

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

By Ali A. Jafarey



MY MESSAGE

Ali A. Jafarey

Three thousand seven hundred and odd years ago, when every man and woman was, almost blindly, following social norms, when the clan system had divided humans into small pockets, when priests prided themselves as leaders of superstitious cults, when princess paraded themselves as chiefs of exploited communities, and when imaginary gods and fanciful goddesses played kind and rough with imaginative men and fancying women, a man rose to declare the freedom of Thought, Word, and Deed for all. He spoke of “The Super-Intellect Being”; the god, the only God, he had realized through his good mind. He explained the Primal Principles of Good Life that he had understood. He dealt with good and evil, discretion and determination, promotion and creativity, innovation and renovation, progress and prosperity, and perfection and eternity. And he based all these on Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. He founded a religion, the religion of “Good Conscience”, a universal religion for all humanity. He declared his religion to all, those who lived close to him and those who lived far. His voice rose to go well beyond his widening circle. His voice reached the wide world of humanity. It widened human thought. It strengthened human speech. It invigorated human action. It refined human behavior. His voice, fresh, sweet and clear as ever, is still heard. Its reach is widening, reaching the wide world. My 12 essays under the title of “The Message of Zarathushtra” echoes that vital VOICE: the Voice of ZARATHUSHTRA.

And my message is: Do listen to the Voice. It gladly guides.

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THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

ZARATHUSHTRA AND HIS GOOD RELIGION

*“Hear the best with your ears
and ponder with a bright mind.
Then each man and woman, for his or her self,
select either of the two, the better or the bad mentality.
Awaken to this doctrine of ours
before the great event of choice ushers in.”*
(Zarathushtra's Gathas: Song 3.2)

ZARATHUSHTRA (Life and Teachings)

Tradition says Zarathushtra was born on the 6th of Farvardin, 30 days before the start of the Zarathushtrian Religious Era (26 March 1767 B.C.E.). Zarathushtra's father Pourushaspa, of the Spitama clan, an Iranian tribe, raised cattle and was famous for his horses. His mother, Dughdav, was known for her enlightened ideas. The family lived near the bank of the Oxus River in present day Central Asia.

Zarathushtra, inquisitive by nature, was a consummate thinker. He kept asking questions concerning the world and its creator. The priests of the ancient polytheistic cult could not provide him with satisfactory answers. His father invited the head priest to talk to him. The ensuing arguments enraged the priest so much that he is said to have dropped dead, evidently, from a heart attack while driving his chariot back home. Disappointed by the response from the priests, Zarathushtra turned to his inner self and the thought-provoking nature around him. His search for the truth, for creation, and its creator led him to God with Whom he communed. At the age of thirty he proclaimed his mission and began preaching the new message to humanity.

That message, fresh today as it was 3800 years ago, shattered myths and established beliefs by challenging rites and rituals related to superstition and sacrifice, and it made Zarathushtra an enemy of the rulers and priests. For over ten years, he and his small fellowship of companions were harassed and tortured. With determination and innate wisdom, and with great risk to his life, he decided to bring his divine doctrine to the chief ruler, Vishtaspa. Ancient Iran was vast. It included Afghanistan, Central Asia, eastern Iran, and Pakistan and was divided into many kingdoms with a council of kings. The council, a loose federation bound by mutual treaties, was presided over by the most heroic leader. The kings were known as khshathras or ‘habitation authorities’. Some of these rulers were both warriors and intellectuals and were called kavis, or sages.

Kavi Vishtaspa of the Helmand valley in southeastern part of the land was a powerful person and, like other kavis, a man of learning. His court was full of sages, and he derived his power from the many conquests to his credit. Zarathushtra's enemies had already reached the court of Vishtaspa to doom his mission. Zarathushtra, undaunted, faced the King and his court, but it was a struggle of epic proportions. It took two years of rigorous perseverance to deliberate and deliver the divine message to the king and the queen, their court and their people. It took two full years to eradicate all evil ideas, intoxicating rituals, bloody sacrifices, and duping doses, and to replace them with: "Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds". Zarathushtra was 42 years old at that time.

King Vishtaspa, Queen Hutaosa, their children, and the people underwent a complete transformation. The princes forsook the throne and became zealous missionaries. The result was that the Good Religion spread far and wide within the lifetime of Zarathushtra. His mission was a great success. Satisfied that he had his "best wishes come true", Zarathushtra passed away peacefully at the ripe age of 77 years and 40 days. By tradition his birth is hailed and celebrated every year, yet his demise has never been mourned into a rite. His trained missionaries preached the divine message far and wide. The Zarathushtrian fellowship widened to include people of many races and nations. For the first time in history, a universal religion was born with a message to inspire all of mankind.

His divine message was a unique revelation, a fresh outlook, a new philosophy, a novel doctrine. It cleansed the human mind of prejudices, superstitions, and evil thoughts. It denied multiple illusory deities and proclaimed Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, as the only God, creator, maintainer, and promoter of the cosmos, the good, beautiful, and orderly universe. Zarathushtra's message stood for peace, progress, and prosperity on this good earth and a blissful life beyond. His message is a living message. It is divine. It is based on the triple principle of "Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds". It promotes the human mind and provokes its thinking faculty.

It solves the complicated problem of Good and Evil by placing them in the human mind as two opposing "mentalities", not entities. Good serves and promotes human society in an ecologically sound world, while evil damages and retards society's good progress. A human being, endowed with a discriminating mind, is born free to choose between good and evil. This places a heavy responsibility on an individual. A person is good if he or she chooses to think good thoughts and, in turn, speaks good words and performs good deeds. One is evil if one chooses to think evil and consequently to speak and do evil. Good deeds lead a person to wholeness and immortality, and evil deeds make one suffer and grope in darkness until light is found and truth realized. Moral rectitude, the good and the bad consequences of one's deeds, follow every act one performs.

Zarathushtra's divine message advocates that every person should choose to serve God, the society, and the living world. It advocates human progress through harmony with the beneficial

nature. It accords perfect equality to men and women Society is based on home, district, state, country, and world, or in other words, on family, community, nation, and world fellowship. There exists no racial superiority. Superiority belongs to the virtuous wise who can lead the world to spiritual and material completion and, consequently, to the Source of Creation and the Totality of Wisdom. With the wise leading the world, the message is ever fresh and ever present. The religion of Zarathushtra is a self-renovating religion. It is a timeless guide to humanity.

The message of Zarathushtra is aimed at knowing God, loving people, caring for animals, plants, water, air, and minerals and at promoting the spiritual and material world. The message provokes the mind, sweetens the tongue, and invigorates the body to make life mentally and physically, spiritually and materially progressive, prosperous, peaceful, refreshed, happy, and loving. The message is Divine and Zarathushtrian.

