1c). But, in a narrative sequence like the one in the famous Śunaḥśepa tale we find a strict distinction in the role of the aorist. When Varuṇa comes to claim as an offering the son that he has given the childless king Hariścandra, the king employs a series of delaying tactics, among them the request that the boy's baby teeth fall out first. The narration continues: *tasya ha dantāḥ pedīre* (perfect) *tanī kovāca* (perfect) *apatsata* (s-aorist) *vā asya dantāḥ*, “His teeth came out. (Varuna) said to him, ‘His teeth have just now come out!’.” (AitBr VII 14).

Now this Vedic usage differs from both the Iranian examples just cited, as well as from the Greek usage, where also the aorist expresses completed action in reference to the past. Only in Classical Sanskrit, where it is infrequent, has the aorist become a general preterite. Old Iranian, then, seems to continue the Indo-European usage; Vedic has the innovation. But, what has happened in Old Iranian to the semantic distinction between the aorist and the other two past tenses, the imperfect and perfect? To judge even by the meager testimony of the inscriptions, the perfect had fallen into disuse in Old Persian; and, the aorist could exchange freely with the imperfect. Thus, in a passage from an inscription from Susa (DSe 1-5) Darius could make an identical statement to the one cited above, about the creative power of Ahuramazdā, only substituting the imperfect *adadā*¹² for

the root aorist *adā*. The situation that presents itself to us in the Gāthās is one in which the leveling of the past tenses is well advanced. I offer the following examples from Y 29 the “Bovine Lament”. Because of its quasi-narrative style it seems to me to provide the least equivocal evidence. The narrative begins in the imperfect¹³

xšmaibyā gəuš urwā gərəždā
 “The Soul of the Cow lamented to you”

In the lament that follows the Cow asks,

kahmāi mā 9βarōzdūm¹⁴ kə mā tašāt
 “For whom did you shape (aorist) me? Who fashioned (aorist) me?”¹⁵

The narrative continues in vs. 2 with the imperfect

adā tašā gəuš pərəsaṭ
 “Thereupon the Fashioner of the Cow asked...”

However, in vs. 6 the narrative takes the aorist,

aṭ ɛ waodaṭ ahurō mazdā¹⁶...
 “Thereupon Ahura Mazda said...”

And, again in vs. 9 we find the aorist,

aṭcā gəuš urwā raostā
 “And then the Soul of the Cow cried out...”

From these examples we may conclude that for the purpose of narration of the past, in Zarathuštra’s diction the aorist and imperfect were interchangeable. It is interesting that the answer to the question posed by the Cow in vs. 1, found in vs. 6, is now in the perfect,

aṭ zī 9βā fšuyantaēcā wāstryāicā 9βərəštā tataša
 “but the Fashioner (has) fashioned thee for the husbandman and the herdsman”

To conclude these few examples, I return to Y 44.6 where again the question about the Cow is raised, as it were, in reference to Y 29.1,

kaēibyō azīm rānyō.skərəitīm gəm tašō

“For whom hast thou (Ahura Mazdā) fashioned the felicitous pregnant Cow?”

Here we have the aorist corresponding to the aorists *ǧbarōždūm* and *tašaṭ* of Y 29.1. Yet, in the following verse, Y 44.7, the question is posed in the imperfect,

kā bərəxδqm tāšt xšaθrā maṭ ārmaītm

“Who fashioned honored Aramati together with Xšaθra?”

My purpose in rehearsing the use of tenses is to show that archaism is an allusive business. On the one hand, Zarathuštra’s poetry displays fluency with the aorist not found in either Old Persian or Younger Avestan; on the other hand, it also reveals a certain semantic leveling of the tenses that is not at odds with the state of the other two languages. So, the question I ask is: is Zarathuštra’s use of an archaic verbal form a sign of the high antiquity of his poems or might it be simply an archaic element of poetic style or, perhaps, even of his dialect? Nearly fifty years ago W. B. Henning wrote the following in his notorious little book *Zoroaster: Politician or Witch-Doctor?*,¹⁶ in reference to the linguistic argument for the historical priority of the Gāthās over Old Persian,

This argument would hold good only if the language of the Gāthās were the same dialect, at an earlier stage, as Old Persian. But that is not the case and has never been claimed. It is notorious that the various dialects of one and the same language group develop at different speeds and in different directions... From the point of view of comparative linguistics the Gāthās could have been composed at a date far later than 600 B.C.

Prosody

I do not believe that anyone would dispute the proposition that much of the Younger Avesta truly is far more recent, younger, that is, in terms of composition and content than the Gāthās or the Yasna Haptaṅhāitī. So, I pass over the Vendidad,¹⁷ the Nirangistān and such texts, viewing them as works standing in an historic tradition flowing from old forms of the common dialect which can be described most accurately on the basis of the metrical portions of the Yašts and the Yašt-like compositions found in the Yasna, particularly those devoted to Haoma and Sraoša. Just as in the study of the Gāthās, meter is a reliable guide through the debris of oral and manuscript tradition, so too meter blazes a trail through the undergrowth and windfalls of the Yašts’ transmission.

As Geldner¹⁸ showed conclusively more than a century ago, the basis of the metrics of the Younger Avesta is the octosyllabic hemistich, a verse unit which corresponds to the single pāda of the Vedic meters called gāyatrī, anuṣṭubh (or śloka) and pañkti. Normally an octosyllabic pāda joins with another such pāda to form a stich or full line of sixteen syllables. As in the Vedic meter, distichs or couplets, and other variations, are formed by pairing two stiches or lines. Although the most basic unit of verse is the pāda of eight syllables, it is clear that the line was the poetic unit, the evidence being that, while the caesura normally falls after the first eight syllables, it can also fall after the seventh or ninth; that is, as the result of seven and nine syllable pādas.

There is sporadic evidence of other meters in Younger Avesta. Unfortunately, this evidence is too scattered to allow a complete description. Nevertheless, the presence of lines of eleven and twelve syllables in the Yašts suggests that the repertory of the poets using the Younger Avestan dialect was rich in inherited meters, even though what has survived the vicissitudes of history might suggest an impoverishment.

From the outset, as I proceed to a comparison the of the poetics of the Gāthā and the Yašts, I do not wish to suggest that, either in terms of beauty of expression or in profundity of thought, the Yašts are on a par with the Gāthās. The Yašts do occasionally rise to heights of beauty, but for the most part they string together epithets or make simple statements of the sort that almost anyone, ancient or modern, could, with proper knowledge of the language compose. The Gāthās are of an entirely different order. For all their notorious obscurity, they exhibit the deep understanding of a gifted, some might want to say 'divinely' inspired, poet.

It is well known that the order in which the Gāthā have been transmitted owes its arrangement to the meters of the individual Gāthās. Disregarding the Wahištōišī (Y 53) which presents enormous problems to metrical analysis, text criticism and interpretation generally, we find that Zarathuštra, whom I consider to have been the author, used three basic metrical patterns, namely, lines of sixteen syllables with caesura after the first seven (7 + 9),¹⁹ lines of eleven syllables with caesura after the first four (4 + 7), and lines of fourteen syllables with caesura after the first seven (7 + 7). Uštawaitī and Spəntā.mainyu are distinguished one from the other by the number of lines needed to complete a strophe, viz., five and four respectively. The Ahunawaitī of 7 + 9 follows what appears to be a common Indo-Iranian pattern of a sixteen-syllable line. The Spəntā.mainyu of 4 + 7 x 4 corresponds exactly to the Vedic triṣṭubh, with the Uštawaitī adding a line.²⁰ The Wohuxšaθra of 7 + 7 has no Vedic counterpart and the

Wahištoistī with frequent 7 + 5 resembles the Vedic jagatī only in the number of syllables.

When we consider the Avestan meters together, both Gathic and Younger Avestan, we see that they have common features. The first is that the number of syllables counted is fundamental to all the various meters. And secondly, expressing the matter negatively, none of the meters gives any indication that syllable quantity, especially as that phenomenon relates to closing cadences, played any part in the poetry. Thirdly, the basic meters are used to construct the larger verse units. Further, when we compare the Avestan meters with their Vedic counterparts, we see clearly that both poetic traditions share a common heritage and that the major feature which separates the two traditions is syllable quantity, for in the Veda there is a marked tendency toward fixed cadences. As H. Oldenberg demonstrated,²¹ the Vedic meters show a great deal of freedom in respect to quantity, a freedom that was already constrained by tendencies that in the later Sanskrit tradition became ever more circumscribed by rules. Whether, as Oldenberg argued, the common Indo-Iranian system approximated the total freedom of the Avestan metrics, or, as Meillet argued in his *Trois conférences*,²² the observance of quantity was a feature of Indo-Iranian poetry inherited from Indo-European, these are questions that lie beyond the scope of the present discussion. What is important is that there was a common metrical system employed by poets who spoke different dialects of a common Old Iranian language.

This brief discussion of metrics would not be complete without reference to Old Persian,²³ as that remains the only certain reference point we have to history. While the inscriptions are mostly in prose, there are also pieces of verse. Particularly uplifting, for example, is Darius' account of what he did to the rebel Phraortes (DB II 73ff) in fairly consistent octosyllabic verse:²⁴

<i>uta nāham uta gaušā</i>	I cut off both the nose and the ears
<i>uta zbānam frāžanam</i>	and the tongue
<i>uta-šai ī cašma awāžanam</i> ²⁵	and I gorged out one of his eyes.
<i>dwaryā-mai basta adarya</i>	He was held bound at my gate.
<i>harwā-šim kāra awaina</i>	All the people saw him.
<i>pasāwa-šim hangmatānai</i>	Afterward in Ekbatana
<i>uzmayā-pati akunawam</i> ²⁶	I impaled him.

Unfortunately, we do not have any samples of hieratic poetry either in Old Persian or Median. The closest we seem to come, outside of Herodotus' tantalizing reference to the 'theogonies' of the Magi, is a quotation phrase like the famous *artāca brazmaniya* of Xerxes' *daiwadāna*

inscription, which by itself indicates nothing demonstrable about meter. There do occur some prayers which appear to be formulaic, but these, like so many prayers in the Younger Avesta as well as the Yasna Haptañhāitī, show no metric pattern.

The sample of verse that I just quoted from the Behistun inscription suggests that the common narrative, it is tempting to say 'epic', meter of Old Persian was the eight-syllable pāda. Further, like Avestan verse, the Old Persian shows no regard whatever for the length of syllables. While it is most probable that epic verse was a couplet like the common śloka of the Sanskrit epics, it seems to me impossible to demonstrate that that was the case.

So far I have tried to show that all forms of verse that we have preserved show a common Iranian conformity in respect to the importance of syllable count and the insignificance of syllable length, especially noteworthy being the absence of closing cadences. Further, the types of metrical schemes employed share a common ancestry with the meters of the RgVeda. Using Old Persian as a certain point of historical reference, we may conclude that as far as the mechanics of verse composition were concerned, both the Gāthās and the metrical parts of the Younger Avesta could have been composed in the 6th century. This is not an argument that, in fact, they were composed then, rather an argument that if Gathic is more archaic or older, some other evidence must be brought forth.

I have already asserted that the octosyllabic pāda seems to have been the meter of choice for the poets who created the metrical parts of the Younger Avesta and for the bards who may have composed epic or narrative verse in Old Persian; and I have suggested that it was an easy meter in which to compose verse. When we look at the rich evidence of the Indian Sanskritic tradition we see that from the RgVeda onward the gāyatrī and then the anuṣṭubh, that developed into the śloka, were the most popular meters. In Classical Sanskrit we find that this is not only the dominant meter in the epics, but also that it is the exclusive meter for all matter of śāstras. So common and often banal is this meter that it is scarcely reckoned as kāvya. Indeed, the lamented translator of the Mahābhārata, J. A. B. van Buitenen, chose to render śloka passages in English prose, reserving for verse translation the triṣṭubhs. Now, one could well argue that the situation in Younger Avestan and, supposedly, in Old Persian shows the degenerate final stage in a long process. Whereas Zarathuṣtra displays the richness of poetic meter of an earlier time, the poets of the Younger Avesta were able to compose only in the simplest of meters, and then not always very successfully. Of course, this might be the correct explanation.

However, it presupposes an historical development for which there is no compelling evidence. Permit me to return to the Sanskrit analogy. At the same time that dry śāstras and stotras were being composed in śloka meter, great poets like Kālidāsa were producing true kāvya in intricate meters of great beauty. Would it be any less marvelous to suppose that one of Iran's greatest poets was surrounded by lesser talents?

Zarathuštra was a profound thinker and a great poet. Even if half of what Martin Schwartz²⁷ has discovered in the Gāthās was to stand the test of scholarly criticism, our wonder and awe before this talent would be no less diminished. A man of such genius, it is natural to think, would hardly feel constrained by meter as a vehicle for his thoughts. In fact, we would anticipate that he would have chosen a particular meter because of its suitability for expressing the thoughts he wished to verbalize. Again, if we draw upon the rich testimony of the Vedic and Sanskritic traditions, we find that in contrast to the all-purpose anuṣṭubh, the triṣṭubh is mostly relied upon for the formulation of complex ideas. What I suggest is that the variety of meters and verse schemes of the Gāthās are the specific result of Zarathuštra's poetic requirements and may tell us nothing about whether they are archaic or old.

There is one final perspective from which the Gāthās do, indeed, appear archaic. That is the circumstance of their composition, namely, that Zarathuštra was non-literate and produced all his poetry without the use of any sort of writing. Yet this is archaic only in terms of the literate cultures of the ancient Near East. Before Darius, and even long after him,²⁸ the Iranians in general were non-literate. Even Darius, while he brags about the inscription (Behistun) which he made, betrays his own illiteracy when he says that it "was read back before me"²⁹ prior to the dispatch of copies throughout the empire.

Theology

Even if Zarathuštra's diction and his poetic constructions appear archaic, his theology does not. 'Archaic' is a relative term; for something to be archaic it must be so in relationship to something else. In this case, that something else is Iranian paganism, if it is still permitted to use that word, about which we are well informed, thanks, for the most part to the Younger Avesta and to the comparative method of mythological study. As no human being lives in cultural isolation, so Zarathuštra's thought presupposes a religious milieu of Old Iranian deities and cultic practices. Many of these he rejected, some he continued, probably unchanged, and many he perpetuated under a variety of ideological transformations that reveal his creative genius. Gone are Miθra, Wṛθraγna, Apām Napāt and the other

deities of the Iranian pantheon, save the greatest god of all, the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazdā. In place of the raucous world of gods and goddesses, Zarathuštra presents the harmony of the abstract entities, the Aməša Spəntas. He has taken the ancient myth of the conflict between the primordial twins that ends in the first human sacrifice out of which the world is constituted, and transformed the myth into a statement about free will and responsibility for the choice of one's actions. All this and more is well-known.

Zarathuštra's reform never worked a thorough religious transformation of society as did Muhammad's reform of Arabian religion. Whether one imagines his reform to have been earlier or later, it never eradicated the old deities. Instead it settled into a curious symbiosis with the old. As a result, the Gāthās appear anachronistic, as if a kind of parenthesis in the story of Iranian religion. Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that they are highly innovative and hardly archaic in terms of the Iranian traditions which gave them form.

Conclusions

True to the promise I made at the beginning, I have not attempted to offer a date for Zarathuštra, nor to place the Gāthās in any particular chronological sequence vis-a-vis the Old Persian and the metrical parts of the Younger Avesta.³⁰ What I have tried to document is that attempts to place the Gāthās in history on the basis of perceived archaisms are bound for failure. The matter is just too complex for our almost non-existent historical evidence to deal with.

I shall close with a reflection upon another quote from Hennings *Zoroaster*,

It is obviously impossible to understand anything of anyone without knowing, at least approximately, the time in which he lived, without apprehending, by such knowledge, his environment, the conditions of life, the cultural situation in which he found himself. To say that the date is irrelevant shows an abysmal lack of feeling for all history. The date must be settled one way or the other; without it all discussion on Zoroaster will remain futile.³¹

I hope this is not so! Otherwise we might as well expend our energies on other matters. I am sure that it would be immensely interesting to know, for example, that Zarathuštra lived in a yurt and engaged in shamanistic seances or that he was the priestly intellectual at the court of a

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Chorasmian ruler, or that he was a peace loving herdsman enjoying the simple pleasures of a classless, non-sexist society on the borders of Siberia. Unfortunately, beyond the few facts that are known about his life and his circumstances on the testimony of the Gāthās, we really do not have anything approaching the conditions Henning declared as the basis for understanding. But we do possess these Gāthās which, despite an obscurity that sometimes seems impenetrable, do say things with great lucidity, things that have become the abiding basis for a world religion that has endured many cruel adversities of history and which, judging by the vitality of their followers today, will sustain Zoroastrianism well into the future.

- ¹ *yō paoiryō *ahurahe *mazdā*
manasca gūsta sāsnaśca
yahmaṭ haca frāθβərəsaṭ
nāfō airyanəm dahyunəm (ciθrəm airyanəm)

The Vulgate spelling *ahurāi mazdāi* shows two layers of errors. First, *mazdāi* contains a common confusion of, 𐬨𐬀 for 𐬨𐬀, the latter being the correct genitive ending. Then, once the dative had been established **ahurahe* was made to conform, becoming *ahurāi*. I take *ciθrəm airyanəm* to be a gloss.

- ² *yō paoiryō āθrawa...raθaēštā...wāstryō.fšuyqs* (98).

³ *yo paoiryō...nāist daēwō* (89). On *daēwo* for *daēwq* see K. Hoffmann in *Henning Memorial Volume* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970) pp. 189ff.

- ⁴ *yehe zqθaēca urwāsən āpō urwarāśca...uxšin...* (93)

⁵ Cf. J. Kellens “Avestique,” in R. Schmitt (ed.) *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989) p. 36; K. Hoffmann “Altiranisch” in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, I, 4, 2 (Leiden-Koln: Brill, 1958) pp. 6, 14ff.

- ⁶ For example, YAv *dadāiti*, but GAv *dadāiti* ‘he gives/places.’

- ⁷ For example, YAv *aoxta*, but GAv *aogədā* ‘he said.’

⁸ J. Kellens/E. Pirart, *Les textes vieil-avestiques I*, (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1988), p. 12f.

⁹ See K. Hoffmann *Der Injunctiv im Veda* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1967) and J. Gonda *The Character of the Indo-European Moods* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1956).

- ¹⁰ For older **adāt*.

¹¹ J. Kellens in his monumental work on *Le verbe avestique* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1984) pp. 227, 379, has introduced potential confusion into the understanding of the Avestan verbal system by classifying all augmentless imperfects and aorists as injunctives. Such a classification has two weaknesses: (1) it obscures the distinction between genuine (semantic) injunctives and merely augmentless preterits; (2) it obscures what must be an historical development in Avestan whereby imperfects and aorists lost the augment, a development unknown in Old Persian.

12 For older **adadāt*

13 So Bartholomae, Lommel, Insler; as inj. (klagt, se plaint) Humbach and Kellens.

14 See A. Lubotsky *Die Sprache*, 36, 1994, pp. 44ff.

15 Both Avestan and Vedic have both an athematic and a thematic stem from the root *taš-/takš*. In Vedic either *atakš-* or *atakša-* can be used in the sense of the imperfect or the aorist. Taking the athematic stem first, we can see from RV 1.162.6 *yé...çaṣālam...takṣati*, *yé...pácanam̐ sam̐bháranti* and RV 1.163.2 *...enam ayunak̐ índra enam (ásvam)...ádhyatiṣthat, ...súrād ásvani vasavo nírataṣta*, that it can be coordinated with either the present or imperfect; but RV 4.35.5 *...akarta...akarta...hári...ataṣta* “You (Ṛbhus) have made...have made...have fashioned the two steeds,” and RV 8.6.33 *utá brahmaṇyā vayám túbhyaṇ...vajrivaḥ, vísprā atakṣma jiváse* “And we inspired hymnists have just fashioned (a hymn) for thee, o Mace-wielder, in order to live,” show the athematic stem coordinated with the aorist. Taking now the thematic stem, we find imperfect usage in RV 1.61.6 *asmā id u tvaṣtā takṣad vájram...svaryám...* (compare RV 1.32.2 *tvāṣtāsmāi vájram̐ svaryám̐ tatakṣa*) and RV 10.48.3 *máhyam̐ tvāṣtā vájram atakṣad āyasám*, but elsewhere, almost exclusively in the context of poetic creation, the novelty of the creation is expressed through the aorist sense of an action just completed, for example, RV 1.62.13 *...gótama índra návyam, átakṣad bráhma...* “Gotama, o Indra, has (just) crafted a brand new hymn.” From a formal point of view, the athematic stem appears to be the present stem, especially in that it alone takes primary endings; thus, in Vedic *tāṣti* (3rd sg.) *tákṣati* (3rd pl.) and in YAv. *ḥam.tāṣti*. Further, already in YAv. the long *-ā* has become sporadically generalized in the past participle and a thematic present *tāša-*, while Middle Iranian generally shows long *-ā*, as in MPers. *tāš(īdan)*, SogdB *t’š-*, but Khot. *tāš-*. Note that at Yt 5.120 the meter shows that the MSS are correct: *ḥam.tāṣat̐ ahurō mazdā*; thus not “fautif pout +*ḥam.tāṣti*” (Kellens *Le verbe avestique* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1984) p. 93), though the vowel length could well be secondary. See further J. Narten *Die sigmatischen Aoriste im Veda* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964) pp. 124ff.

16 (London: Oxford, 1951), p. 36.

17 Some of Chapter II appears to be older than the rest.

- 18 *Über die Metrik des jüngeren Avesta* (Tübingen: Laupp, 1877).
- 19 Variant lines of 7 + 8 are quite common.
- 20 For Vedic see H. Oldenberg *Metrische und textgeschichtliche Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Rigveda-Ausgabe* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982 [reprint of 1888 edition]), p.65.
- 21 *Ibid*, pp. 1ff.
- 22 *Trois conférences sur les Gāthās de l’Avesta* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1925), pp. 41ff.
- 23 Cf. J. Harmatta “Königliche *Res Gestae* und epische Dichtung” in H. Klengel *Gesellschaft und Kultur im alten Vorderasien* (Berlin: 1982) pp. 83-88; also R. Schmitt *Encyclopaedia Iranica* III, p. 304.
- 24 After F.W. König quoted in W. Brandenstein/M. Mayrhofer *Handbuch des Altpersischen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 19643 pp. 25-6.
- 25 Read *cašmāwāžanam*
- 26 Read: *patyakunawam*
- 27 See especially his trail blazing “Coded Sound Patterns, Acrostics, and Anagrams in Zoroaster’s Oral Poetry,” *Studia Grammatica Iranica: Festschrift für Helmut Humbach* (München: Kitzinger, 1987), pp.327ff.
- 28 See Ph. Gignoux’s attractive suggestion that the awkward, repetitive style of Kardēr’s inscription is evidence for the passage from orality to literacy (*Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr* (Paris: Assoc. pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 1991) p. 30).
- 29 *wašnā auramazdāha iyam dipī-mai tayām adam akunawam. patišam arya āha. uta nyapi 9ya uta patyafrasy a paišya mām* (DB IV 88-91).
- 30 Though, their Zoroastrian reworking is, of course post-Gathic.
- 31 *Op.cit.*, p.35.

THE TALISMAN

By
Dina G. McIntyre

A talisman is defined as a charm of great potency, capable of producing extraordinary effects.¹ If anything has been accorded the status of a talisman in the later Zoroastrian literature, it is the *Ahuna Vairya* -- the *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* prayer. This prayer is composed in the Gathic dialect and is in the same metre as the Ahunavaiti Gatha.² Professors Humbach and Insler both believe it to have been composed by Zarathushtra himself.³

In a later text (not a part of the Gathas), called Yasna 19, which is a later commentary on the *Ahuna Vairya*, *Ahura Mazda* is said to describe the *Ahuna Vairya* as His Word, and is said to have stated:

“... this word is the most emphatic of the words which have ever been pronounced, or which are now spoken, or which shall be spoken in future; for (the eminence) of this utterance is a thing of such a nature, that if all the corporeal and living world should learn it, and learning should hold fast by it, they would be redeemed from their mortality!” translation by Mills in Sacred Books of the East, Volume 31, Yasna XIX, verse 10, pages 262 - 263 (Motilal Banarsidas reprint).

While it is unlikely that this is a direct quotation from *Ahura Mazda*, the fact that the writer of this commentary puts these words in *Ahura Mazda*'s mouth, indicates the importance this writer ascribed to the *Ahuna Vairya*.

In the *Bundahishn*, a later Pahlavi text written, according to E.W. West, some time after the Arab invasion of 651 CE,⁴ we are told that when *Ahura Mazda* and the evil spirit met, after some preliminary conversation, *Ahura Mazda* recited the *Ahunavar* (which is the *Ahuna Vairya*), and:

“... even so as is declared in revelation, that when one of its (the *Ahunavar*'s) three parts was uttered, the evil spirit contracted his body through fear, and when two parts of it were uttered, he fell upon his knees, and when all of it was uttered he became confounded and impotent as to the harm he caused the creatures of Ahuramazd, ...” translated by West in *SBE*, Volume 5, *Bundahish*, Chapter 1, verse 22, pages 8-9.

It is significant, I think, that even after the devastation wrought by Alexander and by the later Arab invasion of Iran, the idea survived in what remained of the Zoroastrian community, that the *Ahuna Vairya* is something that not only enables us to transcend our mortality, as earlier stated in Yasna 19, but also has the ability to defeat evil, as the *Bundihishn* tells us. A potent talisman indeed!⁵

If the *Ahuna Vairya* was composed by Zarathushtra, the question arises: did the idea of these remarkable qualities of the *Ahuna Vairya* originate with Zarathushtra, or was this idea a later invention? And if it did originate with Zarathushtra, (the prophet who regarded thought as divine), we are led to wonder: what thoughts or ideas did he encode into the *Ahuna Vairya*, for defeating evil and for transcending our mortality?

To answer to these questions, we turn to the only source we have of Zarathushtra's ideas -- not what someone said he said, as we find in the later literature, but his own words -- the Gathas. The translation of the Gathas on which I primarily rely is that of Professor Insler, and all quotations from the Gathas in this paper are from his translation.

If the *Ahuna Vairya* holds the key to defeating evil, the first question we need to answer is: How does Zarathushtra define evil? If you look at each reference to evil in the Gathas, you will find that some of these references are generic -- referring to evil either as an idea, or as an entity -- the way Zarathushtra refers to truth, good thinking, and good spirit, sometimes as ideas and sometimes as entities. These generic references to evil, shed little light on how Zarathushtra defines evil. But there are many verses in the Gathas in which evil is referred to descriptively, and if we study these verses, it becomes clear that to Zarathushtra, evil is the product of wrongful choices. For example, his descriptive references to evil include such things as deceit, fury or anger, destruction, violence, injustice, tyranny, oppression, cruelty, murder, ignorance, betrayal, leading people astray, violating truth, abuse of power (or evil rule), stealing, bondage, persecution, opposing the Wise Lord's teachings, and many such others -- all the products of wrongful choices.

The so-called "natural evils" -- poverty, illness, death of loved ones, earthquakes, and other disasters, are not identified in the Gathas as evil. There is no evidence in the Gathas that Zarathushtra subscribes to the rather parochial view that anything that causes us grief or anguish or pain is, for that reason alone, "evil".

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The idea that to Zarathushtra evil is the product of wrongful choices is corroborated in Yasna 30. In verse 3, we are introduced to the two opposing *mainyu*.⁶

“Yes, there are **two fundamental spirits**, twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In **thought and in word, in action, they are two**: the good and the bad. And between these two, **the beneficent have correctly chosen**, not the maleficent.” (Y30.3).

In this verse both *mainyu* are referred to as “primordial” or “fundamental” (*paouruue*). Both manifest themselves in thought, word and action. And both relate to choices.

In the verses that follow, we see that when such choices are implemented in thought, word and action, good and evil come to life, they acquire substance, they become real (as we understand reality). For example, referring to the consequences of evil choices, Zarathushtra says:

“... Since they chose the worst thought, they then rushed into fury, with which they have afflicted the world and mankind.” (Y30.6)

And, by contrast, the beautiful Yasna 30 verse 7, where he says:

“But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth, and (our) enduring [aramaiti]⁷ **gave body and breath (to it)**. ...” (Y30.7).⁸

In short, we can summarize the inferences that it would be reasonable to draw from these verses regarding how Zarathushtra defines evil, as follows: Evil, as a force, is primordial. Zarathushtra does not specify its origins. But he does say that in existence, in our world, we bring it to life, we give it substance, we make it real, when we choose it with our thoughts, words and actions.

So it would be reasonable to conclude that at least one way to defeat evils is to stop choosing it, and instead, to choose good, with our thoughts, words and actions. Therefore, a key to the destruction of evil, is making the correct choices: which brings us back to the *Ahuna Vairya* -- the prayer of choices.

Professor Gershevitch has expressed the opinion, that the *Ahuna Vairya* specifies three things that are to be chosen: the *ahu*, the *ratu*, and the *xshathra*-¹⁰. Perhaps these three choices are what the writer of the

Bundahishn had in mind when he said that the first part made the evil one contract in fear, the second made him fall to his knees, and the third rendered him harmless. Let us consider the three parts of the *Ahuna Vairya*, in light of Zarathushtra's ideas as expressed in the Gathas.

Translations of the *Ahuna Vairya* vary widely. And I readily concede that reasonable minds may differ. So what I give you is just one of many different perspectives -- both in translation and interpretation. The following translation is that of Professor Insler. However, he may, or may not agree with all of my interpretations, or with the inferences which I draw from his translation.

[FIRST CHOICE] “Just as the Lord [*ahu*] in accord with truth must be chosen,

[SECOND CHOICE] so also the judgment [*ratush*] in accord with truth.

[THIRD CHOICE] In consequence of (this) good thinking, institute ye the rule [*xshathra*-] of actions stemming from an existence of good thinking for the (sake of the) Wise One and for the lord whom they established as pastor for the needy-dependent.”

Let's start with the first choice: What does Zarathushtra mean by choosing the Lord in accord with truth? To understand the significance of this choice, we have to think back to Zarathushtra's time period.

Today, we are used to thinking in terms of a benevolent monotheism. But the situation was very different for Zarathushtra. We know that the society in which he lived was corrupt and oppressive. He complains of greedy princes,¹² a thieving aristocracy,¹³ and pleasure loving priests who, seduced by power and wealth,

“...chose the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth.” (Y32.12).

These tyrants and priests used fear to promote the worship of many gods, some of whom Zarathushtra describes as “fierce” and “hateful”¹⁴.

He viewed this pantheon of fierce and hateful local gods and, at great cost to himself, concluded that they were not worthy of worship. But to me, one of his most significant accomplishments was that he went a step further. He concluded that these local gods could not truly be divine, because only pure goodness could lay claim to divinity. Only One whose

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attributes were reason, intelligence-committed-to-goodness (*vohu mano*), truth, benevolence, loving kindness, righteousness -- only such a One was worthy of worship, was worthy of being God. If you think about it, this is an extraordinary proposition. That God has to merit worship through His goodness.

Zarathushtra, an ordinary man with no power or influence except the power of his mind and spirit, dared to conclude that *Ahura Mazda's* claim to divinity derived from His goodness. And Zarathushtra made a choice. He says to *Ahura Mazda*:

“... this Zarathushtra chooses that very spirit [*mainyu*] of Thine which indeed is the most virtuous [*spenishto*] of all, Wise One...” (Y43.16).

“I choose (only) Thy teachings....” (Y46.3).

Now we know from the Gathas that the spirit of goodness, *spenta mainyu*, which finds its highest expression in God, derives its virtue from truth -- *asha*. For example, in Yasna 28 verse 1 Zarathushtra describes *spenta mainyu* as:

“... the spirit virtuous through truth [*asha*].” (Y28.1)¹⁵

So this choice that Zarathushtra made, reflects the first choice in the *Ahuna Vairya* -- choosing the Lord in accord with truth.

Zarathushtra's idea of a benevolent monotheism was ignored for many years by his contemporaries, but it eventually lighted a fire that illuminated his world and, long after his death, influenced the major religions that followed. A crucial choice -- this first choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* prayer.