SALIENT POINTS OF THE ZARATHUSHTRIAN RELIGION

To all those friends who ask for some salient points of the “Good Religion” founded and propagated by Zarathushtra and preserved in the Gathas, his thought-provoking songs, to guide humanity to perfection and eternity through the triple Principle of: **GOOD THOUGHTS, GOOD WORDS, and GOOD DEEDS...**

They are:

1. There is only one God, God of Subtle Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, continuous creator, sustainer, and promoter of cosmos (Songs 8 and 9).
2. All superstitious beliefs in false gods, goddesses and similar imaginary beings, and in the performance of rituals to appease them should be abandoned and all irrational ideas and practices should be given up (Song 5).
3. The religion of Good Conscience, the Gathic name for the Zarathushtrian religion, is universal and for all (Songs 9.10 and 17.1).
4. The divine enlightenment (SERAOSHA) reveals many divine faculties which lead to the understanding of the principles that form the cosmos, an orderly universe. The most important are SPENTA MAINYU, the progressive mentality, the divine faculty that creates, maintains, and promotes; ASHA, righteousness, the universal law that precisely regulates every move in the cosmos; VOHU MANAH, the wisdom behind every righteous move; VOHU KSHATHRA, good rule and the benevolent power that keeps good order in the universe; ARAMAITI, serenity and tranquility acquired under a good rule and required to promote the cosmos; HAURVATAT, wholeness and perfection achieved under tranquil conditions; and AMERETAT, immortality and eternity attained through wholeness. (These abstract principles form the main points of most of the seventeen songs.)
5. The universe has been created good and is orderly progressing towards completion as intended by its Creator, Ahura Mazda (Songs 8 and 9).
6. Mankind has been endowed with the freedom of thought, word and deed, and has a bright mind to discern between what is good and what is bad for human society (Song 3.2; 4.9, 11–12).
7. The human being has two mentalities *spenta mainyu*, ‘progressive mentality’, and *angra mainyu*, ‘retarding mentality’. The progressive mentality helps him to improve himself and the world around him. The retarding mentality harms him and the world. The wise would, therefore, choose and promote the better mentality (Songs 3, 4, 10).
8. The human world on this earth is divided into two camps, the righteous and the wrongful. The objective of the righteous should be to win over the wrongful into the righteous camp and thus establish a good life for all (Songs 3, 4, 10, and many more references).

9. What is good can best be understood by studying nature, advancing knowledge, harmonizing with all that is good and beneficial, and promoting the environment—our human society and the rest of the living world (Song 7.3; 8.6; 9.12; 13; 15.3).
10. Mankind may, if it chooses, develop all the above divine faculties and become creative, in fact the renovator, maintainer, and promoter of its endowed environment and become spiritually perfect and eternally godlike (Song 4.16; 8.3; 9.9; 13.3).
11. If a person does not choose correctly, his world continues to be chaotic, and he suffers the consequences until he adopts these divine principles (Song 8.5; 17.6, 8–9).
12. Sooner or later humanity will correct itself and attain perfection and eternal life (Song 10.7).
13. Caste, color, race, and nationality do not play any discriminatory part in the universal message of Zarathushtra.
14. Mankind is its own savior. Each person, guided by a discerning “good mind” and “good conscience”, should work for the betterment of self and fellow human beings and living the world (Songs 3 & 10).
15. Men and women are equal and enjoy the same rights in a free and responsible society. Superiority lies in righteous deeds alone (Song 3.2; 17.5; A Airyema Ishya; Haptanghaiti 1.6; 5.3).
16. The smallest unit of humanity is the family and the largest unit the entire human world. All the units—home, town, state, country, and world—should be united and bound together by love and wisdom (Song 4.16, 18; 5.1; 6.3–4).
17. Every person should acquire and promote wisdom. Human society should be an intellectual society consisting of selfless, devoted members (Songs 3.1, 4.6, 17, 19, 7.10).
18. Free human society should select only fully qualified persons of righteous records and merits for both temporal and spiritual offices in a true democratic environment, and thus establish the cherished and chosen ruling system (Yatha Ahu; Songs 2 & 16).
19. The prime object of every person should be to make a better world in spirit and body. Human society must progress. Every member must persevere to promote it. (Song 3.9; 7.5; 11.9; 13.11).
20. The Good Religion is a “self-renovating” religion. Its continuous progress with the advancing world makes it ever-fresh, ever-modern. Modernization of thoughts, words and deeds, including traditional practices and rites, should be the order of the day. (Songs 3.9; 7.15; 11.19; 15.11)

It may be noted that the popular form of the Zoroastrian religion is what has become to be known as the “Traditional Zoroastrianism”. It is the “institutionalized” form of the religion. It is this traditional Zoroastrianism, forced by the past 1400 years circumstances of being dominated in Iran by Islam and in India by Hindu caste system, that has become a closed club of “born-Zoroastrians” who do not accept any “alien”. Modern studies is enlightening an increasing number of “born-Zoroastrians” that Zarathushtra founded the first UNIVERSAL religion in the world. Any religion, belief, or practice which gets “bound” into a “formal fixed form”, becomes stationary and fossilized, and therefore out-of-date. Zarathushtra established a SELF-RENOVATING religion which is solely based on the Primal Principles of Life and is not bogged down by outdated traditions of complicated rituals and cumbersome customs. Seasonal celebrations, in tune with Nature, such as Nowruz and “Gahanbars”, and scientific commemorations, such as Jashne Sadeh, the festival of the discovery of igniting and maintaining fire, are also fresh and enjoyable.

21. Enlightenment and happiness come to the person who gives happiness to others without discrimination whatsoever. An enlightened and happy life is what every person needs to achieve and spread (Song 8.1).
22. Prayers help a person to communicate with God. They are invigorating, guiding, and satisfying. They help to experience the divine love. One may pray whenever, wherever, and in whatever state one feels the urge to communicate with God. One may do it alone or in the company of others. Prayers may be said in silent meditation, in a few words, in long lines, in prose or poetry, recited loud and sweetly. They may be said plainly or with simple rituals that would help the person feel elevated in their experience (This is repeated throughout the Gathas)

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 1 – **ZARATHUSHTRA, A UNIQUE PERSONALITY**

*“In whose birth and growth
The waters and plants flourished;
In whose birth and growth
The waters and the plants increased;
And in whose birth and growth
The entire progressive creation shouted with joy:
Hail to us, for the ‘Thought-provoker’ leader is born:
Zarathushtra Spitama!
Henceforth the Good Religion of worshipping the Wise One
Will spread all over the earth.”*
(Farvardin Yasht, stanzas 93–94)

The above quotation from the Farvardin Yasht is the oldest poetical eulogy for a human being on record in the Indo-Iranian, perhaps the entire world literature. Prior to this, there were praises only for God, gods, goddesses, and deified personalities. The eulogy consists of seven stanzas, 88 to 94 in the Farvardin Yasht, a piece of the ancient scriptures in memory of the great men and women who served the cause of spreading the Good Religion of Zarathushtra.

The eulogy, although short, throws quite a good light on the birth and growth of a child, a buoyant boy who was born to Dughdav and Pourushaspa Spitâma on a fine morning of early spring, 3,766 years ago. He was their third son. They named him Zarathushtra to rhyme with the names of his two elder brothers—Rataushtra and Rangaushtra. The Spitâmas were a prosperous cattle-raising family and lived near the bank of a river, later called Dâiti, the Lawful, in northeastern Iran. Dughdav was an exceptionally open-minded bright lady. She took care of Zarathushtra in education and provoked in him the desire to search and discover. She set him on the road to discover truth, the truth.

The eulogy shows that:

- (1) The child was born in spring when snow thawed, rains came, waters flowed, trees blossomed, and plants grew.
- (2) The child, as he grew in maturity, was led to good words and good deeds through his good intuition.
- (3) He realized the truth, recognized, and comprehended the Wise Lord in an age when the world around him was completely engrossed in superstition.
- (4) He preached to others what he learned through his inspiration.

- (5) His message introduces a complete change in religious leadership. Leaders, both spiritual and physical, are to be elected. Moreover, their election is to be based on their competency and sincerity so much so that instead of blind faith or unquestioned trust, one is advised to choose Zarathushtra as his or her spiritual and physical leader only after understanding his divine message.
- (6) Man and woman enjoy freedom as equals.
- (7) At a time when every race considered itself to be the chosen people of God/gods, Zarathushtra did not discriminate between race, cast, and creed. The Good Religion is universal and for all the peoples of the world. It advocates preaching and propagation on the sound basis of education and aims at spreading the message all over the earth.

In this eulogy, Zarathushtra is constantly referred to as the “foremost” because he is the first and foremost in giving an entirely fresh outlook to every aspect of life—spiritual, mental, physical, material, and ethical. His Good Religion is all embracing. He fully deserves the credit given to him as a Mânthran, a thought-provoker, and as a lord and leader of human beings in this bodily life. Yet the ancient poet does not deify him because he knew well from Zarathushtra's teachings that God alone is the Lord and Leader of the mental and material, spiritual and physical existence.