Today, we feel very smug about our monotheism. But in reality, like our remote ancestors, we too are polytheists. We worship such local gods as wealth, power, prestige, appearances, position. We worship another local god whom we respectfully call “The Bottom Line”. Now, anyone who has been in business for herself can tell you that if you don't pay attention to your cash flow and to the bottom line, you wont stay in business long. But there is a difference between a healthy attention to the bottom line, and elevating it above all other considerations, in effect, worshipping it. The worship of this local diety -- the Bottom Line -- has seriously eroded the professionalism of the legal, medical and teaching professions.

And in business, its worship may be an effective short-term fix, but can only erode the vitality and resilience of a business in the long run.

Well, by Zarathushtra's standards, these local gods of ours are not worthy of worship. In the *Ahuna Vairya* he makes it clear that the choice of who we worship must be made "in accord with truth [*asha*]" The false gods that Zarathushtra rejected are somewhat different from the false gods that we must contend with, but this first choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* is as important today as it was a few thousand years ago. We too need to choose the object of our worship "in accord with truth (*asha*)."

Let us consider the second choice of the *Ahuna Vairya*. What does Zarathushtra mean by "so also the judgment in accord with truth"? The choice of the judgment in accord with truth immediately brings to mind the choice between the two mainyu which is reflected in Yasna 30. This second choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* is also echoed in Yasna 31 verse 2 where Zarathushtra speaks of:

"... that judgment between the two alternatives by which we are going to live in accordance with truth." (Y31.2).

Now we already know that the good alternative, *spenta mainyu*, derives its virtue through truth (*asha*) (Y28.1), so choosing *spenta mainyu* includes choosing *asha* -- "judgment in accord with truth". In short, we see that this second choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* involves choosing two of the attributes that make for divinity -- a good spirit (*spenta mainyu*) and truth (*asha*).

But let us think a bit more about this second choice. What is the "judgment in accord with truth" of the *Ahuna Vairya*. It is good thinking (*vohu mano*), is it not? It is through good thinking that we grasp the truth. It is good thinking that enables us to make the correct choices. "Reflect with a clear mind" (Y30.2), remember? In Yasna 31 verse 4, referring to God and his divine forces, Zarathushtra says:

"... (And) **through the very best thinking**, I shall seek for myself their rule of strength, through whose growth we might conquer deceit." (Y31.4).¹⁶

In Yasna 29, it is good thinking that provides the solution to the complaint that is made to the Wise Lord.¹⁷ This key role that is played by good thinking is also reflected in the allegorical story in the later Pahlavi writings of Zadsparam who casts good thinking in the form of an angel, and

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tells us that the angel *Vohuman* (Good Thinking) led Zarathushtra to *Ahura Mazda* and the other archangels -- (i.e. the other *amesha spenta*).¹⁸ If you look past the imagery, the idea is quite clear. Good thinking enables us to access God and the attributes that make Him Divine.

So this second choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* -- the “judgment in accord with truth” -- involves all three of the cardinal divine forces of *Ahura Mazda*.¹⁹ It is the choice of good thinking (*vohu mano*) which entails choosing the virtuous spirit (*spenta mainyu*), which in turn derives its virtue through truth (*asha*). This second choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* is the choice of the values that make for Divinity. Just as God must be chosen for these values, so too must these values be chosen -- the “judgment in accord with truth”.¹⁹

The third choice of the *Ahuna Vairya* is choosing God’s good rule (*vohu xshathra*). In the Gathas this rule is called the rule of truth and good thinking (which is another way of saying the rule of the values or attributes which make for Divinity). We find this third choice also specified in the Gathas. In the very first verse of the *Vohu Xshathra* Gatha we are told:

“That good rule must be chosen ...” (Y51.1).

And in verse 18, of that Gatha Zarathushtra says:

“One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve (Him) ...” (Y51.18).

But how do we choose it. The *Ahuna Vairya* tells us that we choose this good rule by bringing it to life, by establishing it, with “actions stemming from an existence of good thinking,” an idea that is echoed numerous times in the Gathas in a variety of ways. For example, Zarathushtra says:

“... The Wise One is Lord through such **actions stemming from good spirit.**” (Y45.5).

“... for I have just now, knowingly through truth, seen the Wise One in a vision to be **Lord of the word and deed stemming from good spirit ...**” (Y45.8).

“By his **action stemming from good thinking,** a man of good determination has expressed his understanding ...” (Y34.10).

“Praising, I shall encounter you with such worship, Wise One, and with **actions stemming from good thinking allied with truth ...**” (Y50.9).²¹

The importance of this third choice in the *Ahuna Vairya* is reflected in Zarathushtra’s view of what it takes to be a *saoshyant* -- a savior, a redeemer.

In the later literature, the concept of a *saoshyant* became greatly embroidered and exaggerated to the point of elevating *saoshyant* to the status of a miraculous, messiah-like leader of great power who will be victorious over evil, and make everything all right.²² It seems we really have not changed that much. Whether it’s Superman, or Yoder, or other omniscient aliens with miraculous powers from another star system, we too hunger for a leader with magical powers who will make everything turn out all right.

This view of the *saoshyant* you will not find in the Gathas. There is no one savior who will come to fix things for us. We have to fix things for ourselves, with God’s help, and with the help of each other. According to Zarathushtra, each individual is a potential *saoshyant*.²³

Which makes one wonder: what is it that makes an ordinary individual a *saoshyant*? We find the answer to that in Yasna 48. In this Yasna, Zarathushtra first expresses his concern about some of the evils -- the products of wrongful choices -- that were troubling him and his world. He says:

“Let fury be stopped. Cut away cruelty, ye who wish to attract the attention of good thinking, along with (that of) truth” (Y48.7).

He asks:

“When, Wise One, shall men desist from murdering? When shall they fear the folly of that intoxicating drink,²⁴ through the effects of which the Karpans [a type of priest] as well as the evil rulers of the lands torture our (good) intentions in an evil way?” (Y48.10)

He asks:

“... which men shall stop the cruelty (caused) by the violent deceitful persons? To which man shall come the understanding stemming from good thinking?” (Y48. 11).

And he concludes:

“Yes, those men shall be the saviors [*saoshyant*-] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth, Wise One. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury.” (Y48.12).

So to Zarathushtra, the *saoshyant* are those who move beyond thoughts and words, to actions in harmony with good thinking and truth -- actions which bring to life the rule of truth and good thinking. The rule which renders evil impotent. That is the third choice of the *Ahuna Vairya*.

We can summarize the talismanic virtues of the *Ahuna Vairya* as a formula for defeating evil quite simply: When we create light, the darkness ceases to exist. We create light by bringing the divine to life with our choices -- our choice of who and what we worship, our beneficent choices in thought and action.²⁵ When we stop choosing evil, we deprive it of substance. It becomes impotent, unable to harm, as the Bundahishn tells us.

But what of the promise of Yasna 19, that if we learn the *Ahuna Vairya* and, learning, hold fast by it, we will be redeemed from our mortality. In the later literature, we are told that the Chinvat bridge stretches from the material to the spiritual. I take the imagery of the bridge to represent a transition from the material to the spiritual. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra tells us how we make that transition. He says:

“Wise Lord, whoever -- be it man or woman -- would grant to me those things which Thou dost know to be the best for existence, namely, the truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking, (with that person) as well as those whom I shall accompany in the glory of your kind -- with all these I shall cross over the Bridge of the Judge.” (Y46.10).

This Gathic verse echoes the *Ahuna Vairya* formula, that when we attain, for ourselves and for each other, the forces with which Zarathushtra equates divinity -- truth for truth's own sake²⁶ and the rule of good thinking, we make the transition from the material to the spiritual. Or, as the author of the later Yasna 19 states, we are redeemed from our mortality.

In closing, you might question: if the *Ahuna Vairya* involves three choices -- the choosing of the Lord, the judgment and the rule, why is it just

called the *Ahuna Vairya* -- the choosing of the Lord. Why not the choosing of all three.

I think it is because all three choices, in the final analysis, reflect the same thing -- the choosing of what makes for Divinity, the *ahu*.²⁷ The first choice is to choose the object of worship because of His attributes which are what make Him Divine -- worthy of worship, the *ahu*. The second and third choices reflect, in thought and action, the individual's choice of these attributes or values, which are what make for Lordship, Divinity, that which is worthy of worship. So when we choose truth, we in effect chose the Divine, that which is worthy of worship (the *ahu*). When we choose good thinking, we choose the Divine, the *ahu*. When we choose the spirit of goodness, we choose the Divine, the *ahu*.²⁸ When we bring these forces of Divinity to life with our actions, we act in a divine way. We partake of Divinity. And when we eventually perfect these choices, we cross over the bridge. We make the transition. We are redeemed from our mortality.

Notes:

- ¹ Webster's International Dictionary, unabridged, 2d edition.
- ² Sacred Books of the East (Motilal Banarsidas reprint) ("SBE" hereinafter), Volume 31, page 259-260, footnote 5 (on page 260); Humbach, The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts. (Heidelberg, 1991), Volume II, p 2.
- ³ Insler, The Ahuna Vairya Prayer. Acta Iranica, Monumentum H. S. Nyberg, (Brill, 1975), p 420; Humbach, The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts. (Heidelberg, 1991), Volume II, p 1.
- ⁴ SBE, Volume 5, Introduction by West, page xli et seq.
- ⁵ Discussions on the *Ahuna Vairya* in the later literature reveal certain similarities. For example:
 - (1) It was revealed by *Ahura Mazda* (Y19.1, 3 SBE Vol. 31, p. 260; Selections of Zadsparam Ch. I verse 12, SBE Vol. 5, p 157);
 - (2) It belongs to *Ahura Mazda* (Y19.5 SBE Vol. 31, pp 260-261);
 - (3) It is the quintessential formula for the defeat of evil (Bundahishn Ch. I verses 21, 22, SBE Vol. I, pp 8-9; Zadsparam Ch. I verse 20, SBE Vol. 5, p 159; Srosh Yasht Hadokht, Ch 1 verse 3 SBE Vol. 23, p. 160);
 - (4) It is the path to heaven (which heaven is described, *inter alia*, as the "best life", the "best righteousness") (Y19.6, SBE Vol. 31, p 261);
 - (5) It increases strength and victory in one's soul (Yasht Fragment XXI verse 4 (sometimes called the Hadokht Nask) (SBE Vol. 23, p. 311). The above commentaries on the *Ahuna Vairya* also reveal certain inconsistencies. For example, that the *Ahuna Vairya* existed before the creation of the material world, (Y19.1, 8, Bundahishn 1.23-26) yet the prayer itself mentions action, the needy poor and other things that are all part of the material world. They also state that the *Ahuna Vairya* existed before *Ahura Mazda* made His good creation, including good thinking, truth and good rule (Bundahishn 1.21-26). Yet the *Ahuna Vairya* mentions good thinking, truth and good rule.

To the extent that what these later texts say about the *Ahuna Vairya* is corroborated in the Gathas, they probably accurately represent teachings that were handed from earlier times. The inconsistencies probably represent later additions by persons to whom the Gathic language, and therefore the meaning of the *Ahuna Vairya* were no longer clearly understood, which is not surprising when you consider the two cataclysmic destructions of texts and teachers that the community experienced around 330 BCE and 650 CE. Yet, these faithful scribes of these later texts, for all their limitations, cared enough to transmit such knowledge as they had. For this I feel towards them both affection and gratitude.

⁶ In a reprint of his article Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas, at page 6, Professor Gershevitch expresses the opinion that *mainyu* is “thought,” whereas, *manah* is the “act of thinking”. Other scholars, translate *mainyu* as spirit (Insler) or force (Dastur N. D. Minochehr Homji).

⁷ See also:
“... Through its actions, [aramaiti] gives substance to the truth ...” (Y 44.6).

There are wide differences of opinion among scholars of the Gathic language regarding the correct translation of the word aramaiti. For example:

Bode & Nanavatty translate aramaiti as devotion,

Haug, as the personification of prayers, Essays on the Language. Writing & Religion of the Parsis. page 150, note 2 (Philo Press reprint, 1971),

Humbach and Ichaporia. as right-mindedness (as do the Pahlavi writers),

Mills as piety,

Insler as piety or (more recently) respect,

Dinshaw Irani as Love,

Jafarey as serenity,

Moulton as piety or devotion, Early Zoroastrianism. p. 344,

Windfuhr as humility, in his article Vohu Manah, page 272 (Michigan Oriental Studies in honor of George Cameron, 1976).

Professor Insler has expressed the opinion, *inter alia*, that the word aramaiti is also related to the Vedic *aram kr* which means “to serve”. See An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra. No. 4, page 5, footnote 7. Based on the way in which Zarathushtra uses the term in the Gathas, I think aramaiti means bringing to life the rule of truth and good thinking with our thoughts, our words and our actions. “Loving

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service” or “devotion” is the closest English equivalent, in my view. For the evidence on which I base my conclusion that aramaiti means loving service or devotion, see *Making it Happen*, Aramaiti, in *An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra* No. 4.

- 8 In Yasna 45 verse 2, the two mainyu are again described as primordial, and manifest themselves in thought, word and action. The concept of choice does not appear specifically in Yasna 45 verse 2, but is indirectly alluded to in the verses that follow, culminating in:
- “... Those of you who shall give obedience and regard to this (Lord) of mine, they shall reach completeness and immortality” (Y45.5).
- 9 As nearly as I can determine, according to Gathas, evil is defeated in the following ways: Through instruction or persuasion, by changing it into good, through the educational effects of law of consequences (what Taraporewala calls the law of action and reaction), and above all, by the choices we make -- by following the path of the Amesha Spenta, by thoughts, words and actions stemming from good thinking, good spirit and truth.
- 10 Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*. Addenda page 329. The Avestan Hymn to Mithra is not a reference to the *Ahuna Vairya*, but the book contains in the Addenda a translation of the *Ahuna Vairya*, and some commentary on that prayer. Although both Professor Gershevitch and Professor Insler see three choices in the *Ahuna Vairya*, their translations differ somewhat.
- 11 Insler, *The Ahuna vairya Prayer*. Acta Iranica, Monumentum H. S. Nyberg, (Brill, 1975), pp. 419-420.
- 12 “Even the Kavis [princes] have continually fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they have begun to aid the deceitful one” (Y32.14).
- 13 “Those deceitful ones who appear in grandeur as lords and ladies, even they have ruined this life by stealing the property of the (true) inheritor” (Y32.11).
- 14 **“But ye gods** -- as well as the one who worships you -- all of you are the offspring stemming from evil thinking, deceit and disrespect. **Hateful, too are your actions**, by reason of which ye have become renowned in this seventh part of the earth.” (Y32.3).

[Referring to Ahura Mazda and His divine attributes! "... ye are above all others, be they **fierce gods** or mortals." (Y34.5).

15 See also Y30.5 where Zarathushtra says:

"... the very virtuous spirit, ... chose the truth, ..."

16 See also: "... *Such is the rule for the Wise One that one shall increase it for Him through good thinking.*"(Y31.6). Or, stated another way: "... Through good thinking the Creator of existence shall promote the true realization of what is most healing according to our wish." (Y50.11).

17 See Some Thoughts on Yasna 29 in An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra. No. 12, p 7 et seq., for the evidence from the Gathas on which this conclusion is based.

18 SBE Volume 47, pp. 156 to 157, translation by West.

19 The three cardinal *Amesha Spenta* or divine forces, in the order in which they appear in the Gathas, are a benevolent spirit (*spenta mainyu*), truth, right, what fits (*asha*), and good thinking or a good mind (*vohu mano*). (The term *amesha spenta* itself does not appear in the Gathas, but each *amesha spenta* itself is mentioned numerous times in the Gathas).

The next two *amesha spenta* are variants of the first three -- good rule (*vohu xshathra*) (which in the Gathas is called the rule of truth and good thinking), and benevolent devotion or service (*spenta aramaiti*). I believe *spenta aramaiti* means the kind of service or devotion which brings to life God's divine values with thoughts, words and actions, thereby establishing His good rule.

And the last two *amesha spenta* are the end results of achieving the first five -- completeness (*haurvatat*) and immortality (*amertat*).

20 In the Ormazd Yasht verses 1 through 4, (SBE Vol. 23 pp 23-24), Ahura Mazda is described as stating that "Our Name, O Spitama Zarathushtra! who are the Amesha-Spentas" i.e. God's divine values or attributes, is the strongest Holy Word, the "most fiend-smiting" the best healing, which destroys best the malice of false gods and men, makes the material world best come to the fulfillment of its wishes. Interestingly enough, these are also precisely the ways in which the

Ahuna Vairya is described in the later literature, even to the use of the term “best fiend-smiting” which occurs in the Srosh Yasht Hadokht Ch. 1 verse 3 (SBE Vol. 23 p. 160). This similarity between the way the *amesha spenta* are described in the Ormazd Yasht, and the way the *Ahuna Vairya* is described in the later literature, while not conclusive, is suggestive that perhaps the interpretations of the *Ahuna Vairya* in this paper are on the right track.

21 See also:

“This I ask Thee ... Have they truly seen that vision which is best for those who exist, and which, in companionship with truth, would prosper my creatures **through words and acts stemming from [aramaiti]**? In consequence of my insight they have wished for Thy powers, Wise One.” (Y44.10).

“Let those of good rule rule over us -- not those of evil rule -- **with actions stemming from good understanding and with [aramaiti]**” (Y48.5).

“What is the **power of Thy good rule, Wise One?** ... What (reward) of Thine is to be sent by truth to those who are certainly sincere as an incentive for **actions stemming from good spirit?**” (Y48.8).

“... To which man shall come the **understanding stemming from good thinking?**” (Y48.11).

“... Thou art the Lord by reason of **Thy words stemming from good thinking,**” (Y51.3).

“... those who have accepted and taught **the words and actions stemming from His good conception [daena-]**” (Y53.1).

22 See Dhalla, [History of Zoroastrianism](#), (1985 reprint) pp 289, 423-428 (with references to Avesta and Pahlavi source materials footnoted).

23 Dastur Dhalla is in agreement with this reading of the Gathas, Dhalla *ibid.* p288.

24 Probably a mind-altering drug used by the priests (Karpans) in their rituals.

25 “... the beneficent have correctly chosen ...” (Y30.3). The dictionary defines “beneficence” as “active goodness, kindness, charity; bounty

springing from purity and goodness.” Webster’s New International Dictionary, Second Edition (1956).

²⁶ An echo of the *Ashem Vohu* prayer.

²⁷ Indeed, in the Gathas, the term *ahura* is used to describe God (*Ahura Mazda*), His cardinal divine forces, which are sometimes personified (Y30.9, Y31.4), and the human being who has comprehended and chosen these divine forces -- Zarathushtra, representing mankind (Y29.6, 8). It is also interesting that in Y53.9, (the last sentence of the last Gatha), Ahura Mazda is referred to as the one who helps the needy dependent who lives honestly.

“... Such is Thy rule, Wise One, through which Thou shalt grant what is very good to Thy needy dependent who lives honestly.” (Y53.9).

In Y29, it is Zarathushtra who is selected as the pastor or caretaker.

The last phrase of the Ahuna Vairya, which refers to “... the lord whom they established as pastor for the needy-dependents” is very close to the last line in the Gathas, but is ambiguous as to the identity of this lord or pastor of the needy-dependents. I am inclined to think that the ambiguity is intentional -- embracing both *Ahura Mazda* and each person who brings the divine to life with his choices -- just as Zarathushtra did.

²⁸ This idea (that truth, good thinking and good spirit are what make for Divinity) may have been one reason why Zarathushtra frequently refers to truth, good thinking and good spirit as entities, sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with *Ahura Mazda*. This idea may also have been why he frequently addresses *Ahura Mazda* in the plural, and why he refers to these divine values as objects of worship or reverence, sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with *Ahura Mazda*. See for example:

“With hands outstretched **in reverence of him, the spirit virtuous** through truth ...” (Y28.1);

“Come hither to me, ye best ones ... Thou, Wise One, together with truth and good thinking ... Let bright gifts and reverence (for all of you) be manifest amid us.” (Y33.7).

“Therefore, let us reverently give an offering to Thee, Lord, and to truth,” (Y34.3).

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“... As long as I shall be able, I shall respect that **truth is to have a gift of reverence.**” (Y43.9).

“Yes, **I shall swear to be your praiser, Wise One,** and I shall be it, as **long as I shall have strength and be** able, o truth ...” (Y50.11)

“... We have said that ye are above all others, be they fierce gods or mortals. If ye are truly so -- Thou, Wise One, along with truth and good thinking -- then give ye that sign to me through every change of this world, so that I shall very happily approach **all of you, as I worship** and praise.” (Y34.5 -6).

“I who shall **serve all of you, Wise Lord**” (Y28.2).

“I who shall eulogize all of you as never before -- **thee, o truth, and good thinking and the Wise Lord and (those others)** [i.e. the other *amesha spenta*]...” (Y28.3).

“... **worship of all of you, Wise Lord, ...**” (Y33.8).

GRANDEUR OF THE GATHAS

By
Ervad Rooyinton Peshotan Peer

I. Significance and Position of the Gathas in the Extant Avestan Literature:

In order to understand the message of the Gathas of the Prophet Zarathushtra in modern times, it is essential to understand the position of the Gathas in the extant Avestan literature, which are the Holy Scriptures of the Zarathushtrians. This becomes more important, particularly when presentations are being made periodically that only the Gathas, and nothing else, are of relevance to Zarathushtrians.

At present, as is known, there is no separate text by the name of 'Gathas'. The 'Gathas' form a section of the Yasna text; consisting of 17 chapters (placed within chapters 28 to 53) of the 72 chapters of the Yasna. Though the Gathas are five in number, they are referred to in the scholastic field by their corresponding chapter-numbers in the Yasna Text. This itself indicates the acceptance of the Yasnas as a part of the Holy Scriptures.

The existing 17 chapters of the Gatha can be recited by a qualified priest in less than a couple of hours; and even a lay member, familiar with the recital of the Avesta, would require a maximum of four or five hours. So, does one understand that the holy prophet Zarathushtra, in his entire lifespan, uttered or preached only this much, and nothing more? It therefore becomes more pertinent to view the Gathas in their proper perspective.

From a historical point of view, we learn that the majority of the kings of the first dynasty of Iran, the Peshdadian Dynasty, were prophet-like saintly beings, and they were all considered as the '*Poryotkeshas*' -- "the first lawgivers" (in the spiritual sense), therefore the prophets. The Religion then was termed as the "*Mazdayasni*" Religion. The great Orientalist, the Late K. R. Cama, in his *Zarthosht Nameh* (in Gujarati), gave numerous references from the Avesta, which describe the existence of the good Mazdayasni Religion before Zarathushtra, who Himself had it. Mr. Cama mentions that there were nine prophets before Zarathushtra, who was the tenth. (Compare this with the concept of 23 *Tirmankars* before Mahavir among the Jains, and the *Jataka* Tales (describing the previous births of Buddha) among the Buddhists). The nine prophets before Zarathushtra as

mentioned by Cama are: Gayomard, Hoshang, Tehmuras, Jamshed, Fredun, Kaikaus, Kaikhusrav, Vishkaripta and Hom.

Fravardin Yasht para. 87 states:

gayəhə marəthno ashaono fravashim yazamaidə. yo paoiryō ahurāi mazdāi manascha gushtha sāsnaōscha “we revere the brave, beneficent ‘*fravashi*’ of holy Gaya Maretan (Gayomard), who first listened to the thought of (the Creator) Ahura Mazda, and (His) teachings”.

The second chapter of the Vendidad begins with Ahura Mazda responding to Zarathushtra’s query, saying that before Zarathushtra, He had revealed His religion to King Jamshed.

Moreover, after the Prophet Zarathushtra, there were several subsequent High Priests also known by the name of Zarathushtra; and the official title of the Chief High Priest of Iran was ‘*Zarathushtrotemo*’.

When Prophet Zarathushtra arrived, He reformed the previous Mazdayasni Religion, and His teachings then technically came to be known as the “*Mazdayasni Zarathushti*” Religion (cf. ‘*mazdayasno ahmi, mazdayasno zarathushtrish*’ in the daily prayer of ‘*Jasa me avanghe mazda*’ the declaration of the faith). It is also interesting to note that throughout the history of Iran, the term ‘*mazdayasni*’ has been used to denote the followers of the religion of Zarathushtra.

Historically, the scriptures of the Zarathushtrians have, over the millennia, been subjected to repeated cycles of destruction. They were first destroyed by Alexander the accursed, then again after the downfall of the Zarathushtrian Iranian Empire in the 7th Century A.C.; and once again suffered further destruction during the dark ages of the 11th to 13th centuries A.C. The present information regarding our scriptures comes mainly from the 9th century A.C. sources, when Pahlavi literature flourished again for a brief period of about one century, and monumental works like Denkart, Datistan-i-Denik, etc., were composed. This literature serves as a link between the present and the Sassanian past.

From these sources then, we may deduce that long after the destruction by Alexander, Dastur Tansar and his team, at the beginning of the Sassanian period, collected and reorganized the scattered scriptures. They created 21 Nasks (Books) and divided them into three major sections (Gasanic, Datik and Hadhamansrik) of 7 Nasks each, according to their contents.

These 21 Nasks, as described in the eighth Book of Denkart, are therefore the recom compilations known in the Avesta as ‘*handata*’ (Gujarati ‘*sangraha*’). Therefore, all the seven Nasks of the ‘*Gasanic*’ (Gathic) group were a ‘*handata*’, or pieced together material as available at that time. Such ‘*handatas*’ have been invoked at the end of each of the five Gathas. Even for the fourth and the fifth Gatha, for which we have only one chapter each at present, the ‘*hamdata*’ is mentioned at the end of both of them. Are we therefore to believe that for these 2 Gathas, out of supposedly many chapters, only this one particular chapter has survived, or that there is the full group (*handata*) only in this one chapter? And, also, where are all the seven other Nasks belonging to the ‘*Gasanic*’ group (almost each the size of the Vendidad)? Moreover, some references in the Gathas, with the name of Zarathushtra in the third person, might suggest that the invoker could be someone else. Further, Yasna 29 8, consists of the praise of Zarathushtra himself. This amounts to self-praise, which in all probability would not have been indulged in by Zarathushtra. This, therefore, is an attempt to indicate that even for the surviving sections of the Gathas, no one can guaranteed that every word of it is original to the Prophet Zarathushtra Himself.

In fact, throughout the present scriptural history, it is known that whatever has survived, has been saved on an equal level, and that everything has been attributed to Zarathushtra. We find in the scriptures that the concepts described in the Gathas are expanded in other works. That is why we say ‘*vispa sravao zarathushtrish yazamaide*’ i.e. ‘we revere all the teachings of Zarathushtra’. The ‘*khshnuman*’ (propitiatory formula) of Mährespand (*Manthra Spenta*) in fact gives the gist of the Zarathushtrian religion. It says “we revere the much-glorious Manthra Spenta -- we revere the law against the demons (*vidaəvodāta* - the Avesta term for ‘Vendidad’) -- we revere the law of Zarathushtra -- we revere the long-standing traditions -- we revere the good Mazdayasni Religion.”

We are aware that at present nearly 95% of even the Sassanian literature has been lost, though the references suggest that the Dasturs who wrote the Pahlavi texts in the 9th century A.C., might have had a majority of these sources with them. These enlightened and highly-spiritually-advanced Dasturs of the Pahlavi writings have given numerous references from the Avesta literature, both Gathic and non-Gathic, particularly in the form of quotations in order to substantiate their interpretations; and for all these numerous Avesta references, they use the term ‘*den*’, ‘*din*’ i.e. ‘religion’. The standard phrase which they use is: ‘*hastke andar den pa eton gowet*’

i.e. 'It is said in the religion thus ...'. These learned Dasturs also composed voluminous independent Pahlavi works, and the important ones among them are significantly termed as '*Den-kart*' (work of the Religion), '*Datastan-e-denik*' (laws of the Religion), '*Vichirkart-e-deni*' (deliberations on the Religion), and so on.

It must, therefore, be understood that there are no references that definitively prove that the first prophet Zarathushtra said only certain things; and at the same time, there are no references to show that the Yasna, Vendidad and other texts are not in accord with the teachings of Zarathushtra. Therefore, it is incorrect to categorize the present Avestan scriptures into Zarathushtrian sections and un-Zarathushtrian sections .

Also, in all the Avesta, and later Pahlavi literature, the Gathas have been held in the highest esteem. The Gathas form the central part of the Yasna Text. Yasna 55.2 mentions: "Gathas are the source of spiritual nourishment and protection; they are spiritual food and raiment for the soul, and they are giver of proper desserts and appropriate rewards (good for good and bad for bad) after death." Vendidad Chapter 10 describes the efficacy of the recitation of particular Gathic verses in order to drive away all types of evil forces.

In light of this, therefore, our attempt is to make it understandable that the Gathas are an integral part. of the entire Avesta scripture, and that the Gathas have a distinct role of their own within the scriptures. Even Prof. Karl Geldner, the giant of the Avesta studies, mentioned about a century ago: "It would, of course, not be legitimate to conclude that ... the Gathas represent only the primitive (teachings), and the later texts (represent) the degenerate Mazda-religion as adapted to the spirit of the people. The Gathas reflect rather only one side of the same Mazda-religion, its esoteric doctrine." ("Avesta Literature" p.44, in Avesta, Pahlavi and Ancient Persian Studies).

II. Reflections on some of the Divine Aspects and also the Notions and Concepts of the Zarathushtrian Religion as Contained in the Gathas:

After ascertaining the position of the Gathas in the extant Avesta scriptures, we shall now try to delve deeper into understanding the essence of some of the concepts in this particular portion of the holy scriptures.

The Gathas begins with the invocation: "*nəmo vē gāthāo ashaonish*": "O Sacred Gathas! Salutations be unto you."

The Gathas are the spiritual heritage of the Zarathushtrians, and the *Athravans* have kept them alive for timeless ages by means of their recital and writings. These sacred hymns of Holy Zarathushtra are an important document from the spiritual, social and historical point of view.

It is known that each of the five Gathas must have been composed at different times in Zarathushtra's life, and a range of highly philosophical thought rises from them, and these thoughts are so practical that not only have they stood the test of time, but they will serve as a beacon for mankind in the next and other millennia to come.

It is evident from Yasna 29 that when 'Mother Earth' cried out for help for a Savior, after much deliberations in the Divine Council, the soul of Zarathushtra was chosen for the mission on Earth. It is said in the scriptures that Zarathushtra was already of the '*Yazata*' level (i.e. in the form of a spiritual worshipful being) and he took the physical form for this worldly mission; hence his utterances and message (in this case the Gathas as we understand) are spiritual in the fullest sense of the word, and therefore we must never bring down his message to a mere mundane material level.

This type of mere mundane level is arrived at when very often, words like '*gao, geush*', etc., are translated as 'cattle, animals' and other such forms; whereas in fact, these terms could also have the meanings of 'earth, light, space' and so on. The terms themselves might have been used for the convenience of lay persons in the language of those times, who lived in an agrarian society. Taraporewala states:

"The Gathas are spiritual in the fullest sense of the word. Therefore, we must never bring down their Message to the material level. The Bible speaks of 'the Good Shepherd', while the Hindu Scriptures tell us about their Krishna as 'tending Cows', and Shiva has been named Pashupati (Lord of Cattle). In the spiritual sense the 'sheep', the 'cows' and the 'cattle' are human souls. If we see in the Gathas only 'cattle-tending' and 'fodder' and 'meadows', we would lose their inspiration completely." (pp.84-85).

The classic example of such language is in Yasna 44.18, which is generally translated as "How shall I be worthy of that prize -- ten pregnant mares led by a stallion through righteousness, about which O Ahura Mazda, is known to me through Haurvatat and Ameretat, so that (i.e. if I get that prize) I may dedicate the prizes to Thee (i.e. in Thy name, or in Thy memory, I may give as a present to the pious man)." Now how could an advanced soul like that

of Zarathushtra ask for such mundane irrelevant matters, and that too through ‘Asha’?