Zarathushtra has remained a human being all through the 4000-year-old history of the Good Conscience religion, a phenomenon, indeed. This makes Zarathushtra enjoy a rather unique position among the founders of religions. He was not a god-incarnate who appeared at a particular period to guide an erring populace. He was not a son of God sent on a mission of salvation. He was not a messenger dispatched to diffuse a particular code of living. He was not a prophet, in the Semitic sense, who was in communion with what appears to be originally a tribal or ethnic god and who told his people what would befall them, what would happen to others, what to do, and what not to do. He was neither a priest, nor a scribe, nor an apostle who inherited a religious lore founded by his predecessors. He was not a lawmaker, divine or royal, who laid down specific codes to be obeyed without question. He was not a philosopher in the strict Greek sense. He was not even a 'Vedic' *Rshi* who sang praises in honor of his favorite gods and goddesses.

Zarathushtra was not visited by a deity in the shape of a human being or some natural phenomenon. He did not behold an angel sent down by God. He did not hear a loud divine voice from out of the void or from a shining object. He did not lapse into a trance and realize the transcendental. He did not experience an ecstasy and grasp the heavens. Zarathushtra was neither a blind follower nor the promulgator of an ancient cult. He was not even a reformer or the promoter of a new trend. He is “foremost” in his mission, an entirely a new mission. Yet he was, like others, the founder of a great religion. Like most of the founders, Zarathushtra speaks about God, teaches strict monotheism, and has a divine message to deliver. Therefore, he is classified by almost all, including, ironically, Zoroastrians, as a “prophet”.

Zarathushtra was, no doubt, an Aryan of the Vedic age, now conventionally placed between 2000 and 1500 before the Christian or Common Era (BCE). As such, he was brought up in an Aryan environment. He knew the Rshis who received their inspirations through *shruti*, ‘audible revelation’. He knew well the *karapans*, the ritualistic priests, and their ruses for exploiting the people. He also knew the *kavis*, the sagacious princes, and their shrewd policies for ruling their subjects. And he knew well about the *ahuras* and *daevas*, the fanciful gods—some abstractions personified, some natural objects deified and glorified by poets and worshipped in awe by the people.

Yet Zarathushtra neither claimed to be an Aryan nor was his message meant exclusively for them. He was human, and his message is for all humanity. He ignored the rshis and their pantheon of gods and goddesses. He renounced both the *karapans* and the *kavis* for their deceitful deeds. And, like Buddha, another Aryan of a later age, he set out on his own to find out the facts. But the two, in their search for the same goal—realization—proceeded on different paths, one to perfection and eternal bliss, and the other to liberation from the desires and passions of individual existence. There is a reason for the different paths. While Buddha came out of his luxurious palace and was shocked to observe a miserable world, Zarathushtra left behind a world of gross superstition and was delighted to reach the abode of radiant happiness.

Treading slowly and observing keenly, Zarathushtra finally discovered Mazda Ahura, literally ‘The Super-Intellect Being’, a god so different from the human-visualized gods, a god transcendental and yet so close as to be a beloved, a god very impersonal in mind but very personal in thoughts, a god that means only good. A Super-Intellect that wisely creates, sustains, maintains, and promotes Its creation. A Super-Intellect that is *spenishta mainyu*, meaning ‘the Most Progressive Mind, the most increasing mentality’ not a static godhead. A Super-Intellect that communions with Its creations and inspires them through *seraosha*, the inner voice within them. A Super-Intellect that has granted freedom of thought, will, word, action, and choice to Its creations and endowed them with good mind, truth, power, and peace to prosper and progress to wholeness and immortality.

Zarathushtra's one discovery, the best, **MAZDĀ**, provided him with all the principles of good life on this earth and beyond. Provoked by his mother when he was a child, he became *Mānthran*, the ‘thought-provoker’ par excellence for humanity. He laid the foundation of his universal religion, *Daênâ Vanguhi*, the religion of ‘Good Conscience’, the religion that means constant progress, continuous modernization toward eternal bliss.

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 2 – *EARLY LIFE*

Zarathushtra was a very inquisitive boy. He asked and learned much from his broad-minded mother and later from his father. His mother entrusted him to a good teacher. At the early age of seven, his increasing queries about religion led his father to bring him to the high Karapan, and his colleagues—the ritualistic priests of the ancient Indo-Iranian cult. Steeped in their own superstitions and groping in gloom, the prejudiced priests could neither change the boy's mind nor could they, because of his father's high position, convict him. On another occasion when the high priest was invited to talk to the boy and also share a meal, the boy was bold enough to refuse to join them in the pre-meal rituals. The outraged old despot left the house, rode off in his chariot, and “dropped dead on his way home,” perhaps because, he, as gluttonous priest, had a heart attack.

Answering Questions

The priests turned Zarathushtra away unconvinced, and he turned away from the priestly class and their fanciful falsities and colorful rituals for good. He turned to nature. He watched with care the domestic animals. He attended the horses, cows, and sheep and played with their young ones. He became fond of the dog, the most loyal of man's friends. He watched the birds. He looked at the trees. He listened to the running river. And he looked up at the sky—the sun during the day and the moon and the stars during the night. His mother taught him the names of several stars and planets. His father told him of astronomy and time telling. He became acquainted with farming and animal husbandry. He watched his parents attending to sick people and animals. He had an ear for nursery rhymes. Then he became interested in poetry. And his good old teacher had taught him rhythm and meter. He was on the road to becoming a master of all contemporary sciences.

At the age of fifteen, Zarathushtra's father invested him with the girdle, today called *Sadreh-pûshi* or *Navjote*, that admitted him as an adult member of the family. As far as his studies of nature and society were concerned, he was far above the average person. He had taken every opportunity to learn something new from every person or quarter. Good things gave him better ideas, and bad things made him think of ways to find a cure. He had learned enough from his observations. He turned silent, pondering, meditating, increasingly spiritual. He started anew with questions. But now he put the questions to himself. Restless, inquisitive, Zarathushtra kept asking himself:

Who made the sun and the stars in their paths? Who makes the moon wax and wane?
Who holds the earth below, who keeps the sky from breaking away? Who created the
waters and who the plants? Who lends the wind and clouds speed? Which artist fashioned

the light and the darkness? Which artist planned sleep, and which awakening? Who made the dawn, day, and dusk?

And he added:

I am eager to know all this and more.

As the years passed, his questions moved from nature to society:

Who made the child lovingly attentive to the parent?

He went a little further:

What is happening and what will happen? What rewards wait for the rightful And what for the wrongful? Which of the two courses is better? The one the true and honest chooses for himself, or the one the deluded and deceitful takes?

And, almost in despair:

How, how can false gods be good rulers, whose mumbling priests have delivered the world to fury and whose princes have forced it to lament?¹

Wisdom Wise

Zarathushtra's head swam with queries. But all along, he observed one fact: there is a law that governs the universe, that regulates it. Sun, moon, stars, planets, days, nights, seasons, waters, plants, animals, and humans all have their positions ascertained and paths determined. The elders called it *ASHA*, or *ARTA*, precision, truth. But who established *asha*? Who promotes it? Zarathushtra contemplated in silence. And he realized that precision comes from wisdom. There must be a master mind, a good mind—*VOHU MANAH*—behind the whole system.

His mind contemplated this “good mind”. His mind scanned the system. It scanned and scanned until he felt fully that his mind was getting in tune with good mind. He realized that he was encompassed by enlightenment through *Vohu Manah*. He was enlightened. He received *Ushtâ*, radiant happiness that comes from enlightenment. And slowly he found that he knew the answers, rather the Answer. Each of his questions was an answer in itself, and that led to another answer, until he comprehended the God, the only God.