Here then, we may concur with Taraporewala’s: “Ten mares, my senses, led by stallion Mind (i.e. Higher Self) which mares shall bear me safe into Thy Light (*‘ushtra’* -- ‘illumination’) -- where Perfect Light eternal I’ll attain, and also bring those gifts to all mankind.”

Here the ten mares are the five senses of perception (*gnānēndriya*) and five senses of action (*karmēndriya*). The stallion is the mind which controls these senses.

Taraporewala further explains this paragraph as: “The inner sense of this verse is that Zarathushtra hopes that through Asha, He may get his reward viz. His ten senses brought under complete control of the ‘Mighty One’, the (Higher) Mind, and that thus He may also gain the illumination. Then He may be able to comprehend what Perfection (*Haurvatat*) and Immortality (*Ameretat*) mean, and He would help mankind to understand what these are.”

This type of terminology of the given words could also be found elsewhere like that in the Kathopaishada, and in Plato’s ‘Phaedros’, or in the Shahnameh.

Just as we have said above that each of the five Gathas represent different time-periods in Zarathushtra’s life, we may also compare the compositions of each of the five Gathas to the different levels and stages of the soul.

Thus:

Gatha Ahunavaiti = Deep Philosophy for the Soul (as propounded by Zarathushtra)

Gatha Ushtavaiti = Divine Happiness of Soul

Gatha Spenta Mainyu = Divine Enhancement of Soul

Gatha Vohu Khsathra = Divine Power of the Soul

Gatha Vahishtoishti = Excellent Desire in Oneness with Ahura Mazda!

One may compare this with the similar perception in the prayer of Hoshbam:

‘ashvahishta. asha sraəshta. darəsama thwā. pairi thwā jamyāma. haməm thwā hakhma’: ‘(O Ahura Mazda)! through the best ‘Asha’, through the most beautiful ‘Asha’, may we see Thee, may we come near to Thee, and may we be in eternal friendship with Thee!’

The first Gatha Ahunavaiti (based on the order of the divine prayer ‘*Ahunavar*’), contains some very deep philosophical concepts. Very often these thoughts could be used as standard quotations and phrases. It is known that Zarathushtra has perceived Ahura Mazda in the Gathas as the highest of the Supreme Beings, and which perception we find running through the Gathas in various forms. The finest of such examples is found in Yasna 29.4: *‘hvo vichiro ahuro athā nə anghat yathā hvo vasat’*: “Ahura Mazda himself is the wisest Judge (of good and evil); and so may that befall us which He wills.” (i.e. Ahura Mazda is the accountant of all living beings, and we resign. to His will). This ought to be a regular prayer on the lips of all Zarathushtrians.

This idea is found again in the same Gatha (Yasna 32.6), where Ahura Mazda is regarded as *‘hātā maranə’*: ‘one who remembers all’, and the said stanza beautifully explains the most fundamental of the Universal laws for all mankind, thus:

Deluded thus a sinner may succeed
At first, and even high renown attain;
Still, O Ahura, in Thy Mind Supreme
All is remembered, and the motives Judged;
For Duly, Mazda, where Thy Rule extends,
And Thy Eternal Law, the Truth prevails.
(Taraporewala)

One of the names of Ahura Mazda as stated in the Hormazd Yasht is: ‘One who maintains account of (the deeds of) men.’ This is like what we understand the Biblical concept of ‘Thy shall be done’. The Bhagwad Gita 18.63 states: *‘yathəchasi tathā kuru’*: ‘Let it be as Thou willst’. But then one has to remember that according to Zarathushtrian religion, this is neither an inertia, nor the fatalistic attitude of resigning only to one’s fate. It is to be so understood that after we mortal men do our efforts, we then leave the results in Ahura Mazda’s hands.

We also observe that very often the first stanza of a Gathic chapter is a sort of abstract of that particular chapter; and the first chapter of a particular Gatha, an abstract of that entire Gatha.

Thus, Yasna Chapter 28 is a forerunner of the Ahunavaiti Gatha. Zarathushtra in the beginning prays for two blessings only: 'Through Asha deeds, true knowledge may I gain, And Vohu Mano's loving wisdom, too, and thus bring solace to the Soul of the Earth.' We may observe that Zarathushtra, whatever he asks for, does not ask it for himself, but for the benefit of others. This in fact is the essence of this Gatha, and would concur with the last line of the renowned Ahunavar prayer: "He who helps the downtrodden will get power from Ahura Mazda's Kingdom. He who does good deeds in Ahura Mazda's name will get the boon of wisdom."

The concept of the *Amesha Spentas* must be clearly understood in order to understand the Gathas. They are the divine attributes of Ahura Mazda. The abstract ideals of the *Amesha Spentas* in the Gathas have been expanded in the later literature of Zarathushtrian Theology in personified forms, and the understanding of the *Yashts* become very necessary in order to understand this concept. The concept of *Amesha Spentas* is the best example of understanding the perception of the macrocosm and the microcosm of the Universe. In the Farvardin Yasht (para. 83), it is said that all the seven *Amesha Spentas* are of one accord in thoughts, words and deeds, and whose father and teacher is the Creator Ahura Mazda. Different combinations of *Amesha Spentas* are seen in each of the Gathic stanzas. Each of the stanzas almost always contains a name or two of them, with Yasna 47.1 being the only stanza where all the seven *Amesha Spentas* are mentioned together. The collective understanding of each of them encompasses the entire gamut of the spiritual and material worlds, and the entire range of philosophy of thought.

In Yasna 28.2, Zarathushtra prays: 'O Ahura Mazda! may I reach Thee through *Vohu Manah*.' In other words, it means: 'By means of the purest thought, I fully recognise Thee, O Ahura Mazda!' The concept of *Vohu Manah* is extraordinary and unique to the Zarathushtrian Religion. *Vohu Manah* holds the second place after Ahura Mazda in the spiritual hierarchy. It is not just plain 'Good Mind'. It is the spiritual knowledge and a deep realization; and it is a Zarathushtrian tenet that all good things emanate only through knowledge and wisdom (cf. the prayer of *Vispa Humata*). In practical terms, 'pure knowledge' is the 'clarity of thought' which in turn

would enable a human being to have a clear and better perception in the execution of his duties in this world.

Next in line is *Asha Vahishta*: ‘the Best Righteousness’. Its Sanskrit form is ‘*ṛta*’. This concept has a very broad expanse, in that it encompasses all the virtuous faculties in the Universe. It is the Law of Nature, the Law of Universe, the Law of Universal Truth, the Cosmic Law. Briefly stated, one can say that ‘whatever is good is *Asha*, and whatever is *Asha* is Zarathushtrian.’

Yasna 28.4 teaches a fine concept of ‘*yavat isāi tavāchā. avat khsāi aeshə ashahyā*’: “As long as I have Will, and wield the Power, so long will I teach (mankind) to strive for *Asha*”. Here, we get an idea about a true Religious Leader -- and after the Prophet, a Dastur or a Mobed. Not only would he be one who is diligent in his endeavours, but also one who would himself possess the spiritual knowledge -- only then could he impart it to others.

In Yasna 28.5, *Sraosha* is mentioned, whose concept is later on expanded to a unique position in the Zarathushtrian Theology. Zarathushtra asks: "when shall I, guided by Sraosha's voice, walk on the path to almighty Ahura Mazda?" We understand *Sraosha* as the Obedience to the Will of Ahura Mazda.

In Yasna 28.6, Ahura Mazda is actually invoked by Zarathushtra to come to his and his followers' help (cf. *jasa me avanghe mazda*) through *Vohu Manah*, and grant them long life. One would wonder why Zarathushtra lays stress on long life. It is therefore significant to note that in the Zarathushtrian Religion, such invocations for long life and benedictions for healthy mind and body are sought for the good and righteous persons only. We find in the Pazend prayers also ‘*asho bed derji*’: “May the Holy person live long!” The idea is that since a holy and righteous person is a benefactor of mankind, his longevity of life would help in the furtherance of goodness in this world.

And further in the same stanza, it is explained that on account of the divine words, Zarathushtra was himself exhilarated, and so do the others who understand them, so that the evilness of the evil be destroyed. This is an important teaching of the Zarathushtrian Religion -- that one does not need to destroy an evil person; but that one ought to try to destroy the root or the source of all evil; and according to the *Vispa Humata* prayer, the root of all

evil or sin is ignorance, or the lack of wisdom. We may find an echo to this in Jesus Christ's famous words: "Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Yasna 28.7, 28.10 and 29.7 describe the origin of *Manthra* (the Holy words, the sacred words) as being the very utterances and formations of Ahura Mazda; and they are fully enlightened; and the efficacy and benevolence of the same for mankind through their recital. This is an eternal substance of the Zarathushtrian Religion even upto the present times that the *Manthra* (*Spentas*) are the very essence of the Religion.

Yasna Chapter 30 is perhaps unique, in the sense that an unheard of concept of Free-will and Freedom of Choice is developed by the Great Thinker. Instead of "Thou shalt do this, and Thou shalt not do this", here the great philosopher, who propounded this theory of understanding, leaves the choice to the individual. This is a great responsibility thrust on human beings, and Ahura Mazda's greatest gift to them, one which helps develop the power of mind.

The chapter begins with the statement that Ahura Mazda created the two Spirits -- good and evil; that man should first listen to what is being taught - - the truth; and weigh properly with illumined mind and with care, before choosing which of the two paths to tread; and then deciding man by man, each one for himself.

But, unfortunately, in recent times, this extraordinary concept is being misused by some members of the Zarathushtrian Community and others for some ulterior motives. The absolute clarity of this perception to its logical end is clearly revealed in stanzas 3, 4 and the rest of the chapter, that the law of cause and effect is there in the Universe, and that "Dark is the mind of those that cling the False, but brightly shines the man that holds the Truth" -- this concept is being totally ignored, and in particular, the second stanza is constantly quoted out of context (more so when an innocuously translated English word 'acceptance', is twisted to suit other contexts). "Free Will" does not mean doing thing that we wish to without taking into account their consequences. There are certain norms to be followed according to the Law of Nature, and this is reflected in Yasna 43.5 as '*akəm akāi vanguhim ashim vanghavə*': "Good to good, and evil to evil", as identified with the "Law of Karma".

The concluding stanza of the same Yasna 30 continues with the same line of thought that runs throughout the chapter:

If ye will only know and learn these laws,
Which Mazda hath ordained for Ye, O men --,
The Laws of happiness, the Laws of pain,
That Falsehood brings on age-long punishment,
That Truth leads on to fuller higher Life
Upon all such the Light Divine shall fall.
(Taraporewala)

This concept of Freedom of Choice is further carried on in Yasna 45 (i.e. in the second Gatha). But in fact, Zarathushtra here clearly warns the members of the assembly to apply their intelligence very discreetly, so that they may not be misled by a false religious teacher. Ervad Kanga gives further explanation to this as: “In other words, Prophet Lord Zarathushtra tells those present in the Assembly that if you, bearing in mind this my sermon and will lead your life in accordance with it, then you will not destroy your life in this and the spiritual world by the false teachings of an evil teacher, but on the contrary, you will acquire happiness of both the worlds” (p.129).

Elsewhere in Yasna 32.9, Zarathushtra castigates such false teachers again as *‘dush-sastush sravāo morāndat, hvo jyātəush sənghānāish khratum’*: “The teacher of false doctrines distort the sacred verses of the Religion; and he through (his false) teachings destroys the wisdom of men”. Such persons (those who twist the truth) have later on come to be known as the *‘ashmogs’* (from Avesta *‘ashəmaogha’* “one who violates purity or righteousness; a heretic; a misinterpreter”, Kanga, Av. Dict. p.66) among the Zarathushtrian community, and they keep on appearing from time to time and in every age.

Zarathushtra’s perception of Ahura Mazda is made very succinct in Yasna 31.7 when he says: “Who (i.e. Ahura Mazda) is the first Great Thinker, whose brilliance has mingled with the boundless light (of the heaven); who himself is the Creator (of the entire world) through His omniscient wisdom, by means of which He upholds the Truth and the best Thought.” This means that Ahura Mazda is the Creator of the Divine Conception, and Who has created the Universe with His immense wisdom. We may compare the Bible: “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God.” And the concept of the sacred prayer of *Ahunavar* is similar to this idea of the Logos.

Yasna 31.9 teaches us another important Zarathushtrian character -- that of being industrious and diligent, and not to be idle. Kanga further explains: "that its significance is this -- just as a man passes his life industriously or otherwise on earth, in the same way he gets reward in accordance with his actions after his death." This implies again about the Law of Karma, that we men have to draw our furrow alone -- and the given dictionary meaning of the idiom 'to draw one's own furrow is to 'lead a blameless life.'

In Visparad 15.1, this virtue of being industrious is expounded further. And that is why a true Zarathushtrian is known, and will be known, on account of the virtues of 'honesty, integrity and hard work.'

'Zoroastrianism teaches dignity of labor. Proper use of hands and feet is advocated—. Work is worship, and idleness is a sin against religion and society. It is stated that an idle man is a burden on human society, and he has to wander from door to door in search of food. (OPH p.402).

One of the most noble emblems of Nature is the Fire. Not only the visible form of fire, but as invisible form in the nature of heat and energy that is pervading the Universe, is being considered of vital importance in the Zarathushtrian Religion. In Avesta, the term for 'fire or heat' is 'afar', and H is also the name of the Yazata presiding over the same. As a luminous creation in direct and close contact with human beings, the fire in one form or Me other plays an important part in the religious life of man, in almost all religions of the world. In the Zoroastrian Religion, the fire is specially venerated as the shining emblem of Ahura Mazda." (OPH p. 389).

The reverence and position of Fire among the Mazdayasnians, and which is a pre-Zarathushtrian institution, has been embodied in the Gathas by Zarathushtra. In the Gathas particularly, the Fire has been visualized as the divine judge. The Fire is therefore recognized as the representative of Ahura Mazda in this world, and as such, came to be regarded as 'the son' of Ahura Mazda.

And throughout the countless millennia then, the Fire has attained the most prominent position in the Zarathushtrian Religion, and has been a centrifugal force around which the community revolves. In the darkest of ages, and in the most difficult of times, this institution of Fire has remained as a rallying factor for the Zarathushtrians, and it would remain so forever. As the son, and therefore the representative of Ahura Mazda, the presence of Fire in all Zarathushtrian ceremonies is inevitable.

Yasna Chapter 44 is among the grandest in the Gathas. The first line keeps on repeating at the beginning of all He stanzas except the last one and that line introduces the 'rhetorical questions' about the different creations in the Nature and the power of Ahura Mazda. According to Dr. Lawrence H. Mills, these questions are 'We expressions of devotion, and only in a few instances, appeals for knowledge.'

The We of the third Gatha is 'Spenta Mainyu' which means 'bountiful or benevolent spirit'. This concept of 'Spenta Mainyu' infect pervades through the entire Gathic section, and this is in fact the essence of the Zarathushtrian Religion, that there are two spirits in the world - one is the Spenta Mainyu, which is a constructive force, and which causes all goodness in the world, and the other its opposite negative force through which the acts of goodness are caused to be undone. And the very purpose of man's existence in this world is to remain on the side of goodness and to struggle against the forces of negation. This has given rise to the most fundamental tenet of the Zarathushtrian Religion - that of 'Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshta', and which has been succinctly described in Yasna 35.2 thus: 'Line are the devotees who revere all good thoughts, words and deeds, done here or elsewhere, now or at any other time, because we remain among the benefactors of the world.'

This concept of Spenta Mainyu in the Gathas could be the source of the 'Fravashis' in the Avesta. According to Mr. Kanga, in his article, 'The Spenta Mainyu in the Gathas' in Dr. Sir J. J. Modi Memorial volume: 'the Fravashis are emanations from Ahura Mazda, and that they appear through Spenta Mainyu, which is the Divine Spirit of Ahura Mazda himself. It would seem that Ahura Mazda reveals Himself through His Own Spirit and through Fravashis in this world.' (p.214).

In Yasna 48.5, we come across a line '*yaozhdao mashyai aipi zanthem vahishfa*': 'Purity is the best for mankind since birth (and throughout the life)'. This then also is the basis for one of the most important doctrines of the Zarathushtrian Religion, that is purity and cleanliness, both of the body and of the mind.

Zarathushtrianism does not enjoin the neglect or torture of our physical body because the purity of body is an emblem of the purity of mind.' MA Zoroastrian has to do his duty to himself. Our body is a sacred weapon of our soul in this life. It is through the body that the soul can perform the duties of this life. It is, therefore, our duty to keep our body clean pure, and healthy - in thought, word, and deed. We can discharge the duties of our life

only if we have a clean, pure and healthy body and mind. Health, endurance, vitality and long life are the blessings from God; and a Zoroastrian prays for the same, so that he can perform his duty and play his part in this life. (OPH p.4003).

This concept of purity and cleanliness has then been so ingrained in the culture of the Zarathushtrians that Prof. Darmesteter declares: The axiom that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' altogether a Zoroastrian axiom, with the difference, that in the Zoroastrian religion, 'cleanliness is a form itself of godliness.'" (RCCP p.86).

The title of the fourth Gatha is '*Khshathra-Vairya*' which means 'Divine Kingdom' and its establishment. This idea of '*khshathra-vairya*' also seems to be unique in character in those times. It may correspond to the prayer "Thy Kingdom come" among the Christians. Dr. Taraporewala translates it as 'Divine Strength,' and explains thus: "*Vohu-kshathra* represents the 'Strength of Love' that guides the aspirant along the Path of Action (service of Man) to Perfection. That is the true Creative Force in man." (Divine Songs of Zarathushtra p.766).

Prof. A. V. Williams Jackson explains this concept as: "Briefly stated, this personified abstraction in its spiritual sense represents an embodiment of Ahura Mazda's might, majesty, dominion, and power, or that blessed reign whose establishment on earth will mean the annihilation of evil. (Avesta, Pahlavi and Ancient Persian Studies - p.161).

Conclusion:

So, we come to the theme question as to what is the Gathic vision of the Next Millennium? In other words, what is the message of Zarathushtra's teachings in the future?

To this we may say that the message of the Great Prophet is always there, and it has nothing to do with this millennium or that it is there for all time to come. The message of Zarathushtra is available to us crystal clear since countless millennia. It is only upon the shoulders of the successive generations of the Zarathushtrians to make or break themselves. It so happens that in course of time, the precepts and the tenets of a particular religion get so ingrained in the body-politic of the adherents of the faith, i.e. the community members, that there are certain visible traits and characteristics being developed and the community becomes famous on

account of such qualitative characteristics. As long as the community members adhere to these principles, and not let the said characteristics be diluted for whatever reasons, the community and the religion are able to reflect their glory.

Now the history shows us that until the near past, the Zarathushtrians have shone themselves reflecting to their own glory by following the teachings of their prophet with abundant faith. But now there is a stage where the spirit has been weakened, and the roots being shaken, and ignorance and doubt having crept in. It is therefore upon the individuals to make a realistic effort to gain knowledge of their own precious heritage. Unfortunately, the present situation is such that the community-members, in the absence of even the basic knowledge of the religion, are not on a firm footing, and therefore regularly being carried away. We understand that during floods or hurricanes, only those objects having firm roots have a chance to survive; hence the best possible way is to try to gain substantial religious and cultural knowledge, and keep the spirit alive through faith.

As in Prophet Zarathushtra's own words (Yasna 44.10):

This do I ask Thee, Ahura, tell me aright,
Reveal to me Thy Faith, the best for man,
Which through Thy Asha, uplifts, promotes all Life,
Teach us to hold Armaiti in our hearts,
That she might guide our human actions right,
Teach us to turn our yearning minds to Thee.
(Dr. Taraporewala)

We pray that may the Grandeur of the Gathas remain forever.

GRANDEUR OF THE GATHAS

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PROJECTING THE VISION OF THE GATHAS

By
Rohinton Rivetna

THE VISION

To bring about “The Kingdom of Truth and Good Thinking” through service in thought, word and action.

FRASHO-KERETI

This vision is unquestionably universal for all humankind.

Deductions:

- The Gathas provide the vision: -- The renewal of our world to progressively transform the world toward the kingdom of Truth and Good Thinking.
- The Gathas also provide the formula for the fulfillment of the vision: -- The moral and ethical code in the body of the Amesha Spentas; Asha and the Good Mind being its embodiment.
- The Gathas then provide for consequence or justice.

Projecting the Vision:

1. How has it been projected? (past);
2. How are we projecting it today? (present);
3. How should we project the vision? (future).

PROJECTION OF THE VISION (PAST)

1. Reflection of Zoroastrianism in other religious doctrines:
 - Belief in one supreme and loving God;
 - Heaven and Hell and individual judgment;
 - Ultimate triumph of good over evil;
 - Strict moral and ethical code;

- The Messiah to come for the final restoration.
2. Could we go so far as to say that it is reflected in the U.S. Constitution?
- Are not Liberty (Yasna 30.2) and Human Rights (Yasna 33.1) embodied in the Gathas?
3. Reflection in Human Moral and ethical codes of conduct:
- The Riva Del Garda Declaration -- World conference on Religion and peace, sixth assembly November 30, 1994;
 - A call for Evangelical Renewal -- Chicago Declaration II 1973;
 - Humanist Manifesto II published in 1933 by Raymond Bragg;
 - On the urgency of a Jewish response to the environmental crisis issued by the Consultation;
 - On the Environment and Jewish Life, Washington D.C., March 10, 1992;
 - Declaration of mutual acceptance by the community of religions;
 - Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief by the United Nations;
 - Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to the Jewish Community;
 - Universal Declaration on Nonviolence signed by, among others, His Holiness, Dalai Lama April 2, 1991;
 - The Contribution of Religions to a Culture of Peace, UNESCO, 1994;
 - A Call to Remember and Renewal by campaign, 1995;
 - Declaration of the 7th World Religions Conference: to the Secretary General of U.N. for a permanent Center for Nonviolent Conflict Prevention and Resolution;
 - The Earth Covenant by Global Education Associates, 1988;
 - New Life for Earth Charter by Earth Council chaired by Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev;
 - Caring for the Earth: A strategy for Sustainable Living. Published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 1980;
 - The Jain Declaration on Nature;
 - An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation;
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the U.N. General Assembly, December 10, 1948;
 - The Seville Statement on Violence adopted by UNESCO, 1989;
 - The New Consciousness;

PROJECTING THE VISION OF THE GATHAS

- Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development, March 12, 1995;
- Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility.

PROJECTION OF THE VISION (PRESENT)

With the vision expressed as “Bringing About the Renovation” i.e. “Bringing About the Kingdom of Truth and Good Thinking” our mission is quite clear: “to bring about this transformation.” In other words our mission is to transform ourselves as individuals or enhance our own spirituality both internally within our own community and externally for all humankind.

- **Internally** within our own community the tools we possess to bring about the transformation are: (weighting 1-10)
 - ⇒ SCHOLARS -- to research and study and to keep the flame alive with ideas and discoveries. (7)
 - ⇒ EDUCATIONISTS -- to teach the faith; no matter whether it is clothed in orthodox or liberal vestments as long as it aims to achieve the vision. (9)
 - ⇒ PRIESTS -- to preserve the practice and rituals. (8)
 - ⇒ SECULAR SUPPORT -- Organizations and Institutions with leadership. (4)
 - ⇒ CONSTITUENTS -- The practitioners, although the most numerous they are the most precious.

How well are we doing in projecting the vision internally? How far are we from the Kingdom of Truth? There are no benchmarks, no yardsticks, no gap analysis. EACH ONE MUST JUDGE ONE’S OWN SELF!!

- **Externally** (outside our community) the tools we possess to project the vision are:
 - ⇒ INTERFAITH ENCOUNTERS.

- ⇒ EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOR of a Zoroastrian in his association with others: “Goodness, Charity, Honesty, Service.”
- ⇒ GLOBAL ETHICS.
- ⇒ UNITED RELIGIONS.

How far have we succeeded? What is the yardstick? Is strife in the world a measure?

PROJECTION OF THE VISION (FUTURE - RECIPE)

Toward Frasho-Kereti, the Kingdom of Truth and Good Thinking

INTERNALLY:

- SCHOLARSHIP:

- ⇒ Produce young scholars at least one in each community -- though self-study or university trained -- and create endowments for providing scholarships.
- ⇒ Scholars to hold round table conferences each year in conjunction with AAR meetings.
- ⇒ Encourage scholars to publish in the K. R. Cama or FEZANA Scholarly journals. Material must be original in content supported by independent study and research.
- ⇒ Develop metrical recitation of the Gathas providing rhythm to enhance their appeal.

- EDUCATION:

- ⇒ Sermons on the path of Asha to be taught at Association monthly meetings by trained experienced presenters.

- PRIESTHOOD:

PROJECTING THE VISION OF THE GATHAS

- ⇒ Develop learned, divinity trained priests. They should be trained in Rituals, Ministry and Scriptures. Priests shall assume the role of scholars and educators.
- SECULAR SUPPORT:
 - ⇒ Providing and maintaining sacred spaces, welfare, development of scholars, educators, priests, providing books and materials, celebration of festivals, etc. This tool is energy intensive and the least productive in terms of fulfillment of the vision but is essential, as it is the glue that holds the process of transformation together. It is merely a vehicle. Secular support is not an end in itself, rather it is only the vehicle. Leaders that run the secular support organizations must comprehend that their main duty is providing support for the transformation of the constituents towards “the Kingdom of Truth and Good Thinking”. I call it the spiritual enhancement.
- GENERAL APPROACHES:
 - ⇒ Respect Internal Diversity. Inculcate respect for the sincere seeker be it Ilm-E-Khshnum or Shiite, Muslim or Buddhist, Kadmi or Shenshai remembering that all paths strive to reach the same goal.
 - ⇒ Abhor Politics. Imposition of the will of a few over the majority -- cuts both ways -- for the traditionalists and non-traditionalists.
 - ⇒ Inculcate respect for elderly wisdom. Discourage “we think our father’s fools...” syndrome.

EXTERNALLY:

- EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOR
 - ⇒ Each Zoroastrian shall be an emissary -- projecting himself/ herself as a product of truth and good thinking by his/her honesty, goodness, charity and service. The mainstream Zoroastrians have preserved, wittingly or unwittingly, Zoroaster’s vision in their practice for centuries which is just beginning to be recognized in the west and is destined to make a very substantial impact. (Fig.

A). In fact, Zarathustra’s message can be packaged as the “Ethical and Moral Principles for a Global Renovation” just as we have the Global Ethics. (Fig. B)

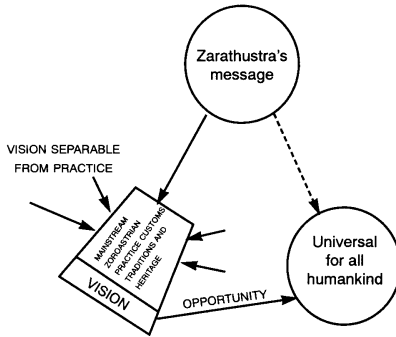


Figure A.

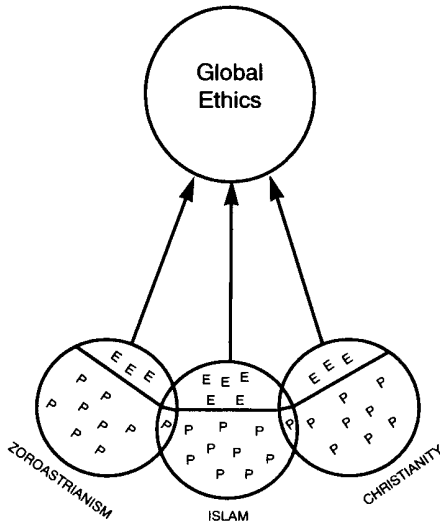


Figure B.

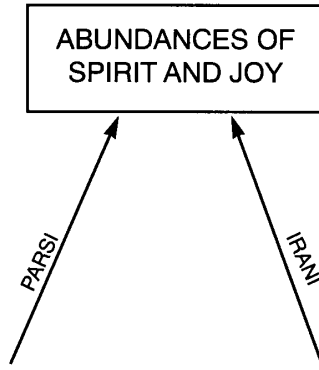
INTERFAITH ORGANIZATIONS:

- Not for everyone. Involvement requires a person who is willing to invest a lot of time and does not expect to see the fruits of his/her labor in their lifetime. Requires physical presence to be counted and perseverance.
- Projection of the Global Ethics. Ensure reflection of Truth and Good Thinking in the Global Ethics.
- Participate in the formation of the “United Religions.”

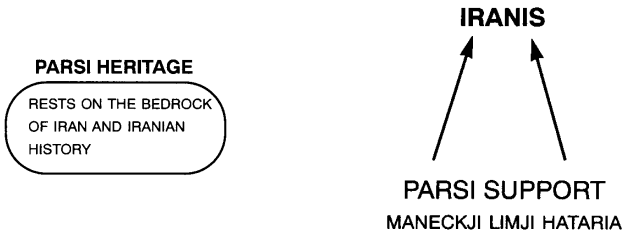
GENERAL (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

- Must continue to invest energy even though the constituent’s response may be poor.
- Transform diversity both internally and externally into rich assets:
Internally:
 - ⇒ Parsi -- Irani;
 - ⇒ Traditionalists -- Non-traditionalists;
 - ⇒ Mainstream Zoroastrians -- Neo-Zoroastrians (Jadith);
 - ⇒ Ilm-E-Khshnumist -- Shenshai -- Kadmi -- Fasli.
Externally:
 - ⇒ Find a common ground between Faiths.
- Build bridges -- Build consensus. For example, the Calendar issue --we have agreed to intercalate.
- Must create Harmony -- Tranquility. If Zoroastrians are to project themselves externally, they must first respect their own internal diversity.

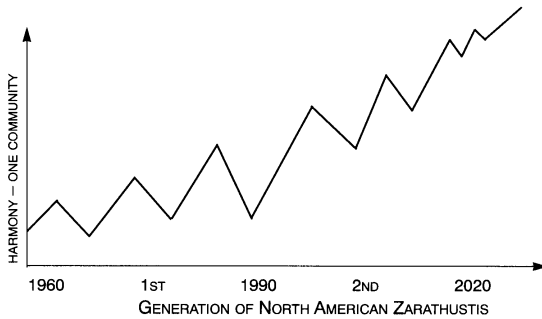
OUR VISION FOR THE COMMUNITY



We must recognize our interdependence! Can Parsis cut off their roots and say we shall live without Iran or Iranis?



PROJECTING THE VISION OF THE GATHAS



ADMONITIONS

- Know your place in creation on the cosmic scale. It will bring a sense of humility.
- Be visionary for without vision we will surely perish. Where there is no vision, there is no light.
- From time to time climb up to the heights of detachment and look through the boulders on the surface that block your vision for the path that we must follow -- you will see in the distance, Zarathustra's vision.
- Learn compassionate action.

NEW MATERIALS TOWARDS THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET ZARATHUSHTRA

By
James R. Russell

The religion founded by the great Iranian prophet Zarathushtra revolutionized man's view of himself and his universe. It shaped not only the nascent civilization of Ancient Iran; but exerted an indelible and fundamental influence on Biblical religion and Greco-Roman philosophical thought. Even so, it is not altogether surprising that the accounts of the Prophet's place and date of birth are vague and contradictory, and that even the exact meaning of his name remains a matter of occasionally embittered dispute, unlike the names, for instance, of Abraham, Akhnaton, Jesus, or Mohammed.

For unlike kings, most religious thinkers do not come in their own lifetimes to the notice of those who chronicle enduringly the major events of the world, which are mostly political: no wholly credible reference to Jesus of Nazareth fixing his historicity exists in any of the chronicles -- which were very numerous -- of his contemporaries. Zarathushtra lived, most likely, at least as long before Jesus and as far from his very literate corner of the world as did the mediaeval English poet Chaucer live after, and far away from, the prophet of Nazareth. Given this perspective of the gulfs of time that separate us from Zarathushtra, what is remarkable is not that we know so little, but rather that even this slight knowledge has not passed wholly into the realm of fanciful legend, as is the case for the Naciketases and Yajnavalkyas of Upanisadic (late Vedic) tradition.

There is scant reason here to rehearse the very numerous arguments based upon Avestan evidence and comparative study that have been advanced, notably by T. Burrows and M. Boyce, to demonstrate that Zarathushtra lived in the remote region of Central Asia around 1500 B.C. The so called traditional date of 258 years before Alexander -- in fact it is one of a number of dates in classical writings -- appears to be based on a mistaken identification of Zarathushtra's royal patron Vishtaspa with Cyrus the Great or another Achaemenian, as S. Shahbazi has argued. Another unlikely Greek tradition places Zoroaster 6,000 years before Plato.

One must mention in connection with the latter date, *Plato: Prehistorian*, a new, lavishly-published volume by Ms. Mary Settegast which proposes to rewrite ancient history on a grand scale, by taking some

of Plato's statements about the past, and the theory of the Platonic school about the date of Zoroaster, at face value. The author has an impressive bibliography, and acknowledges conversations with a number of prominent scholars in fields as far apart as palaeontology and Iranian studies. The book is extremely damaging, since its expensive production gives the false impression of reliability, and no single reviewer is likely to be competent to refute Ms. Settegast's assertions in all the disciplines she has misconstrued. I know not how palaeontologists will respond to the volume, but those parts which deal with Iranian matters are unreliable. She postulates confidently a prehistoric Mithraism on the basis of irrelevant data certain to mislead the innocent and offend both her sources and the patient efforts of Mithraic scholars over the decades who have studied those sources.

But most of all, Settegast's crowning thesis that Zarathushtra lived in the seventh millenium B.C. is wildly fantastical, based uncritically on the Greek tradition that Zarathushtra lived 6,000 years -- i.e., one world-age -- before Plato. The best one can make of that tradition is to assume the period of 6,000 years as one world-age, in accordance with the Zoroastrian chronological scheme of a 12,000-year cosmic time-line. But Settegast takes these numbers literally, because she tries to push the date of a number of archaeological finds back to the seventh millennium B.C. Metaphorically, the two men, Zarathushtra and Plato, represent watersheds in human thought. Settegast says that Zoroastrianism was the root religion of Mesopotamia, and receded from there before the Sumerians. It must have receded quite radically, since her assertion is not supported by a shred of evidence from Mesopotamia, or, indeed, anywhere else. But then, she also accepts the historicity of Atlantis as described in the *Timaeus* and proposes a Stone Age invasion of Europe from the West, even though she admits elsewhere that there are no traces in the Atlantic Ocean of the Atlantean civilization that supposed sank there. The evidence for the invasion? Some crude harpoon heads she thinks are technologically advanced super-weapons!

THE LOCATION OF ZARATHUSHTRA'S HOMELAND

The culture from which did Zarathushtra emerge, sometime in the mid-second millennium B.C., is, though not Settegast's stone age perhaps, one of archaic roots nonetheless, and the Younger Avesta gives us a picture of its heroes and their warlike values. Zoroastrian tradition calls the cradle of mankind, and the homeland of the Prophet Airyanam Vaejah, the Expanse of the Aryas. This is both a sober, geographical designation and a fantastic center of the cosmos. According to the Avesta, it was a northerly clime, where the longest night of the winter was equal to the two shortest

days, and the longest day in summer was equal to the two shortest nights. Winter in Aryanam Vaejah, the Vendidad tells us, lasted 10 months; and summer, two. This information, from the Bundahishn, captured the attention of Hippolyto Joseph da Costa in his monograph *The Dionysian Artificers* (London, 1820, pp. 6-7), who determined that the Iranian homeland must have lain at 49 degrees 20 minutes North latitude -- in the ancestral territory of the Scythians, who, according to the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus, considered their traditions as old as those of the Egyptians. The same Bundahishn has a second calculation of the center of Eran Vej (Pahlavi for Aryanam Vaejah) at 36 degrees 7 minutes North Latitude, but this calculation, suitable for the southerly clime of historical Iran rather than for the proto-Iranians, seems to be Greek in origin, describing the places at which the longest day and the longest night of the year are of equal duration: a number of ancient geographers use this latitude for the middle of the world map. The Iranians further used the points at which the Sun rises and sets on the solstices as observed from this latitude to determine the boundaries of the six climes (*keshvars*) surrounding the central region of the earth, Khvaniras (the "Sun Wheel"). (See L-I. Ringborn, *The Seven Keshvars of the Earths, Sir J. J. Zarhoshti Madressa Centenary Volume*, Bombay, 1967, pp. 9-18. It is a pleasure to record here my gratitude to my dearest friend and unflinching host in Bombay, Khojeste Mistree, who located for me a copy of this important book.)

Is it likely the earliest Iranians could have lived so far north? The Vedas, authored by a kindred people, also contain apparently authentic information about the far North, as for example a description of the Northern Lights, and this led B. G. Tilak long ago to postulate an "Arctic Home" for the proto-Indians, at a time when Orion (Skt. *Mrigasara*) was the constellation of the Vernal Equinox. Orion is a significant constellation in Vedic mythology.

ORION IN IRAN

What we know of Orion in Zoroastrianism is suggestive of several religious values of interest here, but it comes most likely from a period long after the age suggested by Tilak, and one need not conclude that the constellation had to have been the vernal one to possess symbolic significance, as it still does, indeed, for so many people today. The two Byzantine Greek chroniclers Cedrenus and Malalas tell us that when Zoroaster was dying, he prayed to Orion to send a fire from heaven to consume him. The Persians were then to guard his bones, which would insure protection against attack by foreign enemies. The belief in the bones finds parallels in Parthia and Armenia, where the bones of dead kings were

believed to possess the divine glory of kings, or *khwarenah*: when the Romans ransacked ossuary-tombs and stole the bones, ransoms were offered. As for Orion, his name is probably the same as that of the Armenian Ara, who is killed in battle and later rises from the dead, in a legend recorded by Moses Khorenats'l. In Greek, Er, son of Armenios the Pamphylian, is described in greater detail by Plato in his *Republic* probably, as we can judge by Er's patronymic, on the basis of a legend from Armenia. Khorenats'l, who lived a thousand years after Plato, was a Christian, and found pagan mythology distasteful. Plato says Er died in battle, travelled through Heaven and Hell, and then returned to tell of what he had seen. As for Orion himself, he is a blinded hunter (Jews and Christians often identified Zoroaster with Nimrod the hunter) who has his sight restored by the Sun, towards which he walks: a symbol of illumination amongst Zoroastrians, too. He has a dog (Ara is restored to life by spirit-dogs who lick his wounds), and he walks along the stream of Eridanus -- a constellation named after a river in Eastern Europe which has a Scythian, i e., North Iranian name. Eridanus means "River of Er"; Avestan *danu*- "body of water", compare Danube, Don, Dnieper, Dniester, and so on. In Iranian mythology, spirit-travel to the realms of justice in the afterlife are common. Zarathushtra undertakes such a journey; so does the legendary Arda Viraz; so does the Sasanian high priest Katir. The significance of these journeys will be examined below.

When Tilak was writing, India was ruled by the British, who thought themselves Aryans like the Indians (in fact most of them were not, with the possible exception of pure-blooded Celts: speakers of Indo-European languages do not all belong to the same racial groupings, nor are there very many unmixed races around), with this difference: they were also Nordic, and racialist theories of the day held Nordic Aryans to be superior to others (more violent, perhaps?) It was in the interest of Indians seeking to prove they were the equals of the British to show they had not only Aryan, but also Nordic origins, with cultural habits to match. It was therefore assumed the Aryans, like swashbuckling Vikings, had destroyed the Harappan civilization in a storm of fire and blood. But this never happened. The Aryans seem to have migrated gradually, and, on the whole, quietly, into India.

NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN, LAKE BALKHASH, AND THE SEVEN RIVERS

Tilak's theories have been dismissed by most specialists: they contain valuable insights, but his views were marred by the excesses and prejudices of his day. The Aryans were not native to India; but neither were

they from the North Pole. Still, the northern traditions he studied are real, and the embarrassing evidence cannot be wished away; and the Soviet scholar, G. M. Bongard-Levin, proposed that there were Scythian intermediaries from whom the Indians learnt of the fabulous northern climes, just as the pre-Socratic Greek mystics heard tales of the Hyperboreans from northern travellers or even journeyed to the North themselves (Bongard-Levin, *Studies In Ancient India and Central Asia*, Soviet Indology Series 7, Calcutta, 1971, pp. 52-66). These Scythians were an Eastern Iranian people, of course, kindred to the ancient Avestan folk: their royal tribe were called Paralatai, and this is none other than the name Paradhata "Foremost Earlier Created" by which the lineage of the pre-Zoroastrian kings is called. It is now generally assumed that both the early Aryans and the Iranians lived in Central Asia, the latter to the north of the former. Aryans migrated south first, some of them even reaching northern Syria, where the kings of Mitanni invoked Vedic gods. The majority migrated down into the Indian Subcontinent, first to the Punjab, as it seems, through Central Asia and the river valleys of Afghanistan; and traces of very archaic Aryan religion, as will be seen, have subsisted in northern Afghanistan, down to the present day.

The Iranians originally inhabited an area stretching from the Altai to Southeastern Europe, but the ancestors of the Medes, Parthians, and Persians migrated gradually southward onto the Iranian Plateau around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Scythians continued to inhabit this vast region in historical times, as far west as the northern littoral of the Black Sea. In the Avesta, particularly its earlier parts, the few place names that can be recognized with certainty are all from Eastern Iran, so that helps us somewhat to fix boundaries of longitude in approximating the location of Aryanam Vaejah. Along the 49 deg. 20 min. line, therefore, Aryanam Vaejah ought to have been to the northeast of the Aral Sea and to the north of Lake Balkhash, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, and south of the modern cities of Karaganda and Semipalatinsk. The cities and regions known to the Avesta in Bactria, Sogdia, and Khorezmia are all more or less directly south and west of this region. Since the Avesta describes Aryanam Vaejah as a great plain ringed by distant mountains, I should opt for an easterly locale, with the Altai in the East and the vast, tortured knot of Pamir, Hindu Kush, and Himalaya rising south of Jambul.

Through the plain, the Irtysh River flows, perhaps the Vanguhi Daitya of the Avesta. The name of Lake Balkhash/Balqash displays a superficial, and, most likely fortuitous resemblance to the mythical Avestan *Vourukasha* -- Pahlavi *Warkash*. In Kaimyk, a Mongolian dialect, Balqash can mean "long lake"; the Turkic root *bal-* could produce the meaning of

“swampy”; and Balqash resembles other Turco-Mongolian toponyms in the region, e.g., Kara-balgasun. (Kashghari does not mention the lake in his Dictionary; but it is known already in the *Hudud al-'Alam*. For the proposed Mongol derivation see V. A. Nikonov, *Kratkil toponimicheskii slover'*, Moscow, 1966, p. 42. I am indebted to my colleague, Prof. Yevgeny Beshenkovsky, for this latter.) The derivation of the name of Lake Balkhash must remain inconclusive, since the region has both Turco-Mongol and Iranian inhabitants, and other Iranian toponyms of the region have been Turkified historically (e.g., Sogdian Iranian *Chach-kanth* to Turkic *Tash-kent*, with Tk. *tash* “stone”). But the Russian name of the district immediately to the south of the lake, Semirech'ye, “Land of the Seven Rivers”, led N. G. Sardesai long ago to suggest that the seven rivers now called Lepsa, Baskan, Aksu, Sarkau, Biyen, Kartal, and Koku, most of which flow into Lake Balkhash, were the original Sapta Sindhu (Avestan *Hapta Hendava*), or seven rivers of Sind/Hind, a designation later transferred to the Punjab (five rivers, not seven). He points out that Iranian Tajiks called Galchas still live in Semirech'ye (see R. G. Bhandarkar *Commemorate Volume*, Poona, 1917, pp. 93-96).

This is a region of Stone Age human settlement, though the heaviest concentration of inhabited sites from earliest times are in a belt to the south and southeast of the Aral Sea (see S. P. Gupta, *Archaeology of Soviet Central Asia and the Indian Borderlands*, Vol. 1, Delhi, 1979). The so-called Andronovo culture, which has been identified with that of the earliest Iranians, extended far to the north and east of the Irtysh basin, as far as the Yenisei in Siberia. In support of this identification, which has recently been challenged, I. M. Diakonoff has drawn attention to the work of the Soviet archaeologist E. E. Kuz'mina, “who has shown the closeness of the inventory of the Timber-Grave and Andronovo cultures to the description of objects in the Avesta and Rigveda.” (*Annual of Armenian Linguistics*, 9, 1988, p. 86). This, the absence of references to Iranians before the first millennium B.C. in Mesopotamian sources, and the entirely Central Asian cultural milieu of the Avesta, must refute conclusively the theory of C. Renfrew, who suggests the Indo-Iranians were native, not to the steppes, but to the Zagros mountain chain of Western Iran. But the lowlands (Av. *khvairi.zam*, hence Khorezmia) to the south of the Aral Sea were apparently identified with Aryanam Vaejah at an early date by early tradition, and this location, to the south of the one I have proposed, is generally accepted (see Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. 1, 144-5, following Benveniste and Gershevitch). As the faith spread westwards, Aryanam Vaejah was relocated by later sages to Media and even Mesopotamia.

CULTURE AND LIFE IN ARYANAM VAEJAH

Although northern Kazakhstan might seem a remote region to postulate the location of Aryanam Vaejah, the Avestan and Pahlavi texts adhere firmly to the picture of a northern clime with a harsh climate, and the description of the short days and long nights of winter enforce the line of latitude determined so long ago for it. Archaeological discoveries in Kazakhstan and southern Siberia from different periods provide glimpses of a world like that Zarathushtra seems to have lived in. H. S. Nyberg, in his *Religionen des Alten Iran*, convincingly identified Avestan *bangha-* with hemp, whose seeds when burnt emitted a narcotic smoke. Herodotus describes how the Scythians became intoxicated with hemp smoke in special huts. An apparatus for burning hemp seed was found in the Scythian tombs at Pazyryk in the Aitai, from the fifth century B.C.: very likely a relic of the kind of Iranian religious practice Zarathushtra's reformed faith condemned.

The Scythians were a wonderfully equestrian people and one golden brooch of their manufacture depicts two riders resting in the shade of a tree near a tethered horse: a scene of repose I am tempted to connect with Zarathushtra's image of peace at the end of days as *avanghana-*, "unharnessing". The Aryan Mitannians have left us treatises on horse breeding and technical terms for chariot racing on tracks with the turning points marked. We have Scythian wheeled, horse drawn wagons; and the Central Asian steppes they inhabited are still known for their equestrian games. The imagery of ceremonial horse races appears to provide a number of the metaphors the Prophet uses in the Gathas: evidence, again, that these far northern Scythians were preserving archaic Iranian traditions, some of which the Avestan people shared and perpetuated, or, at the behest of the Prophet, came gradually to reject. (See Kuiper, "On Zoroaster's Language," *MKNW* Afd. Let. No. 41.4, 1978, cited by M. Schwartz, *Acta Iranica* 25, 1985, 482-3. For the Scythian remains, see M. Gryaznov, *The Ancient Civilization of Southern Siberia*, New York, 1969, plates 77-9 and 165; and S. I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia*. Berkeley, 1970. On equestrian practices and symbolism, see my article "Some Iranian Images of Kingship In the Armenian Artaxiad Epic," *Revue des Etudes Armeniennes*, N. S. Vol. 20, Paris, 1986-87, pp. 253-70.)

Prof. Schwartz argues that such metaphors, even if they appear, probably did not have much more significance for the Prophet than expressions taken from sports in modern American usage. As Schwartz himself has brilliantly and conclusively demonstrated in the case of Zarathushtra in his ground-breaking article in the Humbach *Festschrift* on

the poetics of the Gathas, poets tend to select their metaphors with care, imbuing them with multiple meanings and subtle, complex relationships to each other and to the entirety of their composition. For Homer, the tree, seasonally denuded of its leaves, cut down for ships (themselves a further, complex symbol still pondered in the fourth Eclogue of Virgil), ruined by forest fire, or quietly growing in Penelope's bedchamber, is the overarching metaphor of human life. Horses were a good deal more important to the Iranians than sports to us, part of their everyday needs as well as their ceremonial life. Racing cannot have been purely an amusement: even the games of the historical Greeks were sacred affairs. For Zarathushtra, one important image, at least, seems to be the great horse race to the turning point of time, when the direction of life turns back, evil diminishes, and the peace and simplicity of the earliest age returns, culminating in victory.

Zarathushtra was born of a pastoral people, and he knew and relied upon animals in a way most of us can scarcely imagine today. For him, the generous cow was the Good Mind, Vohu Manah incarnate -- not a symbol, but the very being. I will not enter into the pointless debate about whether Vohu Manah was meant to be understood as the "spirit of living things" or the animate Universe. It may have been, just as "cow" in the Veda can mean "earth". However, until an authentic text is produced which spells out the exact metaphorical intentions of the Prophet or of the tradition, interpretations are speculative.) Similarly, the prophet asks for ten pregnant mares as a reward for his work. Nyberg correctly translated Avestan *arshnavaitish* as "having had a male", hence, "pregnant". S. Insler ignored Nyberg's work (I will discuss later why Nyberg is passed over so often) and produced the translation "each with her stallion", which is ridiculous. Horses are not monogamous animals, and such a combination would be not only useless (one stallion does for mares aplenty) but a recipe for instant mayhem. On the most obvious level, pregnant animals are more valuable than others, because of the foals to be born and the milk the mares will produce: the Avesta-Pahlavi *Nirangistan* edited many centuries later, preserves from the life of the steppes the memory of koumiss -- fermented mare's milk; and the Avesta prescribes higher prices for pregnant animals than for those that are not. On a metaphorical level, perhaps pregnancy represented to the Prophet the forces of regeneration overcoming death: the serial immortality of a species.

THE TRAVELLERS FROM ZABULISTAN, AND A MANUSCRIPT

The name of the Prophet itself reflects his pastoral background: Zarathushtra contains the element *ushtra*- "camel"; Schwartz has shown that *zarath*- most likely means "old", the other possibilities (golden, driver

of, angry) being philologically unlikely. In two recent articles ("The Name of Zoroaster in Armenian", *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 2, Los Angeles, 1985-6, pp. 3-10; and "A Wandering Herder of Camels," *Annual of Armenian Linguistics*, 8, 1987, pp. 5-15), I have studied two texts which appear to contain heretofore unexamined material on Zarathushtra and Aryanam Vaejah. Manuscripts of the Armenian history of Yeghishe contain marginal explanations of the name of the Prophet, Zradesht in Armenian, as *karevor ukht* "powerful promise", possibly based on a folk-etymology from the two Iranian loan-words *zor* "power" and *dashn* "covenant". This flattering etymology, though, may be a puzzled scribe's rationalization of an earlier explanation of the name with /*ught*/ "camel" instead of *ukht* "promise": that is, the classic mistake of changing the harder, but correct, reading -- the *lectio difficilior* -- into an easier, but incorrect one.

The second article considers a narrative in the tenth century Armenian *History of the Arcrumi House*. The author, T'ovma, met *shakhrick' harnakdens* from Zaplastan -- that is, Zoroastrian priests of noble rank from Zabul who knew the Avesta by heart. These are New Persian and Pahlavi terms: T'ovma probably knew the first from life -- it was sufficiently common to have entered Arabic -- and the second from Yeghishe, who speaks of *hamakdens* in his *History of the War of Vardan*. This was a time when the forefathers of the Parsis, too, had been forced by the combined pressures of Islamic intolerance and civil strife to flee their homes: they took refuge in one mountain fastness, Kuhistan, whilst these priests had evidently reached the mountains of Armenia. In guarded, allusive, yet highly poetic language, the Zoroastrians told T'ovma that their ancestor was not Adam, but the son of a certain herder of camels who lived on an illimitable plain bounded by mountains, where lights glowed by night (the Aurora Borealis, perhaps) and clouds like pounded felt (a nomadic Iranian touch) scudded by day. This camel-herder had somehow offended his people, who drove him away, and he wandered with his wife and son, but later he returned and was received with great honor.

The biography of Zarathushtra, shorn of its miracles, is much the same. The Prophet's message offended the reigning rulers and priests -- the *kavis* and *karapans* -- who drove him away with his wife and young son, Isat.vastra, whose name means "Seeking pasture". This son seems to be the ancestor of the priestly line, and his name has a realistic poignancy, both for the wandering pastoralist and the religious shepherd in search of a flock of believers (the metaphor of pasturage is common in the Gathas). T'ovma did not guess the person the Zabuli mobeds had described to him was Zarathushtra; indeed, he reproduces in another chapter a pseudo-historical

narrative, drawn not from his own experience but from an earlier book, in which the Prophet is mentioned by name as Zradasht. It is not clear why the mobeds were so circumspect as to give the meaning of their prophet's name instead of his name itself -- if I am not wrong in my understanding of the text and that is in fact what they are doing. Probably it was not altogether safe to be a Zoroastrian in Armenia in the tenth century, where the Church was vigilant against what it considered pagan backsliding.

AN ASTRAL NAME FOR ZARATHUSHTRA

These two Armenian sources suggest that the real meaning of Zarathushtra's name was still known amongst Iranians down to the tenth century A.D. We do not find it analyzed in the Avesta, for the obvious reason that speakers of Avestan already knew what the name meant and needed no etymology. In ancient Greece, though, the name of the Prophet had been rendered Zoroastres, hence the English Zoroaster today, and the second element was thought to mean "star", Greek *aster*: a suitably honorific title for the foreign sage who prayed to Orion and who was thought to be the father of astrology, not to mention his stores of other occult and magical knowledge. Tacitus and others believed there to have been several Zoroasters, enforcing the idea of a title conferred on several individuals, rather than a common name given at birth to a man whose extraordinary achievements came later on. One is impressed also by the simple, natural outlines of the Prophet's life as told by the mobeds, unadorned with the signs and wonders of the accounts in the Pahlavi books.

PRE- AND POST-ZOROASTRIAN DUALISM IN SIBERIA

Aryanam Vaejah is a harsh land, and even today some of the religions of Siberia are dualistic in character, their attitudes reinforced, one would think, by the struggle for survival, light against darkness, warmth against cold. Zoroastrian religious terms are, probably for the reason, still common in Turkic and Mongol Siberian religions: one of the Kalmyk sky-gods is called Hormuzta; and the Buryat Mongol Arima has been equated with Ahriman. The Khakas Turks call their creator god Kudai, after Pahlavi *Khwaday* (New Persian *Khoda*). The Tofalar Turks attribute to the devil the creation of frogs and serpent, a reflection of the Zoroastrian concept of *khrafstras*, "noxious creatures". (See U. Holmberg, "Finno-Ugric and Siberian Mythology," in J. A. MacCulloch, ed., *The Mythology of All Races*, Vol. 4, New York, 1925, repr. 1964, p. 301; W. Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, Berkeley, 1980, p. 5; and N. A. Alekseyev, *Shamanizm tyurkoyazychnykh narodov Sibiri*, Novosibirsk, 1984, pp. 39, 46.) W. B. Henning once suggested Zarathushtra formulated dualism as a

protest against a pre-existent monotheism the Prophet decided was unjust. But it is as likely that he came from a polytheistic background with an inherent cosmic dualism he proceeded to refine into a doctrine of moral imperatives. The mythological parts of the Avesta, which by virtue of their Vedic cognates are believed to predate the Prophet, consist in the main of contests between men and monsters, heroes and villains, rain and drought. The poems the Prophet's people heard were steeped in a dualistic view of the world, long before his advent. And in the northern lands bordering on Aryanam Vaejah, dualisms have survived the eclipse of the Prophet's own faith in the land of its birth.

WOLF-MEN AND DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS

Zarathushtra's world was grim in other ways also. In proto-Indo-European times there appears to have been established an institution of bands of young male warriors (German *Männerbunde*). In ancient Rome, these were called Luperci, and came from the class of *equites*. They sacrificed dogs and goats, smeared themselves with the fresh blood while laughing, and ran naked through the streets flogging women with strips of fresh goat-hide to make them conceive. Their name contains an element meaning "wolf". G. Dumézil (*Mitra-Varuna*, tr. by D. Coltman, New York, 1988) compared the Luperci to the Greek Kentaurol, which he regarded as etymologically and typologically identical to the Aryan Gandharvas. The Avesta demonizes Gandareva, and the chief of entertainments of the wicked tyrant Zahhak in the *Shah-nameh* is one Kandarov. Iran, therefore, is connected with the chain of Indo-European traditions Dumézil studied. One might note also the use of the wolf as a dynastic totem in Hyrcania, a province of Iran itself named after the animal (cf. Av. *vehrka*- "wolf"). In both the Iranian and Vedic societies, young warriors were called by the common appellation *marya*- "youths"; but in the Avesta *mairya*- takes on the specific meaning of "scoundrel", and is used of armed bands of cattle raiders who despoiled and devastated settled, peaceful communities. The Zoroastrian confession, Yasna 12, contains a verse in which the proselyte specifically undertakes to renounce the life of the rustler.

The *maryas* seem to have been both an accepted part of ancient Iranian society and an intrinsic threat to its stability, sometimes providing social release and embodying the anarchic forces of male fertility, whilst preying dangerously upon the community and provoking confrontation (in a Greek context, note the war of the Kentaurol and Lapithol; the Roman Luperci, for all their wild behavior, were firmly under control). The Avestan people had to oppose the raids of the *maryas*, but Zarathushtra's followers extended their struggle into the religious dimension of the

behavior of the *maryas*, as it seems. For the Avesta execrates the lone and dangerous wolf, and blesses the faithful, domestic dog. Yasna 32 decries orgiastic sacrifice; and it would appear the Prophet had to confront rites and values which at once threatened his people and were deeply entrenched among them. Much as his dualist teaching seems to have focussed on a religious attitude already implicit in his people's way of thinking, his rejection of the social and ritual violence of the young warrior bands appears to have been a refinement of a nascent sentiment. He encountered ferocious opposition at first, but later on met with the approval of society -- except, that is, for the stubborn worshippers of old and feral gods, the *daevas*.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PROPHET

Zarathushtra, tradition has it, was born laughing, and his light shone long before his earthly birth, the latter perhaps a prototype of the star of Bethlehem. From his earliest youth, the *kavis* and *karapans* sought to kill him, sending herds of crazed animals to trample him. But there was always one animal to stand over him and protect him: a metaphor, perhaps, of the virtuous remnant of mankind who rescue hope from the tyranny of the majority. One recalls the words of Holy Scripture, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil!" (Exodus 23.2)

Though a devoted husband and father, the Prophet was able to endure long periods of solitude and contemplation; his childhood training in the rigorously disciplined practices of priesthood perhaps assisted him in this, and, undoubtedly, gave substance to his poetic gifts. His revelation came to him when he was still a young man, yet his religion began to blossom only when he was in middle age, and at first his sole follower was his cousin. He endured for years the ignorant attacks of the very leaders of society, and fell victim at last to the dagger of an assassin, the Turanian Bradres. The dynasty of Vishtaspa seems to have fallen shortly after his death, and the progress of the religion assailed as it was by determined foes, cannot have been easy. It is perhaps evidence of the imprint of the Prophet's own steadfast good cheer that Zoroastrianism seems never to have conceived any ritualized festival of mourning for its martyred founder, nor did it seek to keep alive the embers of old grudges, seeking new revenge against its adversaries in an eternally rekindled anger. The early Zoroastrians had to tread a path as thorny as any that subsequent religious leaders have encountered; yet their religion, like its Prophet, was born smiling, without fanaticism and rancor.

THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET ZARATHUSHTRA

The Prophet's name is down to earth, and he sought to anchor the concepts revealed to him in the creations of this world: the good earth embodies devotion, plants are the substance of immortality, and water is the essence of wholeness, without which there can be no life. Yet if one must seek the single most important organizing principle of the Prophet's vision, and its elaboration in the religion he established, it is wisdom. He perceived God, not as a being of raw power, like the Vedic Indra, nor of mysterious wrath and eerie remoteness, like Varuna, nor even of abundant luxury and supernal joy. Nor was God the Creator merely, for to name Him exclusively thus would be to attribute to Him the inequities, horrors, and mistakes of the world. If evil, or even the idea that such a thing as evil exists, is merely a mental error, then whence cometh error itself? From the will of a God who is perfect? Does wisdom create foolishness?

Ahura Mazda, God, is the Lord Wisdom: from this single, overwhelming realization, preceded perhaps by that contemplation of Mind which has ever been intrinsic to Indo-Iranian religious thought, the Prophet was enabled to behold all life in symmetry, like a great, beautifully patterned wing unfolding from its source. Even as the feathers of the wing radiate from the powerful shoulders of the eagle and with the impulse of a single movement lift the bird into the air, so did the theology of Zoroastrianism emerge, and take flight, from the symmetry of wisdom and the impetus of creative power. Wisdom both creates a harmonious world and enables the creatures therein to discern between native good and alien evil, and to praise God and further His world as rational beings. The chief characteristic of the Creator is also the most important tool placed in the hands of His foremost creature, Man.

The Greeks, centuries later, were to call the cultivation and contemplation of wisdom, philosophy (Gk. *sophia* "wisdom"); and it has become fashionable to regard the Prophet as a philosopher above all, as if nothing but dear thinking, coupled with a poetic gift, could have led him to preach linear time, final messianic redemption, resurrection of the dead, heaven and hell, and free moral choice to mankind (and despite the classbound character of his society, it was all mankind he insisted upon addressing) for the first time we know in history. I think there was something more, something wholly visionary and uncanny in Zarathushtra's experience. To discover it, we must return again to the climes where he lived, to Central Asia and Siberia.

THE CALL OF THE SHAMAN

Many religions are practiced in Siberia and in the adjoining Central Asia Republics of the modern Soviet Union; but they all have in common a form of religious practice called shamanism. There are Buddhist and Muslim shamans, and there are shamans of yet other faiths which have no name. The word shaman itself is Iranian: the Sogdian pronunciation of the Sanskrit word for an itinerant monk, *shramana*-, adopted into Tungusic. It is now a general term for a priest who, following a harrowing dream in which he is summoned, leaves his home. In solitude, he has a vision in which he beholds himself dismembered and re-endowed with a new and marvellous life. After this, he can leave his body at will and travel, usually in the company of one or more helping spirits or animals, through the air or *via* watercourses and subterranean tunnels into the otherworld, to Heaven, Hell, or both. There, he seeks wisdom or assistance from the luminous God of Heaven, or rescues souls imprisoned by the dark and scary, but stupid and easily fooled king of Hell.

Shamans chant their visions in long, rather repetitive songs, and their ecstasies are often induced by inhalation of narcotic smoke: in Mongolia, juniper smoke seems to be most popular for producing the desired effects. Aspects of shamanism abound in Zoroastrian lore: to Zarathushtra himself is attributed a visionary journey and a strange submarine voyage through river-channels to Aryanam Yaejah, and Arda Viraz takes a drug, called in Pahlavi *mang*, that is, the Avestan *bhanga*-, hemp, to enable his soul to leave his body and visit the other world. Kartir, a Sasanian high priest, undertook the same journey to instill faith in his flock.

THE SUPPRESSION OF THE SHAMANIST THEORY

P. Gignoux, H. Corbin, and others, including this writer, have explored the shamanist aspects of Zoroastrianism, but the first important full-length work in this fine of research belongs to the great Danish Iranist Henrik Samuel Nyberg. The Scandinavians were pioneers in the study of North Asian aboriginal religion, and the connections, once perceived, and explored in Nyberg's *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, seem natural, even obvious. But the Germans of the early twentieth century were wedded to the obscene myth of their cultural and religious superiority to other "races", and had invested too heavily in the concept of Zarathushtra as an advanced, Aryan prophet they could call their own, to countenance a revision of that view. Some of them, under the guidance of a bigot and dietary fanatic named Hainisch, founded an organization called the Mazdayasnan

Botschaft, or Mazda-Worshipping Mission. It still thrives in the Federal Republic of Germany, and has no connection to any kind of Zoroastrianism. The Botschaft teaches in its published pamphlets that Abraham and Jesus Christ were Blond Aryans whose teachings were perverted by the “racially-mixed” Jews and the satanic Catholic Church.