Led by his good mind-wisdom-to God. He called God **MAZDÂ**, literally ‘Super-Wisdom’. Coupled with **AHURA**, ‘the Being’, he addressed his God sometimes as **MAZDÂ AHURA**, ‘Wise Lord’, and much lesser as **AHURA MAZDÂ**, ‘Lord Wise’. When lovingly addressing God's wisdom, he simply used **Mazdâ**, and when he laid more emphasis on God's existence and sovereignty, he used **Ahura**. Zarathushtra retained the term **Ahura**, literally ‘the living, the being’, which is Aryan for ‘lord’ and was applied to both gods and men. But he rejected *daêva*, literally the ‘shining one’, much associated with the fanciful gods of the ancient pantheon.

¹ For these quotations, see Yasna 44

Mazdâ means ‘supreme intellect, prime wisdom’. This Zarathushtra added to Ahura to denote the Supreme Being with which he was in tune.

Until Zarathushtra, gods had been fancied mostly as powerful, ruthless, awesome, vengeful, and dreaded in the supremacy. Now it was wisdom—**Mazdâ**—that characterized the God discovered by Zarathushtra. Wisdom subsumed all good qualities he came to think of as God's: insight, foresight, power, sovereignty, progress, creativity, kindness, love, and above all, eternity. With wisdom prevailing, all the fanciful falsities faded away. So complete was the eradication that Zarathushtra does not mention any of the Aryan gods and goddesses by name in his Gathas—no Varuna, Mithra, Verethraghna, Apam-napât, or a goddess of waters, not even in contempt. Why mention something that had never existed!

A super-wise God would not be simply the creator of *Asha*, the law regulating the universe, *Vohu Manah*, the good mind that lends wisdom to all other creations. That would make God a mighty maintainer. What about promotion and expansion? Is the creation complete, or is it continuing? Zarathushtra continued to question his good mind and to realize the answers.

He conceived and comprehended a new dimension in God—SPENTA MAINYU, the ‘progressive mentality’, the creative mind, the divine faculty that creates, sustains, and promotes the universe. He discovered God's continuous creative aspect. Although perfect and eternal, the supreme, as realized by Zarathushtra, is not an eternal perfection that gives one a static notion. A being that has created all it wanted to create within a specific time and is now enjoying the restful maintenance of its creation with certain ups and downs, is not what Zarathushtra realized. Ahura Mazda is not only *Spenta Mainyu*, he is “most progressive”. His is a continuous creative process. Always on the move—a universe, a cosmos, ever-increasing, ever-evolving. Now that Zarathushtra knew his God, he turned to him, to him only, and put his questions to him:

This I ask you, tell me truly, Lord.

And his questions continued to supply the answers:

How shall I reverently pay You Your homage? Teach this to a friend like me... Let us all be given, through loving righteousness, help so that it come to us through good mind.

The questions were full of fervor, and the answers were filled with favor. Zarathushtra fell in love with God.

I appeal to you. Please, Lord, see to it. Lend me the help a friend gives a friend. Grant me, through truth and precision, The riches of good mind. What would a lover wish? To meet the beloved: Lord Wise, I am longing to have your vision and communion. Come to me, O Best One, O Wise One, in person and in sight, through truth and good mind.²

² Again, see Yasna 44

Zarathushtra wanted a complete union with God. But how? To become merged and thus to lose himself? No, he had found God through good mind, so he wanted the union through good mind. Therefore, he meditated and developed his mental faculties to such a degree that he found himself encircled by enlightenment through good mind. It told him: If you wish to know your Lord, know yourself first, your inner self and your outer self, and your environment! Good mind inspired Zarathushtra to rediscover himself, his God, and God's good creation, all at once.

He had all the answers. No more questions. He was fully enlightened. Was that all? Was that what he wanted? Yes and no. He wanted God. He had God. But he never wanted the Wise Being for himself alone. He wanted, fervently, others to know God, to love God, and unite in God. Thus, he turned toward men to tell them about his discovery and to guide them to it. Zarathushtra was feeling fresh, strong, and progressive. He knew the task ahead was not easy, yet he was optimistic. He was determined. "As long as I have the will and power, I shall teach mankind to seek truth," he promised himself. He knew the religion he had founded was best. He hoped to guide all life to it.

Modern Message

Zarathushtra came with a modern message, fresh, never heard before. He called it *Mâñthra* 'thought-provoking' and called himself *Mâñthran* 'thought-provoker, mentor'. He founded a religion and called it *Daênâ Vanguhi*, 'Good Conscience', for to him religion was nothing but an individual's conscience awakened to facts. Much water had flowed down the neighboring river between his meditation in silence and the day of his enlightenment. Tradition says he was thirty years old. He was tall, robust, handsome, wholesome, wise, mature, cool-headed, composed, imposing, impressive, and an eloquent poet.

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Part 3 – *RELATIVES FIRST*

Zarathushtra was restless again. He returned home. He had his answers, but he had to get them to the people. He did not know how to begin. He prayed for a way, and he was inspired. He then knew how to begin. He called his relatives and explained to them the new doctrine of worshiping Mazda, the only God. He expounded the divine faculties of *Vohu Manah*, ‘good mind’, that provided sound thinking and fine judgment; *Seraosha*, ‘inspiration’, hearing the divine voice that established communion with God; *Asha*, ‘precision and truth’, that provided guidance to do the right thing at the right time at the right place and with the right means to obtain the right result—a perfect order in the world; the establishment of *Khshathra*, a divine “order” by the honest and true; *Âramaiti*, the ‘serenity’ that followed the divine order; the progress toward *Haurvatât*, ‘wholeness, perfection’ that followed serenity and tranquility; *Ameretât*, the ‘immortality’ that is the result of perfection; and *Spenta Mainyu*, the divine ‘progressive mind’ that creates, maintains, and advances the entire divine process. It was too new, too unique to understand. All stared blank, except one person, his cousin Maidyoimâha, son of Ârâsti. He is listed as the foremost among those who “listened to the thought-provoking words and teachings of Zarathushtra.” Tradition says that he was fifteen years older than Zarathushtra.

Bold Bid

Zarathushtra began addressing the people more frequently. A few joined him. But then a reaction started. The priests saw their profession in danger. They attempted to persuade him away. They promised rich rewards. They failed, so they began opposing him. There were not only the priests, the *karapans*, alone, but they had with them their superior allies and patrons, the poet princes, the *kavis*. Bendav and Usig were two of the worst. Both were, incidentally, Vedic poets, *rshis*, of the Indo-Aryan lore. They opposed Zarathushtra hard and harsh, but he maintained his peaceful position. The *karapans* and *kavis* failed in their efforts, and Zarathushtra failed in promoting his mission. The reason for the double failure lay in Zarathushtra's method. The *karapans* and *kavis* failed because he kept so cool and calm in his talks that they simply could not stir up a mob to harm him, yet this same method did not stir up mobs in his support. He disregarded the fanciful gods, but he never denounced any of them by name. For him they did not exist. Why should he waste his energy exciting the public by attacking something about which they were sensitive. He had a better way.

Zarathushtra was a versatile poet with wit and humor. The word for god, *daêva*, was derived from the root *div-*, ‘to shine’, and therefore meant ‘the shining’. With a slight twist, it could be derived from a homonym root, ‘to deceive’, and therefore mean the ‘deceit’. *Karapan*, from *krp-*, ‘to arrange rituals’, meant the ‘officiating priest’. It also meant ‘mourner, mumbles’ as a

homonymous word. Kavi was both a poet prince and a pattering parrot. Bendav meant a faithful friend as well as a serf. Usig was 'bright' and also 'alight'. The drink Haoma was called *duraosha*, 'repeler of death', and it could mean 'the waster of wisdom'.