German scholarship, however impressive its achievements in the Iranian field, was no less tainted by the insane racism of the Nazis, a sickness that seems to have affected most of the German nation with all too few exceptions: Iranists like Junker and Hinz were loyal to the fascist cause. When Nyberg’s book appeared in a German translation by Schaefer over fifty years ago, just as the machinery of the Holocaust was going into operation, Professor Walther Wust, an important Iranist and notorious Nazi, wrote a review condemning the book. In his view, Nyberg’s view of Zarathushtra as the prophet of a pastoral, shamanizing people like the Primitive Siberians could not be accepted -- not for any sober, scientific reason, but because such a view ran counter to the racial pride and political plans of Hitler’s Third Reich. Subsequent reviewers, often enough unacquainted with the methods of anthropology, had been disposed to dismiss the book, and almost unconsciously followed Wust’s lead. Some, like the late R. C. Zaehner, seem not even to have read Nyberg’s book before condemning it. W. B. Henning, himself a refugee from Nazi Germany, abandoned his usual precision when he attacked Nyberg: to him, shamans were just “witch-doctors”, more a polemical than a scholarly usage; and his refutation of Nyberg is marred by harsh ridicule.

Zarathushtra, if he was a shaman, was a reformer of the practice (as with the other religious rites he remoulded, but did not extirpate). To compare him with other shamans and then adduce the differences to show he was not one is a fruitless enterprise. Jesus came out of a milieu in which self-proclaimed prophets, messiahs, and ascetics of every kind abounded. This cultural background helps us to understand the Lord’s earthly career, but it does not circumscribe His particular spiritual gifts. (Still less does it warrant the reduction of Christ to the lowest common denominator of contemporary religious life, as in the monograph of M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*.) It is certainly true that the Gathas are in every way far superior to other recorded shamanistic songs; but there are many playwrights and only one Shakespeare. Zarathushtra also seems to have condemned some practice connected with *haoma*- probably burning it for smoke. (I. M. Steblin-Kamensky, “Flora Iranskol prarodiny (etimologicheskije zarnetki),” *Etimologiya*, Moscow, 1972, pp. 138-40, finds that in a variety of Eastern Iranian dialects, the word for ephedra goes back to **hauma(na/ka/chi)*-. I do not think ephedra smoke has any important hallucinogenic effect; so the

burning of the sacred plant might have been meant by the pagans as a violent ritual immolation of the substance of sacrifice regarded also as the sacrificer.) The Younger Avesta prohibits the burning of Juniper (*haperesi-*), though, and here there seems little doubt an Iranian shamanistic practice is being curtailed. Biruni tells us that Zoroastrians of the tenth century still burnt the evergreen needles of the Juniper on Fravardigan (Muktad), so old practices died hard.

DAEVA-WORSHIP AND ITS SURVIVAL

The gods of the Veda are called *devas*, "shining ones", and either Zarathushtra or his Iranian ancestors determined them to be demons. Certainly there is an element of simple tribal hostility to their Aryan cousins in this, for the separate, "*daevic*" vocabulary reserved for supernatural fiends and earthly noxious creatures consists mostly of terms which in Indo-Aryan are neutral. But Zarathushtra and his followers charged Indra, the Gandharvas, and the Nasatyas with a warlike amorality that seems less a tribal than the kind of moral characterization a dualist would be inclined to offer. Probably the Iranians propitiated *daevas* and worshipped *ahuras*, just as modern Siberians have both "black" and "white" shamans, and it was this failure to take a convinced moral stance against one and for the other that Zarathushtra the dualist deplored.

The Iranians would certainly have regarded their Aryan cousins as *daeva*-worshippers; but it would seem that this did not exclude the presence of such people within the Iranian world itself. The element *dev-* remained in Sogdian proper names. Xerxes destroyed the "places of the *daivas*" and established the worship of Ahura Mazda in their place. Although he destroyed the temples of rebellious foreign enemies, there is no evidence he created Zoroastrian cult centers on their sites, nor is there evidence of Zoroastrian proselytism: so the *daivadanans* were most likely Iranian. In the Pahlavi *Denkard*, the *devyasnan* ("*dev*-worshippers") profess an amoral, materialistic creed: "Whatever we ask of the *devs*, they give it to us," which seems not so much an alien creed as a pre-Zoroastrian one. It is likely it contained many of those features against which Zarathushtra rebelled.

Although the morally and intellectually sophisticated teachings that go under the collective rubric of Hinduism of India contain elements of the common Indo-Iranian beliefs Zarathushtra himself must have known as a boy, there is a less developed brand of Indian religion, sharing certain features familiar to Central Asian and Siberian faiths, which is practiced on the very northwestern edge of the Indian world. This is the so-called Kafir, or Infidel faith, which was once widespread through what are now northern

Pakistan, Afghanistan, and probably Nepal. After forced conversions to Islam in the nineteenth century, the Kafir religion in Afghanistan disappeared, and the region once called Kafiristan was renamed Nuristan, the Land of (Islamic) Light. Some of the Kafirs fled to Chitral, and the religion now survives in three valleys there (see G. Morgenstierne, "A Kafir on Kafir Laws and Customs," *Irano-Dardica*, Wiesbaden, 1973, p. 299). They call themselves Kalash, probably because of their black vestments.

They worship a number of gods, including Indr (Indra), but their chief divinity is Imra, a contracted form of Yama Raja, King Yama, the Lord of the Dead, whom Zarathushtra condemned in Yasna 32. (Yima is the only mythological hero thus mentioned by name in the *Gathas*, probably because he enjoyed semi-divine status. See the discussion of his cult by this writer in the Government Fellowship Lectures published by the *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 53, 1986.) The Kalash in Chitral call Imra by the title Mahadeo, Skt. *Mahadeva*, the Great Deva. Juniper, *saraz* is the universal incense, and its heady scent is everywhere: in their log cabins, and around the heaps of ashes before their open-air sacrificial altars. Two carven horse-heads of wood project from the extremity of these altars (perhaps a relic of the ancient *ashvamedha* or horse-sacrifice), and when a live goat is sacrificed, the shaman, called a *dehar* goes into trance amidst the clouds of Juniper smoke and the bloodletting. The horns of the sacred markhor goat, a magnificent creature, are at the spring festival bedaubed with the blood of a kid and with milk. Zarathushtra uses milk as an important symbol in the *Gathas*, and in modern ritual it is substituted in the *yasna* ceremony for meat; the sacrifices and open-air places of worship recall the descriptor by Herodotus of Persian customs.

One Kalash custom in particular has long excited students of Zoroastrianism, who have compared it to the Mazdean rites of exposure: the internment of the dead in wooden coffins raised from the ground on stilts. (Sometimes the coffin was simply placed on the ground, its position secured by pegs driven into the earth around it, as I have observed.) In Afghani Kafiristan, wooden effigies of the dead used to be carved and erected, and some will see in this a relative of the Iranian cult of the *fravashis*, and adduce perhaps the life-like sculptures from Parthian Nisa as a parallel. But the primary intention of the Zoroastrian practice is to protect the sacred creations of earth, water, and fire from the pollution that other means of disposal should involve; and even where Iranians in historical times have been interred above ground in raised sarcophagi, as in Lycia in Asia Minor, these receptacles are always of impermeable stone. The Kalash practice is not the same: the corpse disintegrates quickly, the wooden coffin and stilts more slowly, and eventually all collapse in a jumbled, dry heap on the

ground. I saw the results of interments of perhaps a quarter-century ago, when I visited Bumboret, Chitral, in June 1988. Above-ground entombment had been banned for some years, so I could not see very recent graves; but preservation of the earth from pollution seems not to have been a consideration of the custom. (For a full description of Kafir funerary rites and interment, see G. S. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, 1896, reprinted by Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1985, pp. 630-51.)

It seems more likely to me that the Zoroastrian practice is an ennobled form, and the Kalash one a simpler perpetuation, of a custom the ancestors of the present adherents of the two faiths held in common in their northern homeland, millennia ago. In Siberia, when the winter ground is too hard to dig, now as in very ancient times, the dead are interred in tombs built above the ground (see Gryaznov, cited above, p. 99). Although the Kalash language and religion are indisputably Indic, we are in Chitral almost within the Iranian world, also: Dari and Pashto are everywhere spoken, and the local Khovar speech contains a number of Middle Iranian loan-words, notably that for prayer, *namach* from Parthian or early Pahlavi, most likely.

CONCLUSIONS, AND A MEDITATION

Out of a south Siberian society mingling the customs of the Kalash and the rites of the northern shamans, we may imagine Zarathushtra emerging. Out of a violent dualism of natural forces in conflict, of the heroes of oral epic battling monsters, of shamans propitiating gods and demons, he moulded the sublime ethical dualism and cosmic drama of the *Gathas*. Out of a society of superstitious priests and orgiastic *maryas*, he brought forth the elegant symbolism of the *kusti* and the fellowship of the flock of the *drigu* -- the humble men and women standing in need of God. Zarathushtra was a man strong enough to laugh in a dark age, brave enough to persevere in adversary and to subdue rage and the thirst for revenge on determined and murderous enemies. He passed on these luminous qualities to those who are even now Zoroastrians at heart, however far they live from the banks of the Irtysh or Lake Balkhash, from Aryanam Vaejah.

Poetic analysis can show us the shape of genius; it is the divine and the ineffable that are the essence of the mind of great prophet and poet, and these can never be comprehended. Zarathushtra has given us, in perhaps the oldest personal verses in human literature, his vision of wisdom unfolding into the harmony of physical beauty and the symmetry of life. Sometimes, when contemplating the light of fire, that purest Zoroastrian icon, I fancy I can hear the Prophet's voice ripping as a soft wind through the tree of time,

caressing the many birds of that tree that are the souls of all living beings, frail in this Universe of cosmic strife, each striving in its small and poignant way to sing the song of its being. I wonder if in his visions, the Prophet on some vast plain saw the extraordinary future his hymns would bring to fulfilment. The king who proclaimed, in a remote southern land to a strangely-attired people, "A great God is Ahura Mazda, who made this earth and that sky, who made happiness for man!" Or the Parthian priests who visited an infant in a manger at Bethlehem. Or the Sasanian Adurbad-i Amahraspandan, writing precepts in Middle Persian for his son, named Zardusht. Or the eclipse of Iran and the new light in India: a small band of farmers and noblemen rebuilding their community in a warm and tolerant country of brightly attired, dark, smiling people, in mango groves and fishing villages. Perhaps Zarathushtra saw, and knew Dadabhai Naoroji rising to speak in a strange language, in a stranger, stately hall. Or J. R. D. Tata riding a shining bird of metal, with red markings on its sides, that flies faster than eagles. Or the Prophet hears rich, emotional, alien music swelling under the baton of Zubin Mehta, on another continent far from Aryanam Vaejah. The vision fades, but the Prophet knows, and how he knows, it will succeed! And he turns, with a smile, back to his grazing camels, his sleek horses tossing their manes near the riverbank, the felt-covered yurt where his young wife is nursing Isat.vastra. Raising his hands aloft, he sings the Ahuna Vairya prayer of victory and salvation, and begins the *Gathas*.

The Ahunavaiti Gatha **Asho Zartosht's Election Campaign**

by
Mobed Fariborz Sohrab Shahzadi

After 38 centuries from the birth of Asho Zartosht and His Gathas, the sequence in which the Ahunavaiti Gatha is written, could be used by any person today to get elected to any office in today's world.

A short summary of the Ahunavaiti Gatha:

The Ahunavad or Ahunavaiti (first) Gatha and its seven chapters outline a step-by-step guide to the teachings of Asho Zartosht, leading mankind on the path of salvation. The simple yet very precise teachings help man decide between evil and good and gives them a choice to seek communication and redemption from God.

The Gathas have survived the test of time because of the clarity of its message and its single-minded goal of leading mankind to follow that message and thereby get salvation from God.

Every Zartoshti must strive, in spite of handicaps and difficulties, physical and emotional obstacles, to pursue the path of righteousness with a good mind, devotion and faith in Ahura Mazda, the Supreme God.

The Prologue verse of the Ahunavaiti Gatha starts with the following verse in which Asho Zartosht is focussing His entire thoughts, words and deeds, with inspiration from Ahura Mazda (God or the Creator), wanting to lead mankind to 'perfection' and 'bliss'.

yā-nim ma-no, yā-nim va-cho,
yā-nim shyao-thnem,
a-shao-no Za-ra-thush-tra-hé.

fe-rā A-me-shā Spen-tā Gā-thāo
ge-ur-vā-in.
Ne-mo ve Gā-thāo a-shao-nish.

The above verse also lays the background for Him to take up the mission to lead mankind on the path of salvation.

The Message in each chapter of the Ahunavaiti Gatha is listed as follows:

Yasna 29:

The introduction of Asho Zartosht to the world.

Yasna 28:

The commitment by Asho Zartosht to serve mankind.

Yasna 30:

The message of Asho Zartosht to mankind.

Yasna 31:

The ideologies of the Prophet for the world.

Yasna 32:

The opposition to His message.

Yasna 33:

The function of self-sacrifice.

Yasna 34:

The path of salvation for mankind.

To explain the sequence of the chapters:

In Yasna 29: The introduction of Asho Zartosht to the world.

Asho Zartosht is ready to introduce Himself to the world by announcing that He is available to take up the task of leading mankind to

salvation. In the same way a person who wishes to get elected for office would introduce candidacy for the office.

In Yasna 28: The commitment by Asho Zartosht to serve mankind

Any person who wishes to stand for office has to give a commitment to his audience that he/she will fulfill the goal expected of the person.

In Yasna 30: The message of Asho Zartosht to mankind.

The platform on which a person will stand and its message is usually communicated to the audience, just like Asho Zartosht mentions in this Yasna.

In Yasna 31: The ideologies of the Prophet for the world.

Any candidate lays down and outlines the ideologies and goals of the campaign so that people can decide their choice of that candidate.

In Yasna 32: The opposition to His message.

The candidate ready to get elected will be opposed and criticized. There will always be doubt cast on the philosophies of the candidate. There will be challenges thrown in the way of the election campaign.

In Yasna 33: The function of self-sacrifice.

The candidate has to sacrifice his/her time/efforts to achieve the goal laid out and win in the campaign.

In Yasna 34: The path of salvation for mankind.

Just like Asho Zartosht describes the results of the path of immortality for mankind, the candidate up for election would perform the same in the election campaign.

Time passes, but the message of our prophet still stands current.....

Aidun Bād, Aidun Tarāj Bād

THE LITERATURE OF THE MOST ANCIENT IRANIANS

By
Prods O. Skjærvø

Introduction

The theme of our conference here in Houston, under the auspices of the local Zoroastrian Association -- The *Gāthās* in the Next Millennium -- evokes a number of questions, and, although my own main concern is developing methodologies for grappling with the translation and interpretation of the *Gāthās*, there are other important aspects as well.

Looking at how the *Gāthās* have been treated in the 20th-century my principal feeling is one of frustration, not only at the problems facing the *Gāthās* philologist, but at the way scholars of Iranian studies -- languages and religion -- have treated the texts.

The history of Iranian studies in general and Zoroastrian studies in particular did not really begin till toward the end of the last century and did not take flight until around the turn of the century, with the work of Christian Bartholomae. Although Bartholomae's work represented a major step forward compared to that of his predecessors, Iranian studies were still only in their teens, as it were, and had a long way to go to come of age. By now we have a good understanding of both grammar and vocabulary, but numerous problems remain, especially in the case of the Old Avestan texts.

Almost all of Avestan scholarship in the first half of this century and much of it in the second half has fundamentally been based upon Bartholomae's interpretation of the *Gāthās* and his concept of their author, Zarathustra. Bartholomae's assumption that the *Gāthās* were the work of an historical Zarathustra who as a prophet reformed the Iranian religions and taught his new religion through the *Gāthās* has been elevated to an axiom underlying all discussion in this field.

Yet, scholars who accept this premise tend to disagree widely about the details of Zarathustra's life and "teaching." These very discrepancies ought to warn us that the premises may be faulty. Indeed, I would like to quote here Leonard Muellner in his new book about the *Iliad* (p. 3), where he says that "[t]he extent of the disagreement among scholars

points to a crisis in methodology.” Clearly, like Muellner, we need “to make a fresh start.”

The major problem with the way the Old Iranian texts and religion have been studied in this century leaps to the eye. Western scholars, rather than adopting an objective scientific attitude and methodology, have made themselves champions of a religion and its prophet. That is, rather than doing their own job -- their *xwēškārik* -- they have been doing the job of Zoroastrian theologians. And what about the Zoroastrian theologians? Well, they have made themselves pseudo-scholars by invoking Western scholarship to support their theology.

These attitudes and approaches are of course not new. To name just one example, the Catholic church for centuries required natural science to conform to the teachings of the Bible and the Church. Similarly, Christianity, especially groups which take the Bible as their principal or only guide in all worldly matters, will frequently invoke science to prove the reality of Biblical stories. Even more ridiculously, science has been invoked to disprove the Biblical stories.

In the same way, Zoroastrian theology must not be allowed to influence Avestan philology or the study of Iranian religion -- although, of course, Zoroastrian theology may itself be the object of study -- nor should Avestan philology and the study of Iranian history or religion be needed for Zoroastrian theologians to establish the tenets of the faith.

In short, objective science, to which the study of old texts and religions ought to belong, cannot base itself upon a subjective scripture. If it does, it is no longer objective and for the sake of decency should admit as much.

This, then, is what I see as the most important task of our studies in the 20th century: scholars must liberate themselves from the axiomatic, theological approach and develop new, objective, methodologies to deal with Old Iranian languages, texts, and religion. Theologians should stay in their own field, which is theology.

But on the other hand, what about the common Zoroastrian man, woman, and youth, for whom this is their holy language and scriptures? If Iranian scholars experience such enormous difficulties in understanding the literal meaning, of the holy texts, what are they to do? Modern Zoroastrians as I have gotten to know them over the last years in New York and Boston

THE LITERATURE OF THE MOST ANCIENT IRANIANS

have a very real problem. Being a small religion in a country which tends to efface religious differences by submerging old values beneath a flood of modern pseudo-values, they are clearly faced with the very real prospect of extinction. The young, people who are interested in their religion are desperately seeking support in the scriptures, and specifically in the *Gāthās*, the words of their Prophet and the revelation of their God. But what do they find? First they have to choose between half-a-dozen 20th-century translations of the texts, and once they have found one, they cannot understand it.

To mention an example: the last time I spoke about the *Gāthās* at a meeting of Zoroastrians at Harvard I spoke with much enthusiasm about the power of some of the poetic images evoked in the *Gāthās*. Not long after, I attended one of their Sunday school meetings at Harvard. Here they expressed their frustration at not finding the elevated poetic and spiritual substance I had spoken about in the translations they were reading and asked me to show them how to find it!

I do not claim any expertise in saving minority religions, but I do think that part of the problem is the gulf separating the Zoroastrian theologians -- with their knee-fall to Western scholarship -- and the Zoroastrian men and women who desperately try to discover the values of their culture and religion and thus bolster their religious identity in a society which favors homogeneity.

As a matter of fact, I have repeatedly suggested to Zoroastrians that instead of looking to Western scholarship for such support they should look at their own culture -- after all their religion is one of the oldest in the world -- and try to find there what it is that has permitted it to survive a millennium and a half of adversity and intense pressure from surrounding religions and cultures, after having, been a state religion for another millennium and a half.

More specifically, I have tried to emphasize that their religion and culture is not based exclusively upon the *Gāthās*, but contains nearly four millennia of human contributions in the form of religious thought and literary compositions. It is this heritage, embedded in what we refer to as the *Young Avesta*, as well as in the later Pahlavi, Persian, and Parsi literature, that constitute the fundamentals of the Zoroastrian cultural identity. Dismissing, it as not being the word of the Prophet and thus not worth consideration only courts disaster, because it leaves you with nothing but a set of obscure texts, the meaning, of which nobody agrees upon. This

attitude is comparable to that of certain Christian sects, who dismiss everything that is not written in the Bible. It would be like denying that two millennia of European history and cultural achievements are not part of a Western identity.

Modern Western Scholars

Let me return to the history of Western scholarship. As you know, the two most important modern scholars to follow in Bartholomae's footsteps are **Mary Boyce** and **Stanley Insler**.

About Boyce's work -- from my point of view -- let it suffice to quote from a modern survey of Old Iranian religion (Julian Baldick, "Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism)," in S. Sutherland et al., eds., *The World's Religions*, Routledge, 1988, p. 556): "[Mary Boyce] is the first Western specialist to take Mazdean legend as a serious source for Zarathustra's life. Her method has been to project back into the past all later doctrine and practice, and then claim that she has shown the continuity of Mazdaism, which she has taken for granted as her starting point."

That this is not an entirely exaggerated appreciation is seen from statements in her own *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Leiden-Cologne, 1975) such as: "In dealing with this tradition it is necessary to distinguish between facts ... and the embroideries" (vol. I, p. 182); needless to say, it is Boyce herself who decides which is fact and which is embroidery. She characterizes Zarathustra's religion as "the teachings of Zoroaster himself ... enveloped in the *sublime obscurities* (my italics) of his great *zaotar* verses" (p. 20); nevertheless, their "sublime obscurity" does not prevent her from describing their message in great detail.

My friend Stanley **Insler** in his translation of the *Gāthās* (*The Gāthās of Zarathustra*, Acta Iranica 8, Tehran and Liege, 1975) perpetuates basically the same kind of attitude: "Zarathustra is a man haunted by a vision, which has pursued him relentlessly throughout his life, and his poetry is in as many ways the autobiography of an idea as much as it is the self-portrait of the prophet"; he refers to Zarathustra as "Zarathustra, who composed these exalted poems with all the craft of his admirable poetic art" and "Zarathustra, in his higher understanding, is preoccupied with intellectual qualities" (p. 327).

It is ironic that it was an outstanding Vedic, as well as Avestan, scholar who espoused this axiomatic approach to the *Gāthās* and who, while

professing an objective philological approach: “our primary task is to interpret what the text itself says, not to project our interpretations into it” -- is clearly subjective in his practical approach: “I have tried to emphasize in these introductions [to the individual hymns] the moral and ethical character of Zarathustra's teaching, which, to my mind, has been seriously neglected in the recent misplaced fascination with the ritualistic background of these exalted lyrics.”

For his translation of some of the key terms Insler has chosen a very modern-sounding terminology, e.g. *mainiūēuš ... spəntahiia ašā* “the spirit virtuous through truth”; *ahuu ā astuuatascā hiiatcā mananḡhō* “both existences -- yes, of matter as well as of mind”; *ārmaiti* “piety (of the faithful),” *saošiant-* “he who shall save.” We may note that the same kind of reproach was leveled by Kellens even more strongly against the translation by Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin from 1948.

The danger of such “modernizing” terminology is obvious and is expressed very clearly by Leonard Muellner in the book I already cited: “One society may share some of its elaborate metaphors and moral rules with other societies, but there is no reason to assume that the metaphors, the rules, and therefore the emotions that they represent and that we tend to experience as inherent in human nature are actually universal.”

Of course, criticizing the terminology of others does not resolve the problem of deciding what terminology to use when translating the *Gāθās*. Personally, I find that relatively “outlandish” terminology is preferable, because it draws attention to the problems inherent in the translation and forces the reader to think about what the words can possibly mean.

But let us continue:

The first Western scholar to break with the tradition of Bartholomae was, as you know, **Helmut Humbach**, who in his German edition of the *Gāθās* (1959) was the first to emphasize the importance of comparing the *Gāθās* with the Vedic hymns, as well as the fact that the poems were hymns of prayer serving the praise of God and the obtaining of gifts from his hand.

But the only scholar to challenge seriously the historical view of Zarathustra and the *Gāθās* was the French scholar **Marijan Molé**, who in the early 60s maintained that the Zarathustra legend was developed *before*

the composition of the *Gāθās*. As this view went against most of the “common opinion,” Molé’s opinions were mostly smiled at as juvenile whims, and M. Boyce dismissed them as follows: “this belongs to that small part of the great French scholar’s work which has found no general acceptance” (HZ, I, p. 182 n. 4).

Unfortunately Molé died before he could develop his ideas any further, and so the most radical break with the traditional approach to the *Gāθās* came much later. In his contribution to a colloquium on the Achaemenid religion in 1987, Jean Kellens stated his non-traditional position as follows (“Questions préalables,” 1991, p. 85): “The study of the Mazdean religion has everything to gain by ridding, itself of the image of a founder or a prophet ... The fact that the research, by postulating a founder, has not been able to articulate the various manifestations of Mazdeism in a coherent picture that might receive a relative consensus ought to make us extremely skeptical toward the premises.”

This approach was developed in his and Eric Pirart’s new edition of the Old Avestan texts (1988, 1990, 1991), in which they focused on the philological analysis and the ritualistic background of the hymns.

Since this edition, Kellens has developed and elaborated also in several booklets and articles on many points not fully discussed in the edition, while making crucial contributions to our understanding of Old Avestan terminology and ritual along the way. The most recent synthesis of his opinion of the relationship between the text and the ritual is found in his contribution to an article on the question of the ritual in ancient and Achaemenid Mazdaism (1994).

The Old Avestan poems

Kellens’ research is thus focused on the ritual implications of the texts -- to what extent they reflect ritual actions. -- He may correct me if I am mistaken. -- This is of course a perfectly legitimate approach, since Humbach so clearly showed that they are ritual texts. My own approach, however, is different from this in that it focuses on the poems as literary compositions.

Once our perspective has been cleared of the distortions of a century of subjective and biased speculations about the texts, we are free to

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look at the poems afresh and ask ourselves the fundamental questions: What are they and what do they say?

First of all, the Old Avestan texts are poems belonging to a poetic tradition which reaches through Indo-Iranian times back into Indo-European times. This has been proved conclusively by the work of numerous scholars who have investigated the poetic techniques and formulas employed by the Avestan poets.

Second, they must have been composed orally, a fact that allows us to apply, at least to a certain extent, modern methodologies developed for analyzing oral poetry. Although this methodology was developed on the basis of epic poetry and so cannot be directly transferred to the type of religious poetry seen in the Old Avestan texts and the *Rigveda*, still many of its fundamental assumptions can be so applied. For one thing, I doubt whether these poems were necessarily composed/recomposed "in performance" the way oral epics were and still are, and although the poet performer may have improvised to some extent on the poems transmitted to him from his predecessors or composed by himself, yet I think that especially in the light of Martin Schwartz's work on the poetical techniques employed -- the original composition must have involved a slower and more introspective process -- which still needs to be investigated.

Let me here say something about the Old Avestan texts as a collection. This collection contains six poems or hymns -- in six different meters. The six poems are all addressed to Ahura Mazda, who, together with his creation, is praised in all of them. This is the whole story as far as the *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti* is concerned. The contents of the Gathas, on the other hand, is much more variegated. In particular, in addition to containing praises addressed to Ahura Mazda, they contain violent attacks against his divine and human opponents, the *daēuuas* in heaven and the followers of the Lie on earth.

The *Gāθās* and the *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti* therefore represent two different types of poetry. The Gathic type is well described in the phrase of a Young Avestan poet, who characterizes Zarathustra as the first to praise Order (*aša*) and to blame the *daēuuas*. The *Gāθās* may accordingly be classified as combined praise and blame poetry. The *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti* on the other hand may be classified as pure praise poetry. As a matter of fact, the Haptan̄gathic poet himself states this explicitly when he says: "We are praise singers, not blame singers."

The genres of praise and blame poetry are not an *ad hoc* construct. They are well known also elsewhere in Indo-European literature and have been discussed in detail for Greek by my Harvard colleague Gregory Nagy in one of his book (*The Best of the Achaeans*).

But who could have made such a collection, and for what purpose? Objectively speaking, I think there are two possible answers: either the collection represents a sample of old poetry perhaps selected for teaching purposes, or it represents a collection of hymns used at specific ceremonies, for instance the New Year ritual. We may note that a similar situation obtains in the case of the oldest hymns of the *Rigveda*, which, it has been hypothesized, may have served as “a textbook for the new year ritual” (Kuiper, “The Ancient Aryan Verbal Contest,” *IJ* 4, 1960, p. 222).

The persons

Let me next say something about the people mentioned in the *Gāθās*.

One consequence of the non-historical approach to the *Gāθās* is the reconsideration of the characters mentioned by name in them, such as *Vištāspa*, and the others whom the later Zoroastrian tradition and most Western scholars regard as belonging to the circle of friends of Zarathustra. First of all, we may note that these characters are hardly described in the *Gāθās*, they are just mentioned. There is therefore no indication there of what their secular positions might be, and, especially, there is absolutely no basis for assuming that *Vištāspa* was a local king who was converted by Zarathustra and subsequently supported the propagation of the Zoroastrian religion. This is all part of the much later Zarathustra legend of the Pahlavi books. The whole notion of Zarathustra at the court of his patron and protector, King *Vištāspa*, is a romantic Western idea, as stressed by Kellens in his recent book on the Avestan pantheon.

In general, ancient literature abounds in names of persons, for instance the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. I doubt, however, if any of you would conclude from the fact that these are the oldest Greek poems known that all the characters in them must have been historical persons living at the time of the Trojan war. This is, however, what is done in Old Iranian studies.

If one looks at the problem objectively, one has to take into account that the persons mentioned in the *Gāθās* are actors in the Iranian epic known from the Young Avestan literature onward, and there is no

reason to believe that the first attested mention of the characters in the *Gāthās* does not also refer to them as epic, legendary, or even mythical characters. As a matter of fact, as I came to realize during my work with the texts, the Gathic passages in which they are mentioned all seem to indicate that these characters are not relatives and neighbors of Zarathustra, but in fact belong to Ahura Mazda's entourage. This realization then led me to the conclusion that *Vištāspa* plays the same role in the *Gāthās* as the “*kavis* or *ršis* of old” in the *Rigveda*. The other characters may be the heroes of old, whose deeds are recounted in the epic tradition. Among these *Frašaoštra* and *Djāmāspa* are said to be in communion with *aša* “Order” (Y. 49.9-10), an expression that recalls the use of Av. *ašauuan-* and OPers. *artāvan-* to designate the dead who live with Ahura Mazda, as well as OInd. *rtāvan*, a term used specifically about the “kavi-poets of old.”

The mentioning of *Kauui Vištāspa*, an epic figure, in a religious hymn need not surprise us. Such mythical or epic references are also seen for instance in the *Rigveda*. We may only think of the Vedic Kavi or Kavya Usanas, who is barely mentioned in the *Rigveda* but whose story is elaborated in the Indic epic, the *Mahābhārata*, and whose epic roots reach far back into Indo-Iranian times -- as his Iranian counterpart, *Kauui Usan*, the later *Kay Ka'us*, clearly shows -- and even farther back, into Indo-European times.

The poet-worshiper

But to return to the literary aspect of the hymns: What is the function of these mythic and epic characters in the Gathic poems? To answer this question we must consider the Gathic poet-worshiper himself and his function in the world in general and on earth in particular.

It has long been known that the Gathic poet, who calls himself Zarathustra, is cast in the mold of the Indo-Iranian and even Indo-European poet-worshiper. His ritual functions and the ritual nature of the poems themselves were noticed and elucidated by H. Humbach in the early fifties, and the Indo-Iranian vocabulary of the poet's salary was discussed by H. Lommel. That the poems are full of references to chariot races, winners and losers, and prizes -- as are the Vedic and many Greek poems -- is also well known.

What I think -- currently -- is the “set-up” in the poems is as follows: In the center of the Gathic universe, as it were, stands the poet-worshiper. The object of his praises and worship is Ahura Mazda. These

constitute the two poles of the universe, around whom everything else is arranged.

Ahura Mazda is the god who in the beginning made or separated Order or Cosmos from Chaos, assigning their proper place and time to all objects in the ordered Cosmos. It was he who determined what would be good life and behavior for human beings. Chaos was not, however, removed from the world through Ahura Mazda's Cosmic or Cosmetic activities and periodically takes over. The Cosmos must therefore also be periodically reestablished, mainly every morning¹ and every New Year.² To reestablish Cosmos and Order, Ahura Mazda needs the assistance of his creatures, specifically humans, among whom this function is of course assigned to the poet-worshiper. This is then a principal purpose of the rituals and of the Old Avestan poems.

But Chaos, too, has its own agents. Among the gods these are the *daēuuas*, among humans they are the followers of the Lie. Two additional tasks of the poet-worshiper are therefore to make sure that his praises and worship are addressed to and reach the proper gods and that the followers of the Lie do not usurp his functions. As reward the poet-worshiper obtains boons here and now, as well as promise of future good things. These and other functions of the ritual are very clearly described by Kellens in his 1994 article.

Thematic structure of the *Gāθās*

On this background we may briefly review what I think is the basic thematic structure of the *Gāθās*.

The basic *structures* of all the *Gāθās* (except the fifth and to some degree the first) are the same, although considerable variation is permitted within each *Gāθā*. The principal difference lies in the degree to which specific themes are elaborated. A theme that is spun out through several strophes in one, may be reduced to a mere allusion in another. *The framing structure*, however, is clear:

I. General introduction of praise and promise of mutual benefits: on one hand for the gods and the Cosmos, on the other for the poet-worshiper and his community.

II. Two things are needed for the ritual and the accompanying songs to be effective:

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- 1) the poet-worshiper must prove himself worthy, and
- 2) some basic, correct knowledge is needed about the following:
 - a) the gods and the cosmos,
 - b) the poet-worshiper and the human community.

To fulfill the first requirement a hearing seems to be staged, in part modeled after that of the final judgment; to fulfill the second the poet-worshiper proceeds to interrogate Ahura Mazda.

III. Having obtained the necessary knowledge -- which, as it turns out, he possessed all the time (he must have asked the same questions yesterday, the day before yesterday, etc.) -- the poet-worshiper becomes like a god himself (*nar- spənta-*) and can announce to gods and men the facts of life:

- 1) those concerning the creation of the universe and how man can assist in destroying the Lie, and
- 2) the rituals and social relationships of good and bad men and how good men can get the better of the bad ones.

IV. Having done so -- to the best of his ability -- the poet-worshiper waits for the gods and other denizens of the other world (his critics) to pass judgment on his performance. Mostly, but not always, confident that he will win, having fulfilled his part of the bargain -- namely to provide the gods with what it takes to remake the initial Cosmos and make the new day/New Year reappear -- they must fulfill their part of the bargain, namely see to it that he is paid his fee -- preferably in cows -- which he expects to be commensurate with his own contribution.

Within this basic structure, the action moves on several chronological levels, namely the past, especially the beginning of the universe, the present, and the future, especially the end of the world.

We may therefore draw the following picture of the *action* in the *Gāthās*:

The poetic competition

The poet-worshiper, acting on behalf of the gods and their spiritual sphere as well as his own, material sphere, prepares his sacrifice and invites the gods to partake of it. The invitations are sent up to heaven in his praise songs, which take the shape of chariots with his tongue as charioteer. But the rival poet-worshipers prepare their own sacrifices and send their own praise songs with invitations. The competing praises therefore take the

form of a horse and chariot race, in which the quality of the poems and the poets determine who will win the race.

This is not all, however. Once the poems have reached Ahura Mazda and his retinue, they have to be recited and judged. Judges are Ahura Mazda and the surrounding deities, as well as the poets and heroes of old, whom the poet-worshiper endeavors to emulate and extol, respectively.³

The winner is finally applauded, while the losers are booed and ridiculed.

Once he has won the competition, the poet acquires enough creative power (*spən*) to provide Ahura Mazda with the required assistance in the form of bodily substance and life spirit to enable him to rejuvenate the Cosmos, that is, recreate the First day of Ordered existence.

Winning the race does not only qualify the winners for rewards here and now, however. Being an ally of Ahura Mazda also ensures that at death, represented poetically as the final turn in the final race, he will be allowed into the abode of Ahura Mazda, appropriately called the House of Songs, in which, no doubt, the poet-worshipers will forever be singing the praises of Ahura Mazda and his creatures, in the manner of the *Yasna Haptañhāiti*.

The loser of the race is not only exposed to ridicule but is also deprived of the chance to join Ahura Mazda in the hereafter. Instead he will be consigned to the House of the Lie, to spend the rest of his existence in misery.

Human concerns

The sociological aspect of the *Gāθās* is also very important, however. The constant problem faced by Zarathustra and his people is the maldistribution of the means of production, to put it in Marxist terms. Zarathustra again and again stresses that the followers of Order lack the means of subsistence, while the followers of the Lie have plenty. This aspect of the *Gāθās* was, in fact, pointed out seventy years ago by the French linguist and Iranist Antoine Meillet, who maintained that Zarathustra preached for the poor, the oppressed cattle-tenders. You may want to note that this concern for society seems to be a novel feature in Indo-Iranian poetry.

The philosophical problem inherent in this situation, is that, by everything he has been told, the poet-worshiper knows that in the Order of things the cow and the pastures were made and assigned to the followers of Order. So what went wrong? Zarathustra does not attempt to answer this question, which has plagued religions ever since they were invented, namely the contradiction between God's power and his inability to help his worshipers. If there is an answer, it is to blame bad humans, but certainly not God himself. Zarathustra, like millions of devoted worshipers of all religions before and after him, just keeps worshipping Ahura Mazda, hoping that he will be rewarded with the things he needs.

The poet-worshiper's qualification

So, what were the requirements for the poet-worshiper to win the competition? Obviously, he must be an expert oral poet and know all the rules and regulations of his craft. One requirement of the poetic style seems to be the insertion of mythical and epic references, as I just mentioned. The myths are never told in detail or presented as narratives; it is part of the art of the poet that his allusions should suffice to show his intimate knowledge with the tradition. In the *Gāthās* such allusions are frequently indicated by the verb “has been heard of” or “as you have heard,” as in the case of the references to the myths of the primeval twins or Yima.

But the most important things the poet-worshiper must possess is “good thought, good speech, good action.” Anybody even marginally familiar with Zoroastrianism knows that this triad also constitutes the basis for the faith. My question is: what do these expressions signify in the Old Avestan poems?

We must discard any preconception to see in them any kind of Christian ethical system, or, for that matter, project into them any modern American ideas they might evoke. Above all we must guard against thinking of the opposites, “bad thought, bad speech, bad action,” as morally bad, thinking “dirty” thoughts, saying “bad” words, and doing “bad things,” especially with sexual implications.

Basically, the expressions imply thinking and speaking about the world as the ordered Cosmos created by Ahura Mazda and to perform the acts required to maintain this ordered Cosmos. Sinning basically consists in thinking and saying things that disagree with the cosmic reality. Those who do this are Liars and thereby followers of the Lie.

In the microcosmos of the poet-worshiper, the terms clearly refer to his ritual activities. His “good speech” is that of uttering his poems of praise and blame correctly, and his “good actions” are those of performing the ritual actions correctly -- both crucial for his success.

But what about his “good thought”? This term is one of the most frequent expressions in all the *Gāthās* and is clearly at the center of the poet-worshiper's world. It of course implies thinking about Ahura Mazda and his ordered Cosmos, but could it also have a meaning in relation to his performance, as the terms “good speech” and “good actions”? If we think about what goes on in the thought of the poet-worshiper, we are bound to realize that the mind is clearly where all of the poet's knowledge is stored, about the world, about the ritual, and about his poems, and, perhaps most importantly, the mind is necessarily where the oral poet composes his poems.

The connection between mind or thought and poetry is seen clearly in some Old Indic terms for poetry and poem, such as *mati*, which literally means “thinking,” but is defined as follows by Grassmann: “Most frequently the word designates the production of holy thinking, the religious song, the uttered prayer.” Note too, OInd. *manman*, which also means both “thought” and “poem,” and *mantra*, Av. *mąθra*- “poem, formula” literally “thought organ.”

I think there can be little doubt that to the Avestan poet his thought was his most treasured asset. How appropriate that Ahura Mazda's abode, the House of Song, should also be called the House of Good Thought, that is, the House of those having the talent required to compose the songs that fill it!

Conclusions

Let me sum up:

In the absence of any evidence whatsoever that there was an historical Zarathustra, a prophet and a religious reformer, who at some point in history -- about which scholars differ to the extent of 1000 years -- told his followers that the *daēuuas* were bad, not good as they had thought, told them not to use the *haoma* for their worship, and invented the system of the entities, or Ahura Mazda's emanations, I and others now are of the opinion that one should proceed to analyze and interpret the Avestan literature unhindered by any such preconceptions and axioms.

Once that is done, the poems themselves force upon the attentive reader the central place of the poet-worshiper and his function, which is that of assisting God and his ordered Cosmos in his battle against the forces of Chaos. This action of assistance not only ensures Ahura Mazda's success, but also that of the poet-worshiper himself, who is rewarded for his participation. The poetry has to be composed according to the rules handed down by generations of poets before him, the same poets who will judge his own poetry when it arrives before Ahura Mazda to be auditioned. The rewards consist in material wealth, as well as absence of sickness and untimely death for the poet, as well as eternal bliss after death, but also for his family in the large sense.

Envoi

I think these two aspects of the *Gāθās* are a good starting-point for modern Zoroastrians to meditate upon: the poets concern for order and truth in the world and his -- at least in our eyes -- altruistic concern for fellow human beings. But as I said at the beginning, Zoroastrian culture is much more than the *Gāθās*. The *Gāθās* are just one small part of its legacy, and it is important that the young Zoroastrians should learn that they possess wonderful literary and even philosophical traditions, quite able to compete with those of other Western and Eastern cultures. Only, having grown-up Zoroastrian intellectuals and academicians tell them that these traditions are not genuine because they are not the Words of the Prophet is not going to help the survival of the faith.

My own little hope is that perhaps by exposing the literary merit of their ancient literature, as well as its place within the greater Indo-European tradition, I may contribute in a small way to making them not feel inferior to cultures who boast of Homer or the *Rigveda*, but proud of being Zoroastrians.

The Chariot Race

Ahunauuaiti Gāθās

Y. 30.9

*Atchā toi vaem khyāmā yoi im
ferashem kerenāun ahum
Mazdāoschā Ahurāongho ā moyastrā
baranā ashāchā
Hyat hathrā manāo bavat yathrā
chistish anghat maethā*

And thus may we be those who shall
make precious (this) state,
as well as Mazda (and) the Ahuras,
*offering ... and through Order,
so that (one's) thoughts shall be in one
and the same place where (one's) insight
shall (at first) be one way, then another.

Y. 30.10

*Adā zi avā drujo avo bavaiti skendo
spayathrahyā
At asishtā yaojante ā hushitoish
vangheush manangho
Mazdāo ashakhyāchā yoi zazenti
vanghāu sravahi*

For at that time (there is) shattering of
the *gear(?) of the Lie
But the fleetest (coursers) will be
harnessed from the good dwelling of
(my) good thought,
o Mazda, and of Order, who will
leave (others) behind at the good
renown.

Y. 31.19

*Gushā ye mantā ashem ahumbish
vidvāo Ahurā
Erezukhdhāi vachanghānm
khshayamno hizvo-vaso
Thwā āthrā sukhrā Mazdā vanghāu
vidātā rānnayāo*

He who knows listens (to him), the
healer of (this) state who thought (up)
Order, o Ahura,
he who controls his tongue at will for
the correct uttering of the words
through your glowing fire, o Mazda,
at the spreading of the two legs in (the
race for) the good (renown).

Yasna Haptaŋhāiti

Y. 41.4

*hanaemāchā zaemāchā Mazdā Ahurā
thwami rafenahi daregāyāu
aeshāchā thwa emayantaschā *buyāmā
rapoishchā tu ne daregemchā ushtachā
hātām hudāstemā*

May we gain and win, o Mazda Ahura,
in (the race for) your help, which ensures
long life, and may we through you
become strong and may you support us
long and as much as you want, o you the
most generous of those who are.

Spəntāmaniiu Gāθā

Y. 49.8

*Ferashaoshtrāi urvāzishtānm ashahyā
dāo
Sarem tat thwā Mazdā yāsā Ahurā
Maibyāchā yānm vanghāu thwahmi ā
khshathroi
Yavoi vispai fraeshtāongho āonghāmā*

You gave to Frashaoshtra the most
pleasurable union
of Order. That I ask you, o Mazda
Ahura,
for me too, (the union) that (is) in
your command (to give in the race for) a
good (reward).

Let us for all eternity be your
messengers!

Y. 49.9

*Sraotu sāsnāo fashenghyo suye
tashto
Noit eresh-vachāo sarem didāns
dregvātā
Hyat daenāo vahishte yujen mizde
Ashā yukhtā yāhi de-Jāmāspā*

Let (him) hear the teachings, the ...
(who was) fashioned to *sing
the words not correctly, because of
tying association with the follower of the
Lie,
when (their) daenas harness (their
coursers) in (the race for) the best prize,
o Djamaspā, (yourself) harnessed to
Order in the contest.

Y. 50.7

*At ve yaojā zewishtyeng aurvato
Jayāish pcrethush vahmahyā
yushmākahyā
Mazdā ashā ugreng vohu mananghā
Yāish azāthā mahmāi khyātā avanghc*

Then I shall harness for you the
fleetest (coursers) --
broad(-chested) by the victories -- of
(my) prayer to you (all),
o Mazda, strong through Order (and
my) good thought --
with which you shall take away
(booty). May you (all) be for my
assistance!

Strong Legs!



(Saharan rock painting)

Y. 31.9

19. *Gushtā ye mantā ashem ahumbish
vidvāo Ahurā*

*Erezukhdhāi vachanghānm
kshayamno hizvo-vaso*

*Thwā āthrā sukhrā Mazdā vanghāu
vidātā rānnayāo*

He who knows listens (to him), the
healer of (this) state who thought (up)
Order, o Ahura,

he who controls his tongue at will for
the correct uttering of the words

through your glowing fire, o Mazda,
at the firm stance of the two legs in
(the race for) good (reward/renown).

Y. 43.12

*Hyatchā moi mraosh ashem jaso
frākhshnene
At tu moi noit asrushtā pairyaoghzā
Uzeređyāi parā hyat moi ājimat
Seraoško ashī mānzā-rayā hachimno
Yā vi ashish rānoibyō savoī vidāyāt*

And you come in *foreknowledge of that which you told me (to be the best): Order.

Thus you preached (words to me that were) not unlistened-to (and would not) rise up (and fly away?) before observance would come to me,

accompanied by the reward which bestows wealth

by which he will distribute **the rewards to the two legs** in (the race for) *luxury.

Y. 47.6

*Tā dāo spentā mainyu Mazdā Ahurā
Āthrā vanghāu vidāūtim rānoibyā
Armatoish debānzanghā ashakhyāchā
...*

Through that (your) vitalizing force, o Mazda Ahura, you give

through (your) **fire a firm stance to the two legs** in (the race for) good (renown),

through the firm support of Armaiti and Order, ...

Conclusions -- prayers for reward/fee

Ahunavaiti Gāθās

Y. 34.11

*At toi ube haurvāoschā kharethāi ā
ameretatāoschā
Vangheush kshathrā manangho ashā
mat ārmaitish vakhsht
Utayūiti tevishi tāish ā Mazdā
vidvaeshānm thwoī ahi*

Thus wholesomeness and immortality (are) both for your consumption --

together with Order, through the command of (my) good thought. Armaiti has grown

in youthfulness and strength.

Through those, o Mazda, you (make?) her free from harm (even when) *in fear.

Y. 34.12

*Kat toi rāzare, kat vashi, kat vā stuto
kat vā yasnahyā*

*Sruidyāi Mazdā frāvaochā yā vidāyāt
ashish rāshnānm*

*Sishā nāo ashā patho vangheush
khaeteng manangho*

What is your rule? What do you want (to hear), o Mazda: the (song) of praise or the (song) of the sacrifice? Tell (us) for (that song) to be heard for which he will cause (them) distribute the **rewards** for (songs according to?) the rules.

Teach us the paths of (someone of) good thought through Order, which are easy to walk.

Y. 34.13

*Tem advānem Ahurā yem moi mraosh
vangheush manangho*

*Daenāo saoshyantānm yā hu keretā
ashātchit urvākhshat*

*Hyat chivishtā hudbāyo mizdem
Mazdā yehā tu dathrem*

(Along) that road which you, o Ahura, told me belongs to good thought- (and) which (is) well-made-it is through Order that the daenas of the *vitalizers walk along (it),

when you have assigned to those of good gifts the **award** whose detainer you are, o Mazda

Y. 34.14

*Tat zi Mazdā vairim astvaite ushtānāi
dātā*

*Vangheush shyaothanā manangho yoi
zi geush verezene azyāo*

*Khshmakānm huchistim Ahurā
khrateush ashā frādo verezenā*

For, o Mazda, you (all) give to (my) vital force and bones that preferable (thing)

on account of the action of (my) good thought. For (to those) who (are) in the household of the pregnant cow

(you give) your good opinion of (my) creative genius, o Ahura, through Order, (you) who make the households prosper.

Y. 34.15

*Mazdā at moi vahishtā sravāoschā
shyaothanāchā vaochā*

*Tā tu vohu mananghā ashāchā
ishudem stuto*

*Khshmakā khshathrā Ahurā ferashem
vasnā haithyem dāo ahum*

Thus, o Mazda, say my hymns and acts (are) the best!

(Do) you (say) the invigorant of the praises (is the best) on account of this good thought and Order.

You (now) make by your (own) command, o Ahura, (this) state precious in price (and) true.

Yasna Haptaŋhāiti

Y. 41.4

*hanaemāchâ zaemāchâ Mazdâ Ahurâ
ithwami rafenahi daregâyâu
aeshâchâ thwa emayantaschâ *buyâmâ
rapoishchâ tu ne daregemchâ ushtachâ
hâtam hudâstemâ*

May we gain and win, o Mazda Ahura, in (the race for) your help, which ensures long life, and may we through you become strong and commandful, and may you support us long and as much as you want, o you the most **generous** of those who are.

Ushtavaiti Gāθās

Y. 46.18

*Ye maibyâ yaosh ahmâi aschit
vahishtâ
Makhyâo ishtoish vohu choishem
mananghâ
Ānsteng ahmâi ye nâ ānstâi daiditâ
Mazdâ ashâ khshmäkem vârem
khshnao-shemno
Tat moi khrateush mananghaschâ
vichithem*

To him who (assigns) to me (the best things) of a lifespan I assign even (my) bones
(as) the best (parts) of my worship through (my) good thought
(but) miseries to him who would give us over to misery,
o Mazda, wishing to please through Order the will of you (all).
That is the discrimination of my genius and thought.

Y. 46.19

*Ye moi ashât haithim hachâ vareshaiti
Zarathushtrâi hyat vasnâ frashotemem
Ahmâi mizdem hanente parâhum
Mane vistâish mat vispâish gâvâ azi
Tâchit moi sâns tvem Mazdâ vaedishto*

He who shall produce for me the true (state) according to Order,
(he produces for) Zarathustra that which is the most precious in price,
for this one (= me), who earns (as his) **fee** a *higher state,
two pregnant cows together with all things found in (one's) thought.
And you, o Mazda appear to me (as) the one who finds (for me) just those most often.

Spentamainyu Gāθās

Y. 50.9

*Taish vāo yasnāish paiti-stavas ayeni
Mazdā ashā vangheush shyaothanāish
manangho
Yadā ashoish makhyāo vase khshayā
At hudānāush ishayāns gerezdā khyem*

With those acts of worship I shall
come before (you) praising you
o Mazda, through Order, on account
of the actions of (my) good thought.
If I shall rule over my (own) **reward**
at will,

Thus sending on their way the longed-
for (things) may I belong to the one who
gives good *drippings.

Y. 50.10

*At yā vareshā yācha pairi āish
shyothanā
Yāchā vohu chashmānm arejat
mananghā
Raochāo kheng asnānm ukhshā
aeurush
Khshmākāi ashā vahmāi Mazdā Ahurā*

Then the actions that I shall perform -
- both those that you have wished for
and those that (our) eyes on account
of (our) good thought deserve (to see)-
(are the bringing back of) the lights of
the sun. The bull of days (is) the *seeder
for the prayer to you all through
Order, o Mazda Ahura.

Y. 50.11

*At ve staotā aojāi Mazdā āonghachā
Yavat ashā tavāchā isāichā
Dātā angeush aredat vohu
mananghā
Haithyā vareshtānm hyat vasnā
ferashotemem*

Then I shall declare myself your
praiser, o Mazda, and I shall be --
to the extent I through (with the help
of) Order can and am able --
the maker of the (initial) state
*successfully through good thought!

For (my) true (action/utterance) may
what is most precious in price be
produced (in return).

Vohukshathra Gāθās

Y. 51.21

*Ārmaoitsh nā spento havo chisti
ukhdhāish shyaothanā
Daena ashem spenvat vohu
khshathrem mananghā
Mazdāo dadāt Ahuro tem vanguhim
yāsā ashim*

This one is now a vitalizing man by
(his) insight (and) the utterances and
action of Armaiti,
(and his) daena. Order (is again) full
of vitality. By (my) good thought Mazda
Ahura gives (it) command, (so now) I
ask him for a good **reward**.

Y. 51.22

*Yehyã moi ashãt hachã vahishtem
yesne paiti
Vaedã Mazdão Ahuro yoi
ãongharechã hentichã
Ta yazãi khãish nãmenish pairichã
jasãi vantã*

(He) at whose worship the best
(accrues) to me according to Order --
I know -- (is) Mazda Ahura. Those
who have been and those who are,
those I will worship with their own
names and revere with adoration.

Notes:

- ¹ References to dawn,
 Y. 46.3: When, o Mazda, will (they) who (are) the bulls of the days / of the (initial) state move forth for the upholding of Order / (in the shape of) the geniuses of the *prize singers -- by (their) announcements, (now) grown (still more powerful)?
 Y. 50.10: Men the actions that I shall perform -- both those that you have wished for / and those that (our) eyes on account of (our) good thought deserve (to see) -- / (are the bringing back of) the lights of the sun. The bull of the days (is) the *seeder / for the prayer to you all through Order, o Mazda Ahura. To whose anointing will (Order) come with good thought? / I, o Ahura, prefer you for me, (your agent of) announcement.
- ² Reference to yearly celebrations(?),
 Y. 33.9: Thus let (my ritual) bring you, o Mazda, by (my) best thought / that force of the two *yearly (offerings) / that make Order grow (and) the *changing comforts by (its) creative magic. / The *guide of these two has been set in motion whose souls follow.
 Note that the five epagomena are named after the Gathas, which are recited during five-day celebrations preceding New Year.
- ³ Note similar sentiments in the *Rigveda*:
 1.117.23a: *sadā kavī sumatim ā cake vām* “I have always wished for your good *mati*, o *kavis*”
 3.38.1:
abhi tasteva dīdhayā manīsām atyo na vājī sudhuro jihānah / abhi priyāni marmrsat pdrāni kavimr ichāmi samdrse sumedhāh / 2 inota prcha janimā kavīnām manodhrtah sukrtas taksata dyām / imā u te pranyo va rdhamānā manovātā adha nu dharmani gman

THE LOGIC OF THE HOLY IMMORTALS IN ZOROASTRIANISM

By
Gernot L. Windfuhr

There is wide agreement that the Holy Immortals are at the roots of Zoroaster's teaching, and that they are his most original innovation in religious and philosophical thought. They organize the spiritual component of a new paradigm that is the grid for viewing the world. It encompasses personal and social life, ritual, the organization of the material creations, the cosmos, and time.

These Holy Immortals are multivalent. They are aspects of Mazda Ahura, and like him may be depicted as persons. They may be both abstract and concrete, transcendent and immanent, operating in the spiritual and the material, the divine and human spheres, both principles and forces functioning in the three realms of human activity, the logical thought, the ethical word, and the material deed, and inside humans. In the Younger Avestan texts, their personification is complete.

However, it is the very multivalence and complexity that continues to make the identification of the relationship between these entities difficult. The following suggests a basic pattern, or logic, which may underly, and produce, that complexity. The initial evidence is the so-called canonical lists found in Younger Avestan texts, where the Holy Immortals appear in a fixed order. They are, with their standard epithets:

1. *Wahu Manah* 'Good Mind'; 2. *Arta Wahišta* 'Best Truth, Order'; 3. *Xšaθra Wariya* 'Desirable Power, Rule'; 4. *Spanta Aramati* 'Holy Right-Mindedness'; 5. *Harwatāt* 'Completeness'; 6. *Amṛtāt* 'Immortality'. These are headed by Ahura Mazda.

Traditionally, they are correlated with the seven material creations. A particular point is the relation of Spanta Manyu 'the Prosperous Spirit' to these entities, who is never mentioned in the lists, but as the creative aspect of Mazda Ahura must have been a member. Lommel,¹ in a work which is still the most balanced study of the spiritual and physical cosmos of Zoroastrianism, and on which much of the following is based, summarized the correlations on the side of the good creation as follows:

Ahura Mazdā	
Spanta Manyu	Good Mankind
Arta	Fire
Xšaθra	Metals
Aramati	Earth
Harwatāt	Water
Amṛtāt	Plants

The collective terms for these entities and their head show changes from the Gathas to the Younger Avesta, probably due to doctrinal development. Thus, in the Gathas, the highest being is unnamed, and is called both *Mazdā* ‘Wise’ and *Ahura* ‘Lord’, which later combined into the fixed term and name Ahura Mazdā.

Similarly, in the Gathas, the entities surrounding Mazdā Ahura are referred to by the collective term *hant-* ‘true being’ and are probably implied in the term *mazdās.cā ahurāhah* ‘Mazdā and the Ahuras’ (Y. 30.9; 31.4).² In the post-Gathic Old Avestan Haptaŋhāiti, they are identified by the adjectival sequence *spanta amṛta*, traditionally rendered as ‘holy’ and ‘immortal’, respectively (YH 37.4; 39.3). Finally, in the Younger Avestan texts the two adjectives are inverted and coalesced into the fixed term *Amṛta Spanta* > *Aməsa Spənta* ‘Holy Immortals’. The same process of gradual exegetical systematization and codification underlies the lists of the six Holy Immortals.

In the Gathas, there does not seem to be any clear pattern or ranking that would identify their relationship. Moreover, there is considerable difference in the frequency of occurrence of each of the six, and in their apparent closeness to Mazdā Ahura. By these criteria, for example, the entities *Srauša* ‘Obedience’ and *Arti* ‘Recompense’ outrank the last two canonical ones, Harwatāt and Amṛtāt.³

This discrepancy between the Younger Avesta and the Gathas has remained puzzling. Thus, in the most recent comprehensive study of the Holy Immortals, Narten⁴ found that in the Gathas there is no fixed group of six, but only an open list, to which other terms may be added.⁵ As to the six, the central group consists of the first three of the canonical lists, that is, Arta ‘Truth, Order’, Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’, Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’; but also (“auch”) Spanta Manyu ‘Holy Spirit’ and Xšaθra ‘Rule, Power’; occasionally (“gelegentlich”) Srauša and Arti; and rarely

(“in Ansätzen”) Harwatāt and Amṛtāt; possibly (“vielleicht”) *Dayanā* (*Daēnā*) ‘Vision’.

These observations are supported by Kellens-Pirart,⁶ who also noted the decrease in frequency of mention, personification, and association with Mazdā Ahura. They only recognize Mazdā Ahura and the “grandes entités” Arta ‘Truth, Order’, Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’, Xšaθra ‘Rule, Power’, Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’. The other three are “entités virtuelles ou moins importantes” to various degrees. Specifically, Harwatāt ‘Completeness’ and Amṛtāt ‘Immortality’ are “entités par association” in the sphere of Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’, and on par with Arti, *Utayūti* are “entités métonymiques”, divinized aspects of human piety in the category of the “grandes entités” Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ and Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’.

Such observations are also reflected in the succinct overview by Humbach,⁷ who noted that, compared to the Younger Avesta, “Zaraθuštra’s conception of the Ahuras is not systematic, and their number is unspecified”. He also emphasized that the list of the Gathic Ahuras “nowhere is explicit”.

This throws some light on the notion of “systematic”. It appears, that the Younger Avestan lists are considered to organize the Gathic evidence in that the first four entities, i.e., Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’, Arta ‘Truth, Order’, Xšaθra ‘Rule, Power’, and Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’, by and large reflect their Gathic frequency and closeness to Mazdā Ahura. But the lists are assumed to create their own set by selecting the low frequency entities Harwatāt ‘Completeness’ and Amṛtāt ‘Immortality’ over other less frequent entities.

It is held, then, that the later lists do not truly reflect the Gathic system, and that there was no coherently conceptualized system in the Gathas. This, however, would imply Zaraθuštra, who could systematically describe the physical cosmos in Y. 44, and its relationship to the spiritual cosmos, was not a systematic thinker when it came to the most central aspect of his new vision, the Holy Immortals.

The arguments for such a view would seem to be not sufficient. Frequency as such is a weak argument in the understanding of the composition and structure of sets, for it superimposes external, non-

structural criteria, and disregards the inherent logic of coherence. This point was made long ago by B. Geiger,⁸ who clearly discussed the issue, and recognized the six as a core group, even though he put Spanta Manyu on the same level as Srauša ‘Obedience’ and Arti ‘Recompense’. Similarly, degrees of personification would seem to be a tenuous criterion in view of the ambivalency of the texts. In particular, this criterion does not apply to Xšaθra ‘Rule, Power’, who is ranked among the four by frequency, but is virtually never personified. Finally, closeness to Mazdā Ahura is likewise difficult to rank. It is certain that Spanta Manyu outranks any other entity in terms of closeness to Mazdā Ahura. He is his creative aspect and, in particular, the fashioner of the Cow (Y. 47.3). That fact is clearly stated in Y. 29, where it is Spanta Manyu who asks Arta ‘Truth, Order’ for a protector for *Gāw*, and it is Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ who finds *Zaraθuštra*.

The impression created by such arguments, even if taken cumulatively, is erroneous. It is well known that the Younger Avestan lists are not a creation *ex nihilo*, but closely follow Y. 47.1. That stanza combines Mazdā Ahura with Spanta Manyu and the six other Holy Immortals.⁹

<i>spanta manyū</i>	<i>wahištā.cā manahā</i>
<i>hacā artāt</i>	<i>šyauθnā.cā wacahā.cā</i>
<i>ahmāi daan</i>	<i>harwatā amṛtātā</i>
<i>mazdah xšaθra</i>	<i>aramatī ahurah</i>

With Holy Spirit and Best Mind,
pursuing *Arta* ‘Truth’ in deed and word,
Him they (the faithful) give completeness and immortality.
Mazdā through Rule with Right-Mindedness is the Ahura.¹⁰

1. Rankings

Y. 47.1 is clearly paradigmatic for the canonical lists. It includes Mazdā Ahura as the highest entity. It mentions only the six canonical entities, no more, no less. Their first member is Wahu Manah ‘Right-Mindedness’, not Arta ‘Truth, Order’. The two lists differ in two regards. The pair *Harwatāt* (‘Completeness’)-*Amṛtāt* (‘Immortality’) is central in Y. 47.1, but final in the canonical lists. Finally, Spanta Manyu heads the six in

Y. 47.1, but is not found in the canonical lists. The two lists compare as follows:

YAv (fixed)	Gatha (Y. 47.1)
Ahura Mazdā	Mazdā Ahura
	Spanta Manyu
1. Wahu Manah	Wahu Manah
2. Arta	Arta
3. Xšaθra	Harwatāt
4. Armati	Amṛtāt
5. Harwatāt	Xšaθra
6. Amṛtāt	Armati

la. Wahu Manah

That Y. 47.1 may be the source of the canonical lists was suggested long ago by Tiele,¹¹ and most recently by Humbach.¹² A particular point of debate is the ranking of Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ relative to Arta ‘Truth, Order’. The facts are as follows: Statistically, both entities outnumber the other four entities by far. But they are essentially even in frequency. In the Gathas proper, Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ occurs 148 times and Arta ‘Truth, Order’ 157 times. Therefore, frequency cannot be adduced as argument for their relative ranking.

More important, Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ is first not only in the canonical lists, but also in Y. 47.1. This shows that those lists do **not** reinterpret Y. 47.1 on this point. Therefore, arguments for the primacy of Arta can only be circumstantial, and must disregard these facts, or dismiss the evidential value of the Gathic passage as an accidental collocation by an inspired seer-rhetorician.