These witty twists of meaning had their effect. They exposed Zarathushtra's opponents. They were irritating but they also aroused interest. They ignited anger, but they also were amusing. They did not provide his antagonists with the pretext to destroy him, but they did give the people an idea of their inner selves. Zarathushtra avoided controversy with his wit, but he had failed thus far in spreading his discoveries because his ideas were so new, his doctrine so fresh, that the people around him could not grasp them. Later tradition says that a good ten years slipped by, and Zarathushtra still had only a few relatives and a few friends who had chosen his way. Nevertheless, his untiring preaching did not go unheeded among the populace. They were mildly sympathetic and not inimical, so the priest-prince coalition tried sterner measures. They started preventing the people, even Zarathushtra's own companions, from meeting him. That was more than he could tolerate.

Zarathushtra began thinking of his mission. Why had his progress been so slow? Then he realized that he had been talking to people of limited knowledge. It had been useless to talk to people who were still not ready to understand what he said. Limited knowledge meant less understanding and more emotion. He had lost many a good year. Concerned that he would lose more, he wondered what he should do. Again he put a question to God:

"To what land should I turn? Where should I turn to go? They hold me back from my folks and friends. Neither the community I follow pleases me, nor do the wrongful rulers of the land. How can I please you, Wise Lord? I know, Wise One, that I am powerless. I have a few cattle and a few men. Please, Lord, see to it."¹

Zarathushtra was inspired to approach Kavi Vishtaspa, the Sage Sovereign of the most prosperous of the Iranian lands. He had a court full of poet-philosophers. The king was prudent and powerful. Should Zarathushtra prevail upon the king's prudence, he would be a success. If not, he could be doomed. It was a very great risk, yet worth it.

Zarathushtra told his companions of his daring venture and assured them of divine help. Soon he and his companions, a small band of honest, goodhearted people, bade their town goodbye and set off to the Helmand delta in the south. His antagonists followed, continuing to harass him, yet nothing stopped him. First he met the powerful Turanian princes, the Frayanas, who listened to him, accepted his message, and became his allies. Then he reached the royal court.

At the royal court he had long, long discussions. There were court intrigues against him, but he was undaunted and firm. It took him two full years to convince Kavi Vishtaspa, Queen Hutaosa, and the court sages. He had won the best support he could ever have. The entire court underwent a change. The warrior king and his stalwart sons and brothers turned into peaceful but

¹ See Yasna 46.1-2

ardent missionaries. Prominent among them were two sage brothers of the Hvogva family, Ferashaoshtra and Jamaspa, and later Prince Spento-data whose name—‘Progressive Law’—shows either that he was born after his father accepted the Good Religion, or that his name was changed because it related to an Aryan “daeva”. He appears to have become a missionary-at-large who forwent the crown he was to wear after his father Vishtaspa.

A later tradition says that Zarathushtra marked his success by founding the *Nîmrûz* (meridian) observatory in the delta, perhaps on the tiny island on the Hamun lake. This Mount Ushidarena, House of Science, is mentioned several times in the Avesta. It is known at present by the name Kûh-e Khvâjeh, Mount of Lord.² The site was, incidentally, ideal for this purpose. It was indeed the “center” of the old, civilized world. It stood 61 degrees longitude and 31 degrees north latitude. One line cut Asia, Africa, and Europe, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, in two, and the other divided in half that part of the world that enjoyed regular days and nights between the well inhabited zones of 70 degrees north and 10 degrees south. It was a lush green place with clear skies. The name “meridian”—*Rapithwan* in Avesta and *Nemroz* in Pahlavi—as well as the “mid-earth” (*vimaidhya zem*) given to it in the Avesta, makes sense and is in keeping with science. Against this the later Ptolemaic transfer of the prime meridian to the Canary Islands in the Atlantic could be interpreted as an illogical political move during the troubled years of the Parthian and Roman wars in the second century CE. The same holds true of the very recent arbitrary transfer of the prime meridian to Greenwich during British supremacy in 1884. Tradition also adds that the occasion was particularly favorable because Aries entered vernal equinox around 1725 BCE, thus providing a good clue for determining various dates concerning the early stages of the Good Religion.

² See Mount Khajeh or alternately Ghagha-Shahr for the ruins of a fire temple and observatory from the Sassanid/Arsacid Eras. – Caleb Goodfellow

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Part 4 – *CONSOLIDATION*

With the aid of Kavi Vishtaspa and the sages, the Good Religion advanced well. Zarathushtra began giving practical shape to the new order. He formed a society of his companions, calling it *Maz Maga*, literally ‘Great Magnanimity’, the origin of the term Magus/Magi. The promoters were Zarathushtra, Vishtaspa, Ferashaoshtra, Jamaspa, and Maidyoimaha. The aims and objectives were to serve and be attuned to the Creator and the created. To be a member, one had to know God, to be honest, to be a thinker, to be industrious, to be peaceful, to enjoy a married life, and to pray in earnest.

The society was simple. It promoted brotherly bonds and was sparing of rituals. It had no professional priests. The members gathered in an enclosure or open ground, perhaps three times a day, to face the light—the sun in the sky or fire in a holder—now cleansed of all organic offerings to blaze better with dry wood and certain sweet-smelling plants. They sang a few devotional songs, and then the teacher spoke to them, encouraging them to lead a good mental and physical life. They did not waste their time on superstitious rites, ceremonies, or worship of the dead. They looked at nature with clear minds, not awe. They held in esteem the sun, moon, stars, winds, clouds, rains, earth, waters, plants, and animals in such a way as to use them the best they could, but never to abuse them. Nature was to be benefited from in a natural way that would not defile, diminish, or destroy it. Man was here to cooperate with nature in his own interest, not to conquer it ruthlessly, otherwise he would bring ruthless consequences on himself.

Zarathushtra disapproved of nomadism. He viewed nomads as consumers without being producers. Their search for fresh land after overgrazing their own, resulting in waste and feuds. Their poverty induced them to rob the better off. Zarathushtra was the first to start a movement to settle the landless people. He is, therefore, called *Vâstâr*, ‘settler’ of the people on *vâstras*, self-sufficient ‘settlements’. He established these settlements, and the people became *Vâstrya-fshuyant*, ‘industrious settlers’. He gave the world a new class of working people. On the priority list of the people to be settled were *drigu*, people who had suffered persecution at the hands of the antagonist zealots and had lost all they had except their firm faith in universal truth.

Zarathushtra wanted to do everything in the proper way, at the proper time and place, and with proper means—all with wisdom and consideration. This would give positive results, with no harm to anyone else and therefore with no dispute. But if someone coveted another’s belongings, home, village, or country, he had to be “corrected” through the proper means. He was, therefore, the first to establish what could be termed as a “defense” department, meant only to defend one’s rights and freedom. There was no war, no aggression, in the religion of Good Conscience. Even defenses were not aimed at repelling the aggressor, but at correcting him and

making him a useful person in the promotion of peace, prosperity, and liberty. Freedom was for all.

Good Conscience overthrew the yoke of slavery, eradicated war, and trained free and honest men and women. Men and women enjoyed perfect equality. Everyone got the fair rewards of his or her efforts. If, however, some were in an advantageous position, it was understood they would lend a helping hand to those less fortunate and make them also strong in body and mind. Zarathushtra was the first to acknowledge freedom of belief, thought, word, and deed. He left it to each individual to choose the right path. But everyone was not able to develop his or her own cohesive world view. Only the wise could. As soon as Zarathushtra realized this, he left the weak-minded and approached the sages. It was then that his success was soon and sure. The wise were not born, however, they were raised. Therefore, Zarathushtra thought of training people in wisdom.

Zarathushtra started yet another movement—a literacy campaign. He called in Jamaspa:

“Sage Jamaspa Hvogva, I teach you my message in a poetic and not in an unpoetic language, so that it shall always stay with you as prayers of glorification with the divine inspirations. Whoever distinguishes between law and lawlessness... is, through righteousness, a wonderful counselor.”¹

Jamaspa did retain Zarathushtra's message, because later tradition says that he collected the Avesta in the fortieth year of the founding of the religion. Thus, Zarathushtra founded the first regular school for training disciples. Classes were held daily. He and certain senior companions attended. His message, now arranged in meter and stanzas, was taken up. The teacher first sang a stanza to music, also composed by Zarathushtra. He then explained it and opened it to questions and answers. He sang again, because now it could be understood better. The disciples sang it next, and the class closed until the following day.