A major textual argument for Arta ‘Truth, Order’ was, for example, suggested by Lommel,¹³ who concluded that Arta ‘Truth, Order’ is the first through which the others operate, and that Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ comes through Arta ‘Truth, Order’, not the other way around. More recently, Humbach,¹⁴ who similarly regards Arta ‘Truth, Order’ as primary, suggested an explanation why Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ gained first rank in the canonical lists. According to him, this is due to the legends which the Younger Avestan exegetes sought to glean from the Gathas. Specifically, he suggests the legend of the first vision of Zaraθuštra, according to which

Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ was sent to the prophet to guide him to his conference with Mazdā Ahura. He argues that the exegetes misunderstood a particular phrase which is repeated five times in Y. 43: *spantam āt Ōwā mazdā manhi ahura hyat mā wahu pari jasat manahā* “I realise that Thou (art) prosperous, O Wise Ahura, when one attends me with good thought”. (Y. 43,7.9.11.13.15). In this passage, Humbach explains, Zaraṅuštra describes himself as meditating in front of the fire, but native tradition interpreted the instrumental singular *wahū manahā* to be the subject of the sentence, “when Wahu Manah attends me”. It is possible that the phrase was misunderstood grammatically, but it appears that the crucial question is not why Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ is first in the canonical lists. Rather, it should be why Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ is first in Y. 47.1.

This is certainly not a simple rhetorical issue. The explanation may be found in the different roles of Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ and Arta ‘Truth, Order’ in Zaraṅuštra’s eschatology. While their relative ranking is difficult to determine abstractly, it is clearly and vividly portrayed mythologically in Y. 29, that is, early on in the Gathas. As mentioned there, the divine council is convened to find a protector for the good minded *Gaw* ‘Cow’. It is Arta ‘Truth, Order’ who is asked first, unsuccessfully, by Spanta Manyu. But it is Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ who finds Zaraṅuštra.¹⁵ As argued by Insler,¹⁶ the mythical events in Y. 29 reflect the essential difference between the two Holy Immortals. Arta, ‘Truth, Order’ is uncompromising, and “sought might as the only solution to protect the cow,” whereas Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ “recognized that the eventual overthrow of deceit must depend upon the growth of reason and understanding in mankind”.

That would imply, not that the Gathic texts are ambivalent, but that the ranking of the two Holy Immortals depends on the **viewpoint**. Arta ‘Truth, Order’ existed as the primary principle. But for the **realization** of Arta ‘Truth, Order’, and for the salvation of this time-bound world, Good Mind is the prime mover and realizer. This eschatological outlook is basic to the Gathas. It would seem that this is the outlook reflected in Y. 47.1, which is continued unchanged in the canonical lists.¹⁷ It would seem to be the same eschatological outlook that can explain why Harwatāt ‘Completeness’ and Amṛtāt ‘Immortality’ are integral members of the lists, in spite of their low frequency, lack of personification, and little closeness to Mazdā Ahura.

Ib. Spanta Manyu

The problem of the relationship of Spanta Manyu to the other six is likewise much debated. While he heads the six in Y. 47.1, he is not included in the canonical lists. Humbach¹⁸ noted that the omission “must have required much theological debate”. He thus would appear to acknowledge that Spanta Manyu was an integral member of the Gathic Holy Immortals as a set. So does a good majority of scholars who recognize Spanta Manyu as heading the Holy Immortals, among whom Lommel’s¹⁹ interpretation remains the most carefully argued.

That is not the case with Kellens-Pirart²⁰ for whom, as mentioned, Manyu is only a “metonymical entity” like Srauša, representing divinized aspects of human piety, which is attached to the category of the “great entities” Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ and Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’ as a subordinate entity. In general, *manyu* is “ ‘l’état d’esprit’, la force mentale qui est à la base des trots niveaux de la conduite rituelle (pensée, parole, acte), et il n’est personnifié nulle part”. (p. 26) These observations disregard Spanta Manyu’s role in Y. 29, or Y. 47.3, where he is identified as the son of Mazdā Ahura.

Narten²¹ argues that Spanta Manyu has no close connection with the Holy Immortals. Specifically, she suggests that the scholarly majority, who placed him at the head of the list, was misled by Y. 47.1, and argues that Spanta Manyu’s position there is simply a rhetorical device, “liedspezifische Anfangsstellung,” which does not prove primacy.²² Narten’s position clearly reduces the paradigmatic statement of Y. 47.1 to rhetorical technique and effect. It would seem more likely to conclude that Zaraθuštra, whose extraordinary rhetoric is well recognized,²³ employed exactly that rhetorical device for a purpose, to focus on the creative primacy of Spanta Manyu.²⁴ At the same time, Narten contradicts herself, when she affirms (p. 39) that, as shown by Y. 47.1, Spanta Manyu belongs to the same class of concepts like Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’, and even can occasionally appear as an individualized aspect of Ahura Mazdā, and may be addressed as a person.

The reason why Spanta Manyu does not occur in the canonical lists may indeed reflect the loss of distinction between Spanta Manyu and Ahura Mazdā, as found in the Pahlavi books.²⁵ However, that was not yet the case in much of the Younger Avesta where Spanta Manyu still retains his status

as divine entity, and is recognized as a creator, discussed most detailed by Lommel.²⁶ It must be concluded, therefore, that Y. 47.1 encapsulates what may be called the Gathic logic of the Holy Immortals, and that the canonical lists essentially follow it, with the major exception of Spanta Manyu. The paradigmatic nature of Y. 47, which introduces the third Gatha, was recognized by Molé.²⁷

“C’est sans surprise que nous voyons cette troisième Gāthā débiter par un chapitre que l’on pourrait appeler ‘le résumé de la doctrine. Y 47 énonce en effet des vérités qui ont été l’objet de la ‘quête’ décrite dans les deux Gāthā précédentes. Aussi bien les doctrines métaphysiques que les prescriptions éthiques qui en découlent sont rapportées ici comme allant de soi: les méchants se sont séparés de l’Esprit Saint, mais non les justes (str. 4); ces derniers ont appris les choses qui sont les meilleures (str. 5)”.

Similarly, Insler²⁸ noted that by their “impersonal language”, the first two stanzas of Y. 47.1 are manthras, “containing the fundamental teachings about the virtuous spirit.”

Y. 47.1 must have had a unique distinction among the 17 poems of the Gathas among theologians. That is, the crucial and relevatory role of Y. 47.1 for eschatology was evidently still recognized by the theologians who constructed the 72 chapters of the yasna-liturgy: They copied the **entire** Y. 47, and placed it as Y. 18. Thereby assigned to it the function of introducing the three chapters of the *Bagān Yasht*, Y. 19-21, which constitute the ancient exegesis of the three sacred manthras, the *Yaθā ahu wariyah*, the *Artam Wahu*, and the *Yeṭhē hātām* (Y. 27, 13.14.15). In fact, those theologians copied Y. 47 a second time, and placed it at the high point of the **final** phase of the yasna-ritual during the *āb-zōhr* in Y. 68.²⁹

2. Paradigmatic patterns

The Younger Avestan lists are distinguished from the list in Y. 47.1 by their basic binary order, which is based on gender: Three neuter entities are followed by three feminine entities. This was well recognized by early exegetes. As noted by Narten,³⁰ the earliest indication of their gender distinction is found in the “pseudo-Old Avestan” YH 39.3, which is probably the most direct source for the *Yeṭhē hātām* manthra, Y. 27.15. These two gender sets were already established at the time of the *Bagān Yasht* (Y. 19-21), the ancient exegesis of the *Yaθā ahu wariyah*, the *Artam*

Wahu, and the *Yeṭhē hātəm* manthras. This is indicated by the terms *manas.paoiriia-* (Y. 19.12) and *ārmaiti.paoiriia-* (Y. 21.1), which, as suggested by Lommel,³¹ were probably coined to refer to the first three headed by (Wahu) Manah ‘Good Mind’ and the second three headed by Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’.

This binary division by **gender** was evidently superimposed on the listing in Y. 47. 1, which creates the impression that Y. 47.1 is an *ad hoc* arrangement. That this is not the case is shown by its comparison with the only other two Gathic passages where the six entities also occur together, Y. 34.11 and Y. 45.10. The following table includes all three passages, together with the canonical list, represented here by the passage from the great hymn to Mithra, Yt. 10.92. The table also indicates the relative positions of Mazdā and Ahura (M-A) and Spanta Manyu (SM), omitting epithets except Wahu (W). The mark x highlights the positions of the pair Harwatāt(‘Completeness’)-Amṛtāt(‘Immortality’):

Gatha I Y. 34.11	Gatha II Y. 45.10	Gatha III Y. 47.1	Hymn to Miθra Yt. 10.92
x Harwatāt Amṛtāt	Aramati/M-A Arta	W Manah/SM Arta	1 W Manah/A-M 2 Arta
Xšaθra W Manah	W Manah Xšaθra	x Harwatāt Amṛtāt	3 Xšaθra 4 Aramati
Arta Aramati/M	x Harwatāt Amṛtāt	Xšaθra/M Aramati/A	x 5 Harwatāt 6 Amṛtāt/A-S

The first point to note is that each of the first three Gathas contains one list. Their distribution appears to be symmetric: Y. 34 is the **last** chapter of the first Gatha, and Y. 47 is the **first** chapter of the third Gatha, while Y. 45 is the third chapter of the second Gatha.

Second, the basic organizational pattern of all lists, including the canonical list, is in pairs. Technically this is determined by the pair Harwatāt (‘Completeness’)-Amṛtāt (‘Immortality’) whose position shifts from one list to the other.

Third, the sequence of the first two lists in Y. 34.11 and Y. 45.10 is symmetric: the pairs occur in the exact inverse order of each other, such that they appear to form a closed circle, a-b-c/c-b-a. Thereby, the list in Y. 47.1 is distinguished and highlighted.

Fourth, Y. 47.1 appears to inhere multiple patterns of **symmetry**:

1. The set of six is framed by the creative pair Spanta Manyu at the beginning and by Mazdā Ahura at the end. The center of Y. 47.1 is the eschatological pair Harwatāt ('Completeness')-Amṛtāt ('Immortality').

2. The pair of **Thought**, Wahu Manah ('Good Mind')-Aramati ('Right-Mindedness'), forms an inner frame, within which the pair Arta ('Truth, Order)-Xšaθra ('Rule, Power') forms the innermost frame for the central pair Harwatāt ('Completeness')-Amṛtāt ('Immortality'). This concentric pattern is systemically defined by gender, male-female (grammatically neuter-feminine): Wahu Manah ('Good Mind')-Aramati ('Right-Mindedness') are male-female; Arta ('Truth, Order)-Xšaθra ('Rule, Power') are both male; and Harwatāt ('Completeness')-Amṛtāt ('Immortality') are both female.

3. This **alternating** pattern of gender coincides with **pairing** by gender: The male-female pair: Wahu Manah ('Good Mind')-Aramati ('Right-Mindedness') forms the frame, inside which are the **sequential** pairs Arta('Truth, Order')-Harwatāt ('Completeness'), and Amṛtāt ('Immortality')-Xšaθra ('Rule, Power').

These patterns suggest a clue to the logic of the interrelationship of the Ahuras in Y. 47.1: It is the **complementarity of gender**, as the basic precondition for procreation, life, and its furtherance. It is established by pairing "active" with "passive" principles. The interrelationship among the pairs is determined by the triple aspect of thought, word, and deed, which are the three realms of divine and human activity.

Wahu Manah 'Good Mind' and Aramati 'Right-Mindedness' are the principles of **Thought**. They are complementary, one representing the "active", the other the "passive" aspect, complementing each other in the mental sphere.

Arta 'Truth' and Harwatāt 'Completeness' represent the primal and the final principles of the **Word**, complementing each other in the ethical sphere.

Xšaθra 'Rule' and Amṛtāt 'Immortality' represent the principles of the **Deed**, uniting the principle of active rule and power with the principle

of continued life which is the necessary condition for its eternal endurance. They thus complement each other in the physical sphere.

That the Younger Avestan exegetes still knew about the fundamental logic of gender is shown by the canonical lists. They arrived at the sequence of **their** lists by an ingenious, minimal move: They moved the central pair of Y. 47.1 to the end. In doing so, they established the two sequential gender sets, thereby highlighting what appears to be Zaraϑuštra’s fundamental insight. But they thereby also reduced, and obscured, the intricate mutually embedding logic of relationships in Y. 47.1 to a simple binary one. Moreover, they merged Spanta Manyu with Mazdā Ahura into one Ahura Mazdā at the head of the list, thereby eliminating the most crucial link in Zaraϑuštra’s logic that is expounded in Y. 47, and created a list of seven.³³ This may reflect dogmatic shifts, or just dogmatic simplification. The logic of Y. 47.1 and that of the Younger Avestan texts may be shown as follows:

Y. 47.1		YAv	
m	Spanta Manyu	m	Ahura Mazdā
m	W Manah	m	Wahu Manah
m	Arta	m	Arta
f	Harwatāt	f	Xšaϑra
f	Amṛtāt	f	Aramati
m	Xšaϑra	m	Harwatāt
f	Aramati	f	Amṛtāt
m	Mazdā Ahura		

This intricate pattern of Y. 47.1 can not be accidental. This becomes evident when one considers the many possible options in organizing the members of this set. The pairs of Y. 47.1 thus seem to reflect the three basic commandments of Zoroastrianism, good thoughts, good words, good deeds. In simpler form, the correlations are as follows:

		“active” neuter/male	“passive” feminine/female
Thought	=	Wohu Manah	:: Aramati
Word	=	Arta	:: Harwatāt
Deed	=	Xšaθra	:: Amṛtāt

In fact, the three Zoroastrian commandments would seem to capture these and other more intricate relationships *in nuce*, in more familiar fashion, even though such interpretative correlations are not found in the Zoroastrian books as such:

- | | | |
|----|------------|-------|
| 1. | proper | mind |
| 2. | complete | truth |
| 3. | continuous | deed |

3. The Pairs Outside the Gathas

The pairing by gender implicit in Y. 47.1 provides the paradigm for instruction, and for the physical world as shown in the following.

3a. Seating Order

There is a scene found in the Middle Persian *Bundahišn* 26.8 which describes Ahura Mazda on his throne, with the six Holy Immortals present in front of him. The three male ones are to his right, the three female ones to his left. The arrangement is closed by Srauša ‘Obedience’. This scene therefore reflects the binary division of the Younger Avestan lists,³⁴ but more important, shows the knowledge of male-female complementarity:

	Ahura Mazda		
	Wahu Manah	Aramati	
right	Arta	Harwatāt	left
	Xšaθra	Amṛtāt	
	Srauša		

It should be noted, however, that the ultimate source for this late arrangement is the embedding logic of gender pairs found in Y. 47.1.

3b. *Months of the Calendar*

The Holy Immortals figure prominently in the Zoroastrian calendar. Thus, Ahura Mazdā with the other six function as guardians of the first seven **days** of each month. Their sequence is unproblematic, since it strictly follows the order and hierarchy of the Younger Avestan lists.³⁵

However, the Holy Immortals also function as guardians of specific **months** of the year, but in a sequence and distribution which is puzzling. The sequence does not follow the hierarchical lists, and is interrupted by the four cardinal months which are named after other divine entities. They thus occur in pairs, together with the pair of two more months which are named after the waters and fire, *Ātar* and *Āpah*, the material correlates of Arta 'Truth, Order' and Harwatāt 'Completeness', respectively. No month is named after Mazdā Ahura or Spanta Manyu, although *Dadwah* 'Creator', the name of the month of the winter solstice, could imply either of the two.³⁶

Taqizadeh³⁷ discovered that these pairs follow exactly the seating order of the Holy Immortals mentioned above. Considering that the introduction of the Zoroastrian calendar presupposes considerable astronomical-theological thought, it is more likely that the arrangement in the calendar reflects the knowledge of the Gathas, specifically the logic of Y. 47.1. As shown in the following table, the corresponding sequence of the male-female (neuter-feminine) pairs (m. f.) begins with the winter solstice:³⁸

Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Dadwah	Frawati-	Tištrya	Mithra
m Wohu	m Arta	f Amrtāt	f Āpah
f Manah	f Harwatāt	m Xšaθra	m Ātar
Aramati			
1st Pair	2nd Pair	3rd Pair	(2nd Pair)

The intricate interrelationships implicit in this table become evident when the months are plotted on the **circle** of the year. The 12 months appear to be correlated in multiple patterns. One is triangular: On the basis of the spiritual and material correlates of the guardians of each month, including those of the four cardinal months, one is the **trigonic**

pattern which connects each cardinal month with two non-cardinal months of the Holy Immortals.³⁹

The other is the pattern that constitutes a second layer, so to speak, and is formed by the eight months named after the Holy Immortals. They do not just occur as pairs, but they are also chiasmatically arranged in what may be called protective **cross-ties** reinforcing the circle of the calendar. Most prominently, the pair Arta Wahišta ‘Best Truth, Order’ and Harwatāt ‘Completeness’ is “tied” with the pair Āpah ‘Water’ and Ātar ‘Fire’, their material correlates. There is a corresponding cross-tie which diagonally connects Amrtāt ‘Immortality’, the guardian of plants, with Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’, the guardian of beneficent animals, and Xšaθra ‘Rule, Power’, the guardian of the sky and metals, with Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’, the guardian of the earth. In Figures 1a and b, the arrangement is clockwise, with summer at the top.

The naming of the two months after water and fire is noteworthy. In the Gathas there is presumably no clear evidence for a dogmatic, or even hierarchical, correlation between the Holy Immortals and the material creations as part of systematic cosmology, only the quasi-systematic description of the cosmos permeated by the divine entities as helpers of Mazdā Ahura, and of man, who partakes of these divine forces.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the months named after water and fire imply that the **systemic** correlation was already established when the calendar was introduced.

More important the calendar reflects only what has been well established. It has apparently never been noticed that the material creations in the Old Avestan Haptaŋhāiti 37.1 occur exactly in the order of the Holy Immortals in Y. 47.1. There the list of creation invoked is as follows: ‘We worship Ahura Mazdā who created animals and Arta ‘Truth, Order’; water and plants; luminaries (sky) and earth; and all good things’. This sequence compares with Y. 47.1 as follows (here the terms in Y. 37.1 are listed in their original accusative case):

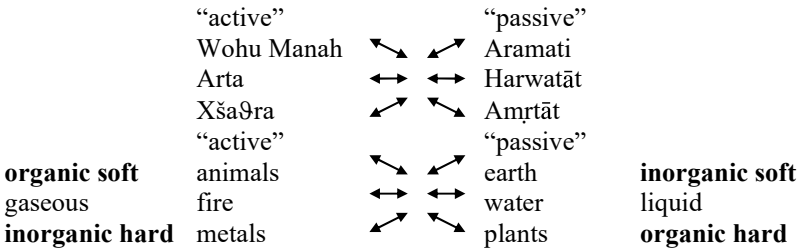
THE LOGIC OF THE HOLY IMMORTALS IN ZOROASTRIANISM

<u>Y. 47.1</u>	<u>Y. 37.1</u>	
Spanta Manyu	Ahuram Mazdām	
Wahu Manah	gām.ca	Cow, Bull
Arta	atram.ca	Truth, Order
Harwatāt	apas.ca	Waters
Amṛtāt	urwarās.ca	Plants
Xšaθra	raucās.ca	Luminaries
Aramati	būmīm.ca	Earth
Mazdā Ahura	wispā.wahū	All Good Things

The sequence of creations is the same in Y. 47.1, except Spanta Manyu is not listed here (but he is mentioned separately from Mazdā Ahura immediately before, in YH. 36.1). Lexically, “sky” is represented by *raucah* ‘light, luminaries’ and the Gathic *zam* ‘earth’ is replaced by *būmī* ‘ground’, which could reflect dialect differences. This coincidence would seem to show that the paradigmatic correlation between the Holy Immortals and their creations, which is already evident in Y. 44 was known to the authors of the Old Avestan Haptaŋhāiti, the liturgical text which is generally assumed to be temporally closest to the Gathas themselves. At the same time, it becomes also apparent that, after all, the Younger Avestan list is not simply binary (3 neuter + 3 feminine), but in fact does codify the logic of the paired patterns of the Zoroastrian calendar. The following table highlights the correlations between Y. 47.1, YH. 37.1, and the Younger Avestan list. This, then may finally put to rest the impression that Zaraθuštra did not fully and clearly fathom his own logic of the Holy Immortals:

<u>YH. 37.1</u>	<u>Y. 47.1</u>	<u>Yav. Lists</u>	
Ahura Mazdā	Spanta Manyu	Ahura Mazdā	Mankind
Animals	Wahu Manah	Wahu Manah	Animals
Arta (Fire)	Arta	Arta	Fire
Waters	Harwatāt	Xšaθra	Sky
Plants	Amṛtāt	Aramati	Earth
Luminaries	Xšaθra	Harwatāt	Waters
Earth	Aramati	Amṛtāt	Plants

The logic of the material creations becomes evident when arranged in accordance with the pairs of the Holy Immortals: They identify the six **states of matter**, which are shown to be intricately interlocked:⁴²



It should be noted that the Zoroastrian calendar is the product of the high point of astronomical science that rapidly evolved in the early Achaemenid Persian period and may be much older.⁴³ The **naming** of the months is critical, and, as the imperial calendar of the new Age of the Persians, it encodes highest levels of the knowledge about the material and the spiritual cosmos, and time. The evidence of Y. 37.1 strongly suggests that that knowledge was already found in the earliest church, represented in the Haptañhāiti.

3c. Ritual Table

It is therefore no coincidence, as I suggested some years ago,⁴⁴ that this calendrical pattern is reflected in the yasna-ritual, such that the 12 ritual instruments systematically correspond to the 12 months of the calendar and that both in turn reflect the 12 functional steps of the ritual. Inversely the Zoroastrian calendar encodes the knowledge of the Zoroastrian yasna-ritual. For easier recognition, Figure 2a reproduces the ritual table from Kotwal-Boyd, while Figure 2b represents the ritual table in circular form and places the 12 ritual instruments outside the circle.

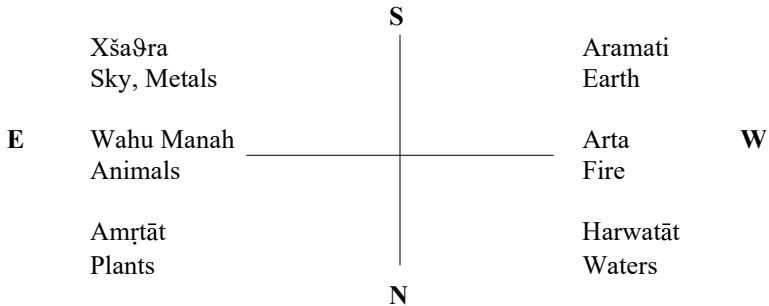
The analogy between calendar and ritual table is evident, particularly with regard to the two diagonal cross-ties in the calendar and the arrangement of the four small cups on the ritual table.

3d. The *hapta karšwar* ‘Seven Continents’

The six Holy Immortals are also guardians of the mythical *hapta karšwar*, or so-called seven continents. In turn, those continents are assigned to 6 assistant priests who formerly accompanied the main priest, the *zautar*, at high yasna-services. There is also the tradition that assigns each continent to one of the helpers of the *Saušyant* ‘Savior’ close to the

end of time.⁴⁵ Both patterns are evidently parallel. They are combined in Figures 3 and 3a.⁴⁶

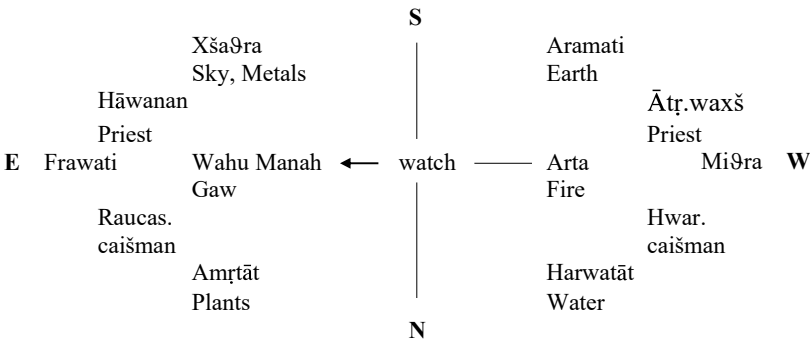
There appear three (horizontal) pairs of Holy Immortals, in a pattern which is not haphazard. It is exactly that of the sequential pairs in Y. 47.1. The first pair of Y. 47.1, Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ - Arta ‘Truth, Order’, appears on the diagram as the guardian of the prominent, i.e., the equinoctial line, E-W, in the center. The second pair, Harwatāt ‘Completeness’ - Amṛtāt ‘Immortality’, guards the two northern continents, and the third pair, Xšaθra ‘Rule, Power’ - Aramati ‘Right-Mindedness’, guards the two southern continents. Accordingly, each pair of Holy Immortals is assigned a fixed position along the south-north axis, such that each Holy Immortal individually is uniquely defined in this hexagon. Accordingly, each material creation is uniquely defined, as follows:



The basic pattern thus created has many ramifications. It may suffice here to point out an unexpected pair of correlations that are shown below. Superimposing the months on the equinoctial axis of this earth, one finds the following: In the west, Miθra, who is of course intimately connected with *hwar* ‘sun’, is correlated with the savior *Hwar.caišman* ‘Sun-eyed’, as well as with Arta ‘Truth, Order’ and its creation Atar ‘Fire’. In the east are the Frawarti, the souls of the departed, but also the myriads of prototypical protective spirits. They are correlated with the savior *Raucas.caišman* ‘Light-eyed’, but significantly also with Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’. The component *raucas* has multiple referents. It may mean both ‘day’ and ‘star’. Also, Miθra, who has the standard epithet *waru.gauyauti* ‘having many cattle-pastures’ is horizontally linked with Wahu Manah, the guardian of *Gaw* ‘Cow’.

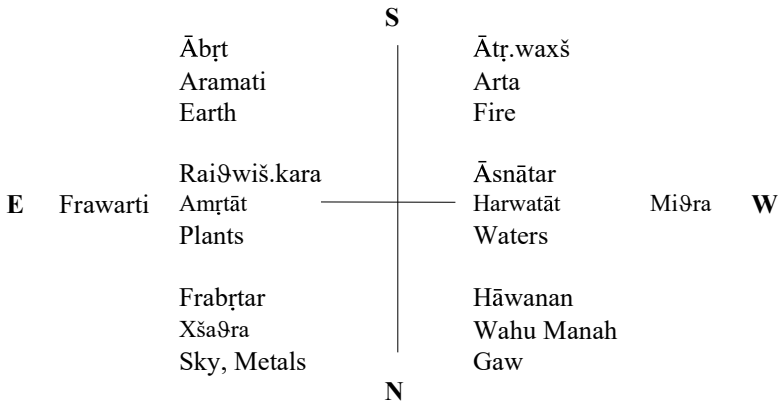
In addition, there is linkage between the two major assistant priests and the east-west equinoctial axis. First, linked to the east is the *Hāwanan* ‘mortar-priest’, whose function is to pound the *hōm*-sticks, and to drink the *hōm*-juice.⁴⁷ He is “watched” from across by *Miθra*, the guardian of the morning hours. Second, linked to the west is the *Ātr.waxš*, literally ‘making the fire wax’, whose function is to *yauš da-* ‘give life to, purify’ the fire. This involves the washing of the stone slab on which the fire vase rests with consecrated water, during the preparatory ritual. The *Hāwanan* is thus linked to the hierarchy: *Wahu Manah*->*Frawarti*->*Raucas.caišman*. Similarly, the *Ātr.waxš* is linked to the hierarchy: *Arta*->*Miθra*->*Hwar.caišman*. Finally, while the link between *Ātr.waxš* and Fire is “natural”, the link of the mortar-priest *Hāwanan* with *Gaw* ‘Cow, Bull’ must have special significance.

Clearly, the linkages discovered here have mythological and cosmological connotations. They may allow insights into the inner workings of the ritual and its correlations with the material and spiritual cosmic matrices. That the *yasna* is a cosmic ritual like all such rituals, and that the ancient name of the ritual table, and the ritual area as a whole, is *wraisa* ‘turning point, pivot’, is well known. It is also well known that the Holy Immortals are represented in the ritual. For example, *Aramati*/Earth is represented by the ground, *Harwatāt*/Waters by the water used, etc. But such observations are rather unspecific, and belie the acknowledged complexity of the ritual. What distinguishes the observations here is that they show how these linkages are precisely defined in the time and space of the Zoroastrian model. This may be shown as follows, with focus on the E-W axis:⁴⁸



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In the diagram above, the priests were positioned according to their linkages with the continents and saviors. As pointed out, the pattern that evolved is that of Y. 47.1. There is another unexpected correspondence, this time with that of the pairs of Holy Immortals found in Y. 34.11/Y. 45.10 discussed above. It is based on prescriptions in ritual guide books on the basic positions of the priest around the ritual area,⁴⁹ and shown below. Evidently, the two different arrangements are related, but it is not clear how. It is possible that they reflect the abstract pattern of the complex clockwise and counter-clockwise moves by the priests, which are now performed by the main priest and his assistant priest during the simple daily Yasna-ritual. The priests with the Holy Immortals and material creations in Figure 3a are:



It should be stressed that these well-defined links and pairings are not artificially forced onto the *hapta karšwar*, but evolve directly from the systematic evaluation of the patterns provided by the Zoroastrian texts.

3e. *The Two Spirits*

The preceding observations strongly suggest that Y. 47.1 is the fundamental matrix of Zoroaster's teachings about the Holy Immortals. The analysis of its dialectic above is not an exercise in outdated New Criticism, but a modest attempt to trace the art of the manthra. Rhetorical arguments are appropriate, but if taken alone they belie or belittle, the tradition of manthric wisdom poetry, and the tradition of the composition, memorization, and oral transmission of huge corpora of texts by means of

immense mental, verbal, and performative architectures, which always reflect cosmic proportions, both cognitively and quantitatively.

The dialectic of the manthra Y. 47.1 states that Spanta Manyu heads the Holy Immortals. This does not imply that he has to appear as a guardian of a month, or of a continent. Arguments which deny that leading role, especially when based on Gathic passages, thereby are forced to deny that most fundamental polarity that defines Zoroastrian's teachings, which is that between Spanta Manyu and Ahra Manyu. The existential logic of these two Spirits presupposes the primacy of Spanta Manyu among the Holy Immortals, which is formulated in Y. 47.1. The confrontation is between these two Spirits, never between Mazda Ahura and Ahra Manyu directly. This is twice formulated to full extent, in Y. 30.3-6 and in Y. 45.2. Therefore, counter-arguments either have to dismiss those two, or, if they do acknowledge those two, have to overlook their own arguments against Y. 47.1. The passage may be rendered as follows:

Y.45.2

*at frawaxšyā ahauš manyū parwiyā
yayā spanyāh uti mrawat yam ahram
nait nā manāh nait sanhā nait xratawah
naidā warnā nait ux 9ā naidā šyau9nā
nait dayanāh nail ruānah hacantai*

Now I shall speak of the two primal Manyu of existence,
the holier of which shall say to the evil one:
Neither our thoughts, nor pronouncements, nor intentions,
nor choices, words, and deeds,
nor Visions/Consciences and souls are in accord.

Y.30.3

*at tā manyū parwiyā yā yamā hwafnā asruwātām
manahi wacahi.ca šyau9nai hīwahyah akam.ca
ayās.ca hudaahah rš višyata nait duždaahah*

Now there are those two primal Manyu, who are told about (in your tales) as the two twins through a dream, or: twins who are the two kinds of dreams.

(They are not the same:) In thought, word, and deed, they are the Better, and the Bad.

And between these two, the beneficent have rightly chosen, not the maleficent.

Y. 30.4

*at.ca yet tā ham manyūjasaitam parwiyam dazdai
gayam.ca ajoyāim.ca yat.ca ahat apamam ahuš
acištah drugwantaam atartaunai wahištam manah*

And when these two Manyu first come together,
each (by and for himself) determines life and non-life, and how
existence shall be.

The worst for the Deceitful, but the Best Mind for the Truthful.