Zarathushtra's teachings were easier to memorize in the form he gave them, because they were poems, songs, prayers, and a message, all in one. They were *mānthra* ‘thought-provoking recitations’. Moreover, their poetic form helped to keep Zarathushtra's message pure and pristine with little room for adulteration. The high sanctity accorded to the songs has preserved them so perfectly well that they constitute the only believable miracle of Zarathushtra. Thus, his message was kept alive. His disciples were trained, and the religion was promoted as their education progressed. Zarathushtra's disciples called his message *Gāthā* ‘sublime songs’.

Meanwhile, Zarathushtra had become a kind husband and a loving father, because he had married a woman named *Hvovi* (meaning ‘Self-going’). They had six children in all: Son *Isat Vāstar* (‘Strong Settler’), daughter *Freni* (‘Loving’), daughter *Thriti* (‘Third’), son *Urvatatnara* (‘Befriending People’), son *Hvare-chithra* (‘Sun Bright’) and daughter *Pouruchistā* (‘Full Intellect’). We are not certain as to when he got married. The Avesta tells us only the name of his

¹ See Y 46.17

prospective wife, but later tradition says he turned down his first proposal because the girl was not willing to discuss the union face to face. Perhaps he married late when he was at the court of Kavi Vishtaspa. The Avesta says that Hvovi was a disciple. Her name heads the list of female workers of the religion. Thus, she is the first prominent woman Zarathushtrian. The names of their children also reflect the spirit of Good Conscience—none of them had been named in the agricultural tradition—and therefore indicate that he married late. If so, he was over forty when he married and would have been in his seventies when his youngest daughter Pouruchista got married at the age of fifteen.

First Missionaries

Zarathushtra blessed his companions for spreading his thought-provoking message. He wanted the wise to propagate Good Conscience throughout the world—a world of friendship and fellowship, caring and thoughtfulness, peace and prosperity, and perfection and eternity. His message was not for a chosen people. It was for all. It was universal. This is why Zarathushtra, who continuously emphasized that one should promote one's home, village, town, and country, never mentioned his own birth, race, birthplace, or country. Until his message had spread, however, the movement toward peace and prosperity could not start. Zarathushtra became, therefore, the first teacher to train disciples—missionaries—to teach and propagate the religion without boundaries of cast, creed, color, race, or nation.

Soon Zarathushtra's missionaries went to far-flung places, never to return home but to live abroad and preach. Thus, a missionary tradition was established which was later vigorously pursued by the followers of Buddha, Mani, Jesus, Muhammad, and others. Zarathushtra's school flourished long.

It appears he was followed by Jamaspa and then Saena, son of Ahum Stuta, as the heads of the school. Saena was the eighth person to join the fellowship and therefore was one of the earliest of Zarathushtra's companions. The Avesta says that Saena trained one hundred disciples.² Later tradition adds that the school served for three centuries and a disaster, perhaps the end of the Kavi dynasty or the fall of the succeeding patrons, brought an end to it.³ Zarathushtra loved and revered his companions.

He immortalized the names of several of them in his Gathas. It appears that it was upon his bidding that the names of some two hundred fifty people, twenty-seven of them women, are revered in the Farvardin Yasht in the chronological order of their choosing Good Conscience and joining the Great Fellowship. In that list, Zarathushtra is the first among men, Maidyoimaha the second, Vishtaspa the twenty-first, his heroic son Spento-data the fiftieth, Ferashaoshtra the fifty-third, and Jamaspa the fifty-fourth. Zarathushtra's wife Hvovi is the first among the women. His three daughters follow next, and Hutaosâ and Humâyâ, wife and daughter of Vishtaspa, are the

² Fravardin Yasht stanza 97

³ Selections of Zadspram Chapter 23.11-12.

fifth and the sixth. Most of the married women have their husbands' names mentioned as well. The maidens are remembered with *kainyâ*, 'maiden or Miss', preceding their names.

Meanwhile, the great emphasis placed by Zarathushtra on founding a home was manifested when his youngest child Pouruchista married. The bridegroom, according to later tradition, was Jamaspa. Zarathushtra took the opportunity to immortalize his advice to all uniting couples: "The reward of this Fellowship shall be yours as long as you remain united in weal and woe with all your heart in wedlock... May each of you win other through righteousness."

Newer than New

A look at the new society founded by Zarathushtra reveals that everything was fresh, even the names. The Farvardin Yasht shows that Zarathushtra had retained his and all those names that depicted the agricultural aspect of their society. Yet among the two hundred fifty names mentioned in the *Yasht*, there is not a single one that yielded the faintest trace of the faded religious precedents—no single or compound names with Mithra, Verethraghna, Vayu, or any other Aryan deity. We see *Saena* ('Eagle'), one of the earliest to join, retain his name, but his father bears the name *Ahum Stuta* ('Life-praising'). Did the father have this name before the advent of Good Conscience? This is hardly possible. Did he have a name that praised a "daeva"? It is most probable that he did. He and others in his category must have changed their names to suit the new spirit.

An array of meaningful names—Strong, Settler, Loving, Befriending People, Full Intellect, Sun Bright, Promoter of Goodness, Progressive Law, Refresher, Good Mind, Good Deed, Good Life, Guardian of Good, Accumulator of Good, Promoter of the Highest Good, Worshiper of the Wise, Devoted, and many many more never heard before in the Indo-Iranian lore—all short compound nouns—are testimony to the new life of the companions and their kindred.

During the forty-odd years of his teaching, Zarathushtra had spoken much good—of God and creation, man and woman, mind and body, good and evil, home and society, freedom and equality, science and culture, peace and stability, promotion and progress, and universal fellowship and general development. All had heard him speak on all these subjects, but no companion has reported him to have advised on what to eat, what to wear, what to build, when to work, when to retire, what to celebrate, or how to mourn.

Was Zarathushtra not concerned with daily life? He was concerned and he could easily have instituted taboos like many other founders of doctrines have done, for he lived a life of his age—the bronze age of about four thousand years ago. But he was well aware of his changing world. Any instructions on daily life would grow old and out-of-date, and if it became a tradition to be zealously adhered to, it would prove an obstruction to progress.

Zarathushtra believed in a constant and continuous renovation of the world. So, he said: "May we be among those who make life fresh. You, lords of wisdom, and you who bring happiness

through truth and precision, be single-minded in the realm of inner intellect.”⁴ He petitioned the lords of wisdom of every age to unite in mind through truth and inner intelligence and continue refreshing and renovating life on earth. Time does not stop. Why should the world stop and stagnate!

Zarathushtra did not treat his followers as children who should be directed with do's and don'ts. He treated them as mature and understanding, strong enough to discriminate between good and bad. Mankind holds a high position in the religion of Good Conscience. Men and women are neither children nor servants of God, but friends, lovers, and beloveds who can, if they choose, progress to become “godlike”.

Zarathushtra was happy. He had delivered his message, won the wise to the religion, established life on new principles, rendered the country prosperous, trained disciples who were busy in expounding and expanding the message abroad, gotten his youngest daughter married, and had in every act contributed to the growth of *Daenâ Vanguhi*, the religion of ‘Good Conscience’ for the world. He had succeeded in his mission. Many years had passed between the day of introduction and the day of fulfillment of the religion. Later tradition puts it at forty-seven years. One could see all these years in Zarathushtra's rich wrinkles. He had advanced in years, advanced in wisdom, advanced in work, and advanced in mission. He was a successful messenger, a successful founder, and a successful promoter—a sweeping success.

Late one evening, he bade his companions good-bye and retired. The next day they found him in his eternal sleep, with a smile on his face. He had been granted “the good life forever”. He had become immortal. Zarathushtra had come laughing, he made the world laugh and smile and went smiling—the giver of serenity sublime. Tradition says that Zarathushtra passed away on 10 *Ardibehesht*, on about 30 April in the forty-eighth year of the establishment of the religion (48 ZRE) at the ripe age of seventy-seven years and forty days—circa 1690 BCE.

⁴ Yasna 30.9

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Part 5 – *THE GATHAS*

Zarathushtra passed away but left us a legacy—the GATHAS (gâthâs). They are sublime prayers addressed to God, and yet they are the Laws of Life, both at the same time. While chanting the Gathas, one praises God and simultaneously comprehends the principles of living with wisdom and truth on this earth, principles that promote men and women equally to grow godlike and to be united with God. They are a masterpiece of “love God, serve all”. The Gathas entertain no myths, epics, tales, narratives, parables, or history.

They do not belong to the past, they issue no commandments for the present, and they make no predictions about the future. They have been contemporary for four thousand years. They are timeless.

The Gathas, seventeen Sublime Songs, are the very “Code of Life”—both mental and physical, spiritual and material—for all those who choose, of their free will, “Good Conscience”, the name Zarathushtra gave the religion he so painstakingly and prudently founded and promoted. He called it Good Conscience because to him religion is nothing but an individual's conscience awakened to the realities of life. And when people share the same conscientiousness, they share the same religion. ‘Conscience’ (Gathic *daêna*) in plural means ‘religion’. We shall survey the Gathas to understand the teachings of Zarathushtra.

A Small Book

The Gathas! It is a small book, a booklet of barely 60 pages of 4 .5x7.5 inches (11x18 cms). It has 241 stanzas in all, a total of less than 6,000 words, enough to read them all within an hour. Its seventeen songs, strangely called *hâitis* meaning “sections” instead of “songs”, were composed by Ashavan Zarathushtra Spitama.

The size is perfect, a guidebook size. Its size was calculated by Ashavan Zarathushtra himself. He wanted to deliver an ever-fresh message. It had to be concise and precise. A bulk of verbosity of do's and don'ts would not have worked. He himself says that he has given us his message “in a poetic and not an unpoetic” language, “so that it shall always stay with” us (Song 9.17). A poetic piece is easily and correctly memorized and transmitted. Chances of interpolation, especially if the poetry has a halo of high holiness around it, grow very slim. This was an Aryan devise of preserving their heritage at a time when there were no devices for writing and recording. The Gathas are living only because of living memories, devout human tape-recorders. The unique technique has preserved the very dialect spoken by Zarathushtra and his companions for us. The size is perfect—concise, precise, invoking, thought-provoking.

Its logical sequence is: *Ahuna Vairya*, the emblematic opening stanza of the Gathas, as the first, followed by the songs from one to seventeen, and concluded by the benedictory *Airyema Ishya. Ashem Vohu*, a third outstanding stanza, could have come at the very beginning as the “motto” of righteousness, or, as was the case with Pahlavi writers, at the very end as a sublime colophon. This makes the Gathas a coherent collection. Each stanza is like a pearl in a cord of song, and each cord of song is a part of a necklace of the “divan”, complete poetic works.

This is what Zarathushtra wanted to leave for his present and future companions—a thought-provoking message. All other talks, sayings and statements said by him in prose or even poetry on the daily life of four thousand years ago belonged to his time and are naturally lost. What is left as an eternal message is his coherent Gathas.

Preservation and Transmission of the Gathas

The survival of the Gathas to the present day is the outcome of a sad story which, nevertheless, has a happy ending. By the time the Sassanian dynasty gained the Kayanian crown of Persia in the year 1961 of the Zarathushtrian Religious Era (ZRE), or 224 CE, the language of Zarathushtra and companions had become an “unknown, mysterious” language. The Gathas became incorporated in a group of writings now known as the Avesta which became regarded as sacred scriptures in its own right. It was only through translations, interpretations, and commentaries in the Pahlavi language of the Sassanian days that the knowledge of the Avesta, including the Gathas, could be gained.

The downfall of the Sassanian Empire in 2367 ZRE (630 CE) and the subsequent eclipse of the Zarathushtrian Religion brought hard times down upon the faithful. The collection of sacred writings was badly damaged and only one-third of the Avesta, mostly consisting of its religious part, survived more or less as a result of the catastrophe. Fortunately, the Gathas survived intact through this extremely hard time because of the valiant efforts of the priests who had thoroughly memorized them for their liturgical ceremonies. The priests did their best and one should be grateful to them for what they did under very adverse conditions.

The key to what the Gathas state was practically found by Western scholars who got interested in “Oriental” studies in 18th century CE. The recovery of the Gathas is fairly recent. Most of what we know about the Gathas has been, more or less, uncovered during the past one hundred years. We owe much to the patient Western scholars who gave it an impetus. The slogan of “Back to the Gathas” by some reformist Zarathushtrians is even more recent.

A Challenge to Consider

The five Gathas in the Avesta are the very divinely inspired words of Zarathushtra, the holiest of the holies. Yasna 55 is a befitting lengthy praise in honor of the Gathas. It says that they “are the Primal Principles of Life... They are, as Lord Wise wishes, meant to maintain an ever fresh and modern life... The Gathas are our guardians and protectors. They are food for our minds, rather, food and clothing for our souls.” The statement made by the composer of Yasna 55 is very

challenging. He or she made it some 3500 years ago. But is it and can it be still true? Why not have a quick glimpse through the Gathas?

The Gathas are basically *Mâñthras*, literally ‘thought-provokers’. This is the reason why they are so concise and precise. They stimulate one's thinking faculty and guide it on to the track to think precisely. They stir one to move on a clear, straight road with a basic map in hand and a discerning vision in mind.

The Gathas are prayers to God and guidance for humanity. Every line, every stanza, and every song is communion with God; and at the same time, they impart an eternally modern message. They lead humanity, with all its modern science, to Ahura Mazda, God of Subtle Wisdom. With the Gathas as the guide in thought, word, and deed, one may devote one's life in practicing, teaching, and preaching the divine doctrine. Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds are the quintessence of the Gathas. Should we keep in mind that the above points are not a designed selection from a miscellany or an encyclopedia by numerous authors of different ages and divergent schools, but from a booklet by a single composer, we will realize the uniformity, universality, modernity, and the subtlety of the thought-provoking message.

No Interference

The “Good Religion” founded and forwarded by Zarathushtra Spitama is a self-renovating religion, a religion that provides humankind of all times with basic principles of life which guide one to perfection and eternity. Such a religion simply cannot give directions regarding minute movements of everyday life and social norms which change with the passing time.

Zarathushtra's only words, the Gathas of seventeen songs with opening and concluding stanzas, are more or less like a first class concise seventeen-page road map meant to guide well a person, from his or her starting point in life to his or her destination in the life beyond. The map provides the principal data of the roads that lead from one town to another town and to the final destination. It is then left to the traveler to be an adult, trained, educated, experienced, prepared, equipped, and adapting to traverse the road wisely and safely. He or she must use his or her discretion to drive, halt, drink, eat, rest, check the vehicle, refill, and set out for the next stop, and all along enjoy the progressing trip.

The Gathas are not a voluminous unabridged dictionary or a twenty-four-volume encyclopedia to refer and find the answers provided by authors other than the person referring to it. Such dictionaries and encyclopedias need continuous updating or else the information given by would be outdated. The same holds for any religion which solely relies on its old traditions for answers to every question asked and does not budge an inch to move forward.

Zarathushtra does not treat human beings as children who need to be guided in every move they make, to feed, clean, wash, clothe, walk, talk, and train them and also tell them again and again “do this!” and many times more “No, no, don't do this!” Zarathushtra treats human beings as adults, well trained by their parents, who can “listen to the best and ponder with a bright mind,

and then each one, for his or herself, choose between the two,” right or wrong.¹ He provides them with the Primal Principles of Life so that, by choosing the **Right** path realized by him, it is chosen. He knew well that the passage of time means continued change. Any directive in detail would soon be outdated. So, he left it to the “lords of wisdom”,² the scholars and scientists of the day, to respond to the requirements of their time. It is these experts and specialists who provide us with normal and abnormal phases of human behavior, and how to promote, demote, correct, remove or cure them.

The Gathas never indulge in details of what one must do and must not do in a society. The Gathas do not interfere into the details of one's daily life. They do not make life cumbersome by breathing down one's neck. They do not prescribe what to eat and what to reject, what to wear and what to tear, what to build and what to wreck, when to work and when to retire, when to celebrate and when to mourn, what is disease and what the cure, and what observances for the dead and how to dispose of a corpse... Had they done so, this very act would have rendered the Gathas obsolete within a short period.

The divinely enlightened Zarathushtra knew well that society and civilization do not remain long unchanged. They are continuously changing with the passing time. Social differences are evident from time to time and place to place. Any instruction on daily life would grow old, or be out of place in another location, and if it became a tradition to be adhered to, it would only prove an obstruction in a changing and progressing world. That does not mean that the Gathas advocate abandoning or discarding any good, logical, and useful tradition. In fact, they favor maintaining and promoting a rich and enriching heritage.³ What they disown is obsolete, retarding, useless, dumb, unintelligible, and superstitious customs.

A universal message cannot force the traditions of one society upon another's. A universal message ought to be above regional and temporal differences. And that is what the Gathas are. With the Gathas as the guide, one need not try, generally in vain, to stop the clock and transfer a mode of living to another land, only to maintain an outmoded, out-of-place practice. With the Gathas as the guide, one need not cut, clip, patch, piece and paste, or alter, change, transform, transmute and modify any custom just to adapt to, what one may call, an alien environment. It is the Gathic society, ever-fresh, ever-modern, ever-logical, ever-scientific, and ever-divine, which prevails. One does not need an adaptation with the Gathas as the guide.

Back to the Gathas?

Back to the Gathas? Sounds an attractive slogan, but no! The Gathas are not the past to go back to. The Gathas are the guide and as such, they are the present and the future. The slogan or motto, if any, should be: “Forward with the Gathas!” What, therefore, is needed is neither revision nor modification nor reformation, but restoration. We must resort to the Gathas, so far

¹ Yasna 30.1

² *mazdāscā ahurāñhō*, which appears in Yasna 30.9 and 31.4. – CG

³ Song 9.2 (Y 44.1)

unconsciously kept high above reach, in order to restore ourselves to the Good Conscience, the true Zarathushtrian religion. The restoration of pure and pristine Gathic principles of life in every wake of life—both mental and physical—would automatically mean modernization, rather a continuous modernizing process. It shall keep us always abreast of time, abreast with foresight.

Let us, therefore, read later the Gathas themselves to fully comprehend and realize that we have the true guidelines for an up-to-date mental and physical, spiritual and material life on this good earth and beyond. “May we learn, understand, comprehend, practice, teach, and preach” the inspiring message of the divinely inspired Mânthran, the thought-provoking Teacher, because according to Yasna 55, the Gathas, Our Guide are “the Primal Principles of Life... (and) we wish to maintain our lives fresh as is the will (of God Wise).”

We will, in the following parts of **THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA**, see what the Gathas state about God, God's creation, Primal Principles of Life, Freedom of Choice, human society, rituals and many other points to lead a healthy, happy, rich, progressive spiritual and physical life on this good earth and the life beyond.

Sources:

- (1) The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra, Irach J.S. Taraporewala, Bombay, 1951.
- (2) The Gathas of Zarathustra, a reconstruction of the text. Maria Cornelia Monna, Amsterdam, 1978.
- (3) Stot Yasn (The Gathic Part of the Avesta consisting of the Gathas of Zarathushtra and Supplements by His Companions, translation and annotation in Persian), Ali A. Jafarey, Tehran, 1981.
- (4) The Gathas, Our Guide, the thought-provoking divine songs of Zarathushtra, Ali A. Jafarey, Cypress, 1989.

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 6 – *GOD IN THE GATHAS*

We have already seen how Zarathushtra got attuned to the divine message. Here is a summary of how he conceived and comprehended God and communed with him. In Song 10.10,¹ he sings:

“I shall seek to exalt Him for us with veneration of serenity,
Who, by a new name, is known as Mazda Ahura, the Wise God.
He grants, through righteousness and good mind,
wholeness and immortality in His dominion.
May He grant us steadfast strength and endurance.”

It may be worth noting that the two words chosen by Zarathushtra to describe best God belong to opposite genders. Ahura, meaning ‘The Being’ with a secondary meaning ‘lord’ is masculine, and mazda ‘supreme wisdom, super-intellect’ with a secondary meaning of ‘The Wise’ is feminine. A beautiful combination, indeed! However, Zarathushtra has followed the grammatical rules of his age that when masculine and feminine nouns combine, pronouns follow the masculine rule, yet he frequently uses the neuter gender, particularly the emphatic HVA, in his Sublime Songs. We too, bound by the present Judeo-Christian usage of God taken as a masculine in English, use the masculine pronoun without assigning any particular gender to God, for God is above such an imagination. Maybe a day will come when we have a better conception of God and use the simple pronoun of IT.

Here is a gist of how Zarathushtra describes his Mazda (164 times) and Ahura (131 times) of which Mazda Ahura is mentioned for 50 times and Ahura Mazda for only eight times together or with one word in between! And yet, prompted by the later Avesta, we have become accustomed to say Ahura Mazda.

Before we proceed further, let it be pointed out here with emphasis that the term ahura (Sanskrit asura) for god is a pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian term. But mazdâ was added first by Zarathushtra alone to describe God as “Super-Intellect”. And this makes a great difference. Gods and goddesses were known for their power. Zarathushtra laid stress on God's wisdom. Strength follows super-intellect.

God is wise. He is the wisest. He is knowing, the most knowing. He knows best. He knows best the past, present, and future. He remembers all that exists. He knows the secrets of life. He is wide-viewing and all-watching. He watches every move, open or hidden. He is, above all, Mazdâ, super-intellect, supreme-wisdom.

¹ Y 45.10

God is supreme. He is the first and the latest—literally the foremost and the youngest. In other simple words: God is above age and time.

God “dwells in progress”. He is progressive, the most progressive. He is the continuous creator, maintainer, and promoter of the universe and all that is in it—the sky, stars, sun, moon, earth, everything. It means that He is not a static god who has finished with his creation and is only maintaining or guiding it to a given destiny. He regulates the universe through *asha*, the ‘law of precision’. His *spenta mainyu*, ‘progressive mentality’, continues to create and promote his creation. He possesses *vohu manah*, ‘good mind’, the wisdom that maintains it. He establishes *khshathra*, the ‘divine dominion’, in which all is well, everything is good, and every creature enjoys *âramaiti*, ‘serenity’. He grants *haurvatât*, ‘wholeness’, and *amaretât*, ‘immortality’, to creation. He is in continuous contact with those who want to listen to His voice, *seraasha*, the ‘inner voice’. For us, God has created the joy-bringing world. He has created the living world and bestowed it with free will. He has created body, conscience, and intelligence, and he has infused life into the physical frame. He has then granted it freedom of thought, speech, and action so that one is free to choose one’s convictions. The freedom is for all, the righteous and the wrongful, wise or unwise.

God is of oneaccord with *asha*. He does not violate the very laws he has so wisely ordained. His laws entertain no exceptions. It means no unexplained freaks, no never-understood miracles.

God is the judge. He upholds the prime laws. He is the lord of life. It is God who has ordained that good deeds produce good rewards, and evil deeds have bad consequences