The linkages found in the preceding discussion cannot be accidental. They would seem to imply a reasoned matrix of the spiritual interrelationship between the Holy Immortals and the lesser deities, such as Miθra. In more abstract terms, the linkages exemplify the dynamic logic of unequal pairs. That, however, is the same logic as that in the pairing of the Holy Immortals with the material creations. In fact, the matrix of the six Holy Immortals itself seems to be defined by the same logic, as it links the three “active” Immortals (neuter/male) with the three “passive” ones (feminine/female).

The ultimate logic of the interrelationships of Mazdā Ahura, Spanta Manyu with the Holy Immortals, and the material creations may be visualized in form of the following two diagrams.⁵⁰ They represent the attempt to encapsulate what may be called “the logic of dynamic symmetry”, according to which one term, or concept, functions simultaneously on two levels of an implicational hierarchy, expressing the dynamic logic of the chiasmic dialectic of unequal pairs. The first diagram focuses on the hierarchy of Good, the second on the hierarchy of Good and Evil:

MAZDĀ AHURA

Holy	Mind	Good Mind	:: Proper Mind
Spirit	Truth	Truth	:: Completeness
	Rule	Rule	:: Immortality

a.	Ahura Mazdā		
b.	Holy/Holier Spirit	::	Evil Spirit
a.	Good Mind (neuter)		
b.	Good Mind	::	Aka Manah ‘Evil Mind
a.	Truth (neuter)		
b.	Truth	::	Druj ‘The Lie’
a.	Rule (neuter)		
b.	Rule	::	Duš.Xšaθra ‘Evil Rule’

That is, the direct opposition between good and evil is subordinate to more abstract, or fundamental, aspects of the principles involved; in the Gathas Ahura Mazdā is never opposed directly to the Evil Spirit; opposition occurs only on the next lower level of, and during the limited period of, the time-bound creation by the Holier Spirit and counter-miscreation by the Evil Spirit.

In conclusion, the highly ordered dialectic that is encoded in Y. 47.1 may well be comparable to the “algebra” of symbolic logic in its **complex simplicity**, and shows Zaratustra as a powerful archaic philosopher and meta-physicist, well before Plato and the other Greeks who admired him, for whatever they may had heard of him, as a philosopher for whom Mazdā and the Holy Immortals are very rational, but also very personal divine beings and powers. It is their logic and paradigm which uniquely defines and guards the order of space and time in spirit and matter, and informs the ritual.

FOOTNOTES:

1. See Lommel 1930; his view is well reflected in his translations of the Gathas, 1971.
2. Cf. the early remarks by Geiger, 1916, 99 ff.; also Humbach I, 13; also Gershevitch, I. 1986, “*mazdāšca ahurājho*”, *Studia Grammatica Iranica. Festschrift für Helmut Humbach*, München, 83-101. But see the discussion in the concluding section below.
3. Lommel 1930, 88, who also added *Srauša* and *arti* as an attached pair.
4. Narten 1982, which is the first detailed study since Geiger 1916.
5. Cf. Narten 1982, 1-10, for expanded and reduced lists in the Gathas and the Younger Avesta.
6. *TVA* I, 26 ff.; cf. also Kellens 1991, 27-40.
7. Humbach I, 14.
8. Geiger 1916, 100.
9. Cf. especially Lentz-Seiler-Tavadia 1953, with componential analysis. More recently, Insler 88, 278; *TVA* I, 167/II, 214; Humbach I, 174/II 191.
10. With reference to Y. 34.11 and Y. 45.10 where similar constructions with the pair *Harwatāt* ‘Completeness’ and *Amṛtāt* ‘Immortality’ appear, Insler, Humbach and Kellens-Pirart all agree in relating the dat. sing. masc. *ahmāi* ‘him’ to *Mazdā*. Further, Insler and Humbach agree that the unmentioned subject of the 3rd pl. aor. *da(a)n* ‘they (will) give’ are the faithful, who give *Harwatāt* ‘Completeness’ and *Amṛtāt* ‘Immortality’ to *Mazdā*. This would imply that *Mazdā*, and thus salvation, depends on the faithful’s cooperation in the Spirit. Kellens-Pirart suggest that the plural implies faithful performance of the ritual, and that the two terms stand for the consecrations and praises. The two interpretations do not exclude each other. Alternatively, it appears that what is implied by the dative *ahmāi* is the

perfection of Arta ‘Truth, Order’ of *ahu* ‘Existence’, as suggested by the term *parāhu* found immediately before this stanza in Y. 46.19c.

11. Tiele 1903, 141; cf. Geiger 1916, 87.
12. Humbach II, 191.
13. Lommel 1930, 49.
14. Humbach I, 71-2.
15. Y 29.8, even though the speaker is not mentioned, he appears to be Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’; cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, J. 1973. “On the complaint of the ox-soul”, *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 1, 100-04, who refers to Wahu Manah ‘Good Mind’ in the preceding stanza; Kellens-Pirart in *TVA* I, 109 suggest ‘the fashioner of the cow’ mentioned in stanza 6.
16. Insler, 139.
17. Note also Windfuhr 1976, 277 n. 10.
18. Humbach II, 190.
19. Lommel 1930, 24-88; Narten 1982, includes an extensive list of others who regard Spanta Manyu as primary.
20. *TVA* I, 26-32.
21. Narten 1982, 48.
22. Narten points to the well observed fact that Spanta Manyu is the first term in all six stanzas of Y. 47, and thus thematic for the entire third Gatha, Y. 47-50.
23. E. g., Humbach 1991, 94-112.
24. It could, in fact, be argued that the sequence [*spanta*] [*amṛta*] for the Holy Immortals, used twice in the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, still reflects a list that was headed by [*Spanta (Manyu)*] and ended in [*Amṛtāi*], so

that it functioned as a theological cover term for the list, cf. Windfuhr 1976, 272 n. 5. Note that *amrta* does not occur in the Gathas except in Amr̥tāt ‘Immortality’.

25. The earliest passage which has the appearance of an equation may be found at the very beginning of the exegetical “Bagan Yasht”, Y. 19-21, specifically in the first stanza of Y. 19, which is an exegesis of the *Ya9ā ahū wariyah* mantra: *ahura mazdā mainiiō spāništa/dātarā gaē9anqm astuuaitinqm ašāum* “Weiser Herr, Heilvoller Geist, Schöpfer der stofflichen Welt, wahrhafter”; cf. Narten 1982, 40, n. 94. Cf. also Kreyenbroek 1993.
26. Lommel 1930, 17 ff.; cf. also Narten 1982, 48 n. 94.
27. Cf. Molé 1963, 251, with reference to Lentz-Seiler-Tavadia 1953.
28. Insler, 278.
29. Note the observation on Y. 47, and its triple occurrence in the liturgy, by Kotwal-Boyd 1991, 103: “The placement of the first chapter of the Spēntā Mainyū Gathā (i.e., Y. 47) in Y. 18 and later in Y. 68 is significant. Y. 47 refers to Health or Perfection (Haurvatāt) presiding over waters, and the ritual actions taking place during this recitation include the libation of the date-palm cord with the metal wire (Y. 18) and with the cup of consecrated water (Y. 68). As is the case throughout the Yasna, reasons for the repetition of certain passages are often found in connection with the ritual actions taking place.” Cf. Boyce, M. 1985. “Āb-zōhr”, *Eir.* 1, 48-50.
30. Narten 1982, 98-102.
31. Lommel 1971, 1, 25ff.; cf. Narten 1982, 98-102.
32. It is noteworthy that, in all three Gathic passages, *Mazdā* is associated with *Aramati*, which suggests a special paradigmatic relationship between the two.
33. Number speculation with “7” may have been involved, as Tiele 1903, 140, suggested, because the actual number in Y. 47.1 is 6 plus the 2,

i.e., Spanta Manyu and Ahura Mazdā. -- Tiele, in fact, was convinced that Zaraϑuštra combined all **eight** in Y. 47.1 intentionally.

34. Jackson 1928, 46.
35. The following was first discussed in Windfuhr 1976.
36. Roth 1880.
37. Taqizadeh 1938, 21. -- On a speculative attempt to justify the assignments of the Holy Immortals to the months, see Boyce II, 248-50.
38. Roth 1880, 711, suggested that the calendar may originally have begun at winter solstice; note also Hertel 1934, 13-4; on this issue, see most recently Bielmeier 1992.
39. Windfuhr 1976, 292.
40. The caption is copied from Hunger 1992, fig. 12; the figure itself is found on plate XXVI in F. Thureau-Dagin 1922. *Textes cunéformes (du Louvre) Vol.6. Tablettes d'Uruk à l'usage des prêtres du Temple d'Anu temps des Séleucides.*
41. Narten 1982, 118-9.
42. Windfuhr 1976, 283-9; 1984, 159-62, 169.
43. Hartner 1979, 1985, argued for the early date 503 B.C.; cf. Bickerman 1967, 1983; Bielmeier 1992; Panaino 1990. Most recently Marshak 1992 proposes convincingly the 8th-7th centuries B.C., if not earlier.
44. This is detailed in the study on the yasna-ritual by Windfuhr 1986, whose type-script was distributed to a few colleagues, and whose findings were presented at a number of conferences.
45. Cf. Boyce I, 134, 284.
46. For detailed reference, see Windfuhr 1986.

47. See Modi 1922, 337-40.
48. The implicit position of Miθra facing east, suggested by this collocation of patterns, could well be a trace of an earlier “Miθraic” east-west orientation of the ritual.
49. Cf. Modi 1922, 337.
50. Windfuhr 1984, 160-62.

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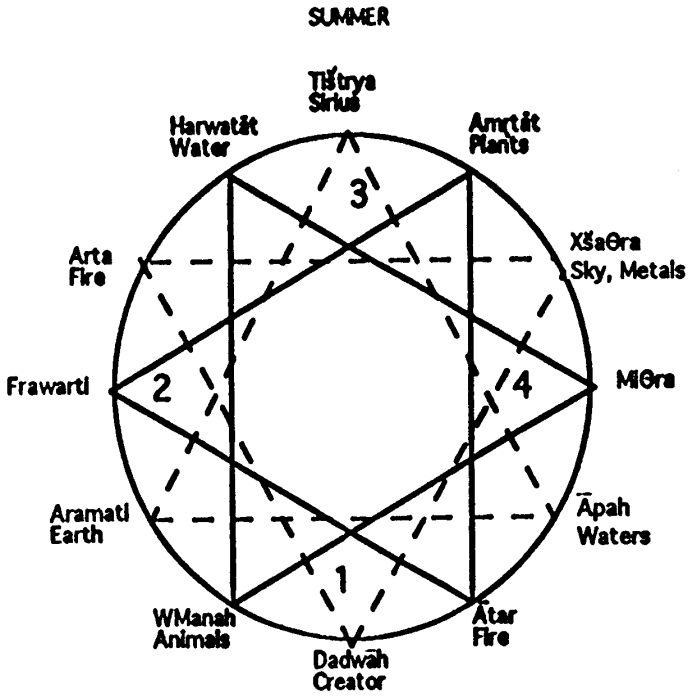
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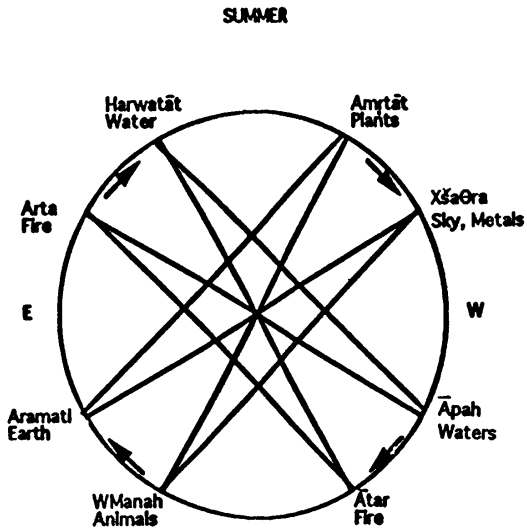
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Cross-Ties in the Calendar
(Windfuhr 1976)

1. Trigon of organizing powers:
Dadwāh, Arta, Xšaθra.
2. Trigon of renewal:
Frawartī, Amṛtāt, Ātar.
3. Trigon of fertilization:
Tištrya, Āp, Aramati.
4. Trigon of fulfillment:
Miθra, Wahu Manah, Harwatāt.

Figure 1



Cross-Ties in the Calendar
Windfuhr 1976

Figure 2

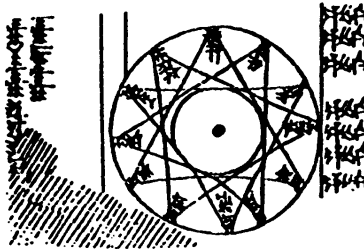
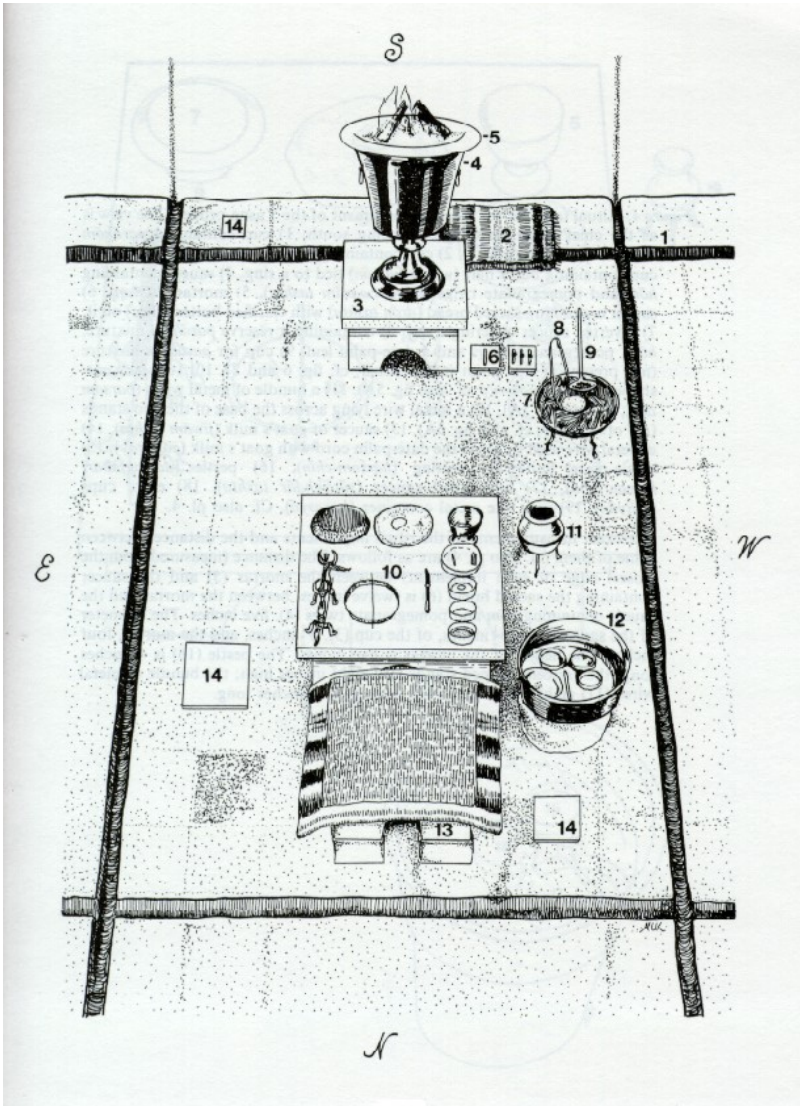


FIG. 12. Diagram on a Seleucid astrological tablet establishing connections between Babylonian months according to the principle of "triplicity."
TCL 6 pl. 26.

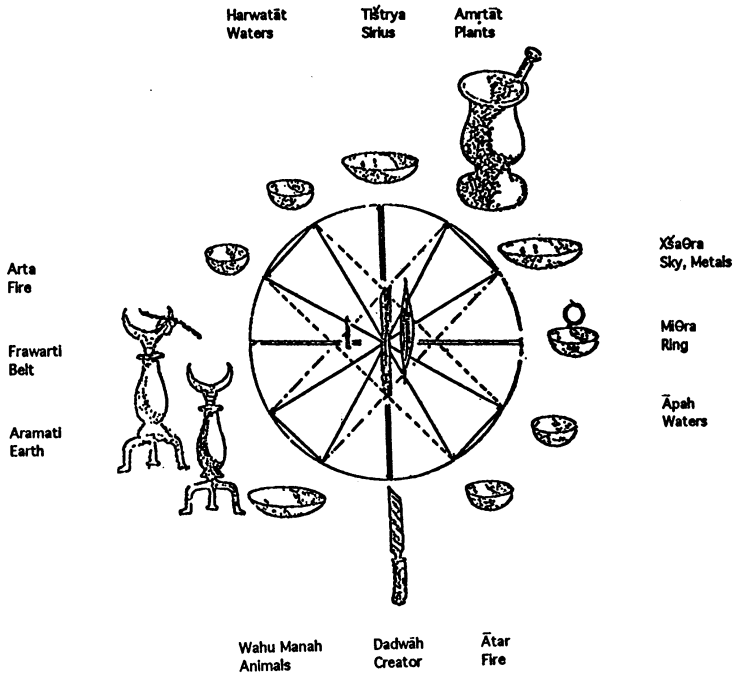
Hunger 1992

Figure 3



Kotwal and Boyd, 1991

Figure 4



Windfuhr 1986

Figure 5

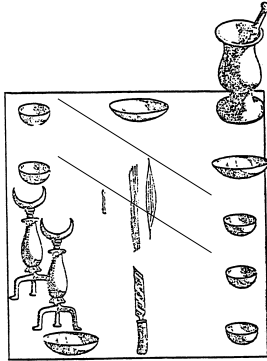
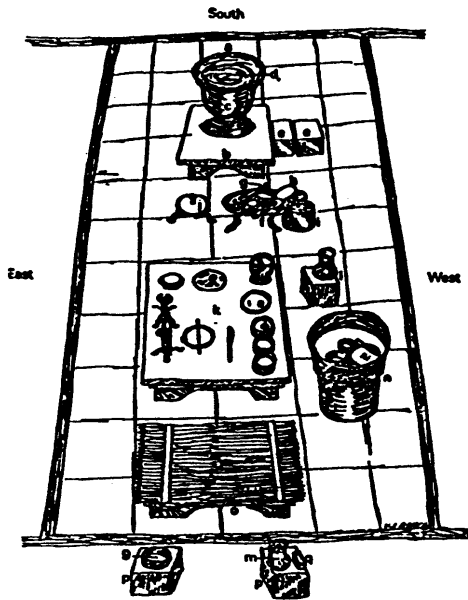


Figure 3: Arrangement of Implements

Figure 8



Kotwal & Boyd 1977

Figure 9

THE LOGIC OF THE HOLY IMMORTALS IN ZOROASTRIANISM

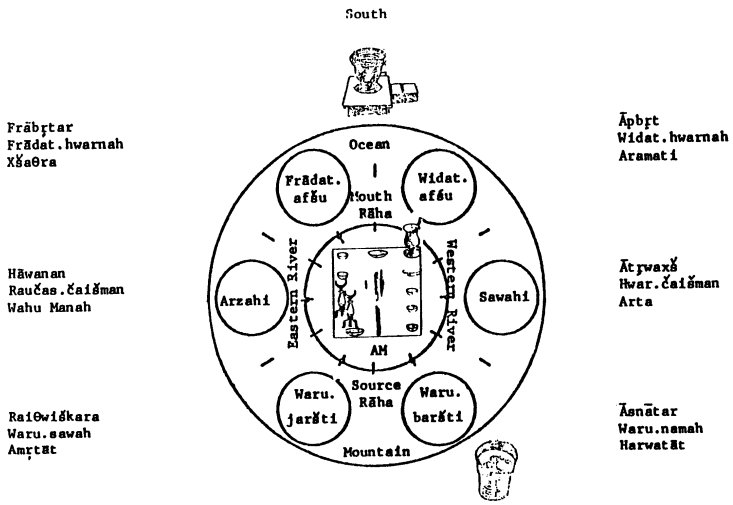
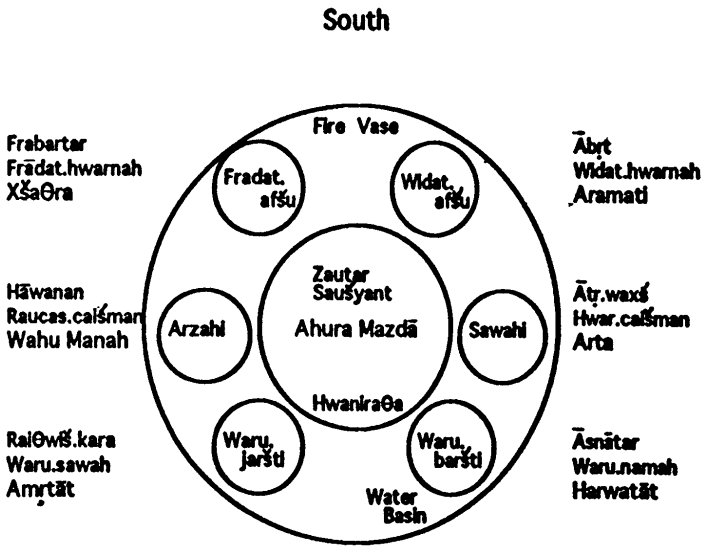


Figure 10



7 Continents, Saviors, and Priests

Figure 11

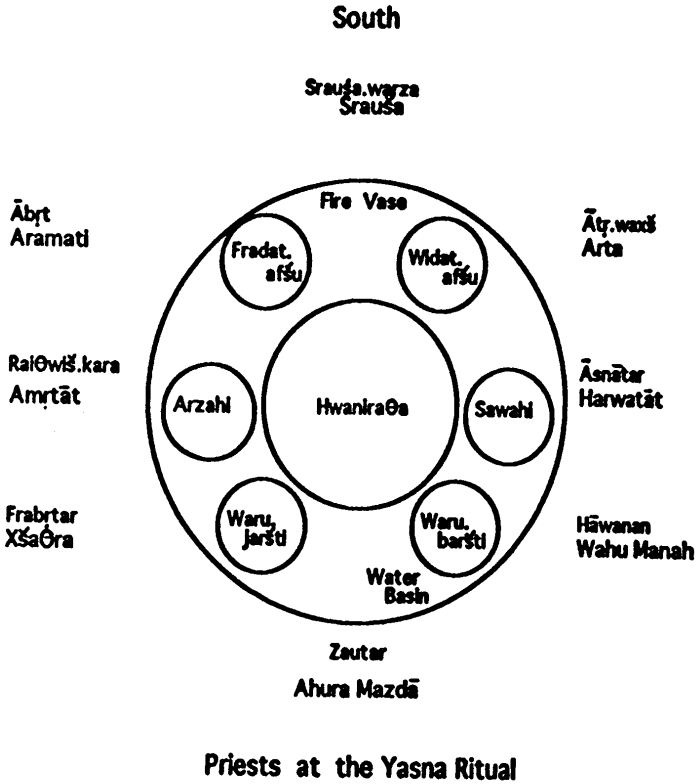


Figure 12

WILL THESE CONFERENCES HELP ZOROASTRIANISM SURVIVE?

*By
Kobad Zarolia*

I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for inviting me to share my ideas with this audience.

When this Conference was first announced, the purpose of the Conference, as printed in the brochure, was:

“This Conference will provide a forum in which recognized academic and religious scholars will exchange their research and reflections on the Gathas, as well as educate, enlighten and extend the current state of Gathic studies in the Avestan and Pahlavi texts.”

This portrays to me that the study of the Gathas are in the realm of the scholars only, and not of the lay Zoroastrians.

Let us examine how this conference could enhance the advantage to lay Zoroastrians.

This is the third such Conference held in the last few years. The first was in London, the second in California, and the third here in Houston. The first two Conferences may have served the scholars in some way, but for the general public these conferences did nothing. I have not seen any papers published, nor was there any information distributed to the public. There was only a small mention of these conferences in the FEZANA Journal and some other publications.

To enhance the advantages of this Gatha Conference, we first have to examine what the Gathas mean to Zoroastrians, and by Zoroastrians I mean not the scholars, but those who follow the religion and faith. Let us, thus, examine what the Gathas mean to the layette.

To try and find this out, I took a survey of numerous Zoroastrians, in Toronto, during the *Muktad* period. Please keep in mind that all were Parsis. If Iranian Zoroastrians were surveyed it is possible that the results could have been different.

A total of 48 people were surveyed. Following are the questions and the responses:

Question 1: *How many times in the year do you pray any of the Gathas?*

- (a) *at non-Muktad times,*
- (b) *at Muktad times.*

Answer 1:

(a) at non-Muktad times	1%
(b) at Muktad times	40%
Never	60%.

Note: Of the 48 participants surveyed at least 9 were Mobeds. The non-Muktad time was qualified as *Ghe-sarna*.

Question 2: *How many times in a year do you read the meanings of the Gathas:*

- (a) *for reference purposes?*
- (b) *for your own pleasure and learning?*

Answer 2:

(a) for reference purposes	12%
(b) for pleasure and learning	20%.

Note: This shows that most Parsis would rather pray the Gathas with devotion and faith, than use it as a philosophy of life.

Question 3: *Do you think the Gathas should be preached regularly at prayer meetings?*

Answer 3:

Yes	82%
No	12%

Note: If this percentage remains the same in a wider survey of the population, then we should, perhaps, give some thought to finding ways to add the recitation of the Gathas to our communal prayers. One of the ways to do this is to use the Gathas for *Hum-bandagi* prayers at the time of all community prayer meetings. We currently only do this in Toronto during the 5 Gatha days.

WILL THESE CONFERENCES HELP ZOROASTRIANISM SURVIVE?

Question 4: *Do you think readings from the Gathas should be substituted for the traditional Jashan?*

Answer 4: Yes 48%
No 52%

Question 5: *Would you be willing to support and to help organize Gatha discussion meetings? If yes, (a) every two weeks, (b) every month, (c) every two months?*

Answer 5: Yes 72%
No 28%

(a) every two weeks 20%
(b) every month 32%
(c) every two months 20%

Note: This gives Mobeds and community organizers in North America a point of reference for organizing religious functions that reflect the wishes of the people.

Question 6: *Could you credit any of the actions or habits in your daily life to lessons learnt from the Gathas?*

Answer 6: Yes 56%
No 44%

This concludes that mini survey that I conducted. I would like to suggest that a broader survey of all the Zoroastrians in North America be conducted, so that we could learn what the majority of Zoroastrians want and expect. This could possibly be organized by either the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) or by the North American Mobed Council (NAMC).

The results of this survey indicate that Zoroastrians definitely wish to learn and understand the Gathas in order to make it a part of their spiritual and philosophical life. This does not mean that the other scriptures are not important to them, as these other scriptures contain many wise teachings and they can also provide spiritual motivation. I also mention this because I do not want to known as a “Gatha only cult” member.

Now, let me inject my own opinion about the Gathas. When I asked my 16-year old daughter what the Gathas meant to her, she replied that they were prayers for remembering the dead. What she meant was that they were prayers recited at the time of the *Muktad*. When I first became a priest, the Gathas were the prayers one recited during the 5 Gatha days.

I was also told that the Gathas were the divine songs written by *Asho Zarathushtra*, our prophet. Or am I wrong, and are the Gathas the revealed words of *Ahura Mazda* through *Asho Zarathushtra*? If it is the later, then let us emphasize and shout out at the top of our voices, for every Zoroastrian to listen to, that they should be proud of this fact. I have never heard anyone calling Zoroastrianism a revealed religion, nor have I seen Zoroastrianism being promoted as the revealed words of *Ahura Mazda*. Other religions proclaim it, so why shouldn't we?

If the Gathas are the revealed words of *Ahura Mazda*, then let us start respecting them. When Zoroastrians are asked to describe their religion, they say that it is the first monotheistic religion. We need to add the word "revealed," and say that it is the "first revealed monotheistic" religion; that is, if you agree that the Gathas are the revealed words of *Ahura Mazda*. Perhaps, the scholars might be able to answer the question whether Zoroastrianism is a revealed religion or not. I would like for this conference to emphasize to the North American Zoroastrians that they should start treating the Gathas as the revealed words of *Ahura Mazda* to our prophet *Asho Zarathushtra*.

It is an answer to this type of question that would enhance the value of these conferences for the Zoroastrians of North America. It would help elevate the Gathas to a level where it should be in our daily lives. FEZANA should help coordinate this effort, along with NAMC and the Council of Iranian Mobeds of North America (CIMNA). It would be cheaper and more efficient for all these organizations to pool their resources and efforts.

This brings me to the million-dollar question. How are we going to fund this type of project? Why is it that Zoroastrians do not have a source of funds to enhance and promote their religion? Why is it that we always have to ask for donations every time we start a project? Would it not be nice to have a kitty of money set up, and have to then think up projects to help the community?

WILL THESE CONFERENCES HELP ZOROASTRIANISM SURVIVE?

I wish one of the scholars present could tell us whether the Gathas or any other scripture mentions a Zarthushti's duty to contribute a certain amount of his time and money to promote Zoroastrian causes. Taken as individuals, the North American Zoroastrians are probably one of the richest communities, but collectively, we are the poorest. This observation has come from my experience by comparing us to others, especially those religious groups that have migrated within the last 25 years.

Let us take, as an example, a community in Texas, and assume that it has a 100 families. Let's assume that each family contributes 2% of their income, and let's further assume that the family income is \$30,000 per year, which is below the income level of affluent North American Zoroastrians. My calculations show that the fund would receive \$60,000 per year. Now, if they had done this for 20 years, they would have collected \$1,200,000 plus all the earned interest. After taxes, the out of pocket expenses for each family would be \$420 per year, or \$35 per month, or \$8 per week, or about \$1 per day. How ridiculous we are to not realize the power of regular contributions for religious needs.

Now imagine if the contributions were calculated on the real income levels of the community. We could easily have collected enough to build up the infra structure required for our religious and social needs. Other communities would then be as jealous of our community as I am of theirs in Toronto.

The Sikh community has 8 Gurdwaras in and around Toronto; the Hindus have 10 beautiful temples, and the Muslim community has 20 Masjids for the different denominations. All these communities have also created a social and religious infra structure.

My biggest peeve with the Gathic scholars is that every one of them thinks that he can best translate the words of Zarathushtra. There are as many divergent translations of the Gathas as there are translators. While each translation claims to be an improvement on its predecessor, in reality, it only aggravates an already existing confusion. With a count of over 40 published translations, many of them in violent contradiction to another, one must wonder why it is necessary to have so many translations? By having this many, we merely trivialize the Gathas and its teachings. I don't believe any other community would allow its scriptures to be dealt with in

the manner the Gathas have been. The message that I am passing on to you from Jal Birdy, the NAMC President, is: Please stop putting your energies towards translating the Gathas, and start putting it towards making the Gathas more popular among the North American Zoroastrians, by promoting its spiritual and philosophical values.

Why can't our religious leaders tell the community which translation is best and most acceptable to the community, and then start encouraging the community to use it? I know that this will sound absurd to the Gatha scholars and aspiring translators, but to the community it would provide relief from continuing controversies. It might help if FEZANA, NAMC and CIMNA protested every time another scholar tries to translate the Gathas.

We could also put our energies towards producing a book that is easier to read and refer to. CIMNA produced a nice and easy version of the *Ahunavaiti* Gatha by Mobed Fariborz Shahzadi. My own favorite has been *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra* by D. J. Irani. With all the talent within the community, why can't we produce a book of all the Gathas together, and have it handsomely bound, so that it becomes a prized possession for every Zarathushti from *Navjot* to death? That book should become a constant companion to a Zoroastrian just as the *Khorde Avesta*. I hope that on projects like these we get some guidance from our *wada dastoorjis* (high priests), and that we can use our collective *vohu mano* (best mind) to come up with the best way to achieve this goal.

One of the aims of this conference should be to put out a paper which, based on Gathic teachings, finds ways to promote giving, sharing and helping all Zoroastrians. Its emphasis should be that charity is a duty not an option.

We as a community now have to decide how we are going to promote the Gathas as the revealed words of *Ahura Mazda*; words that should play an important role in the religious life of every Zoroastrian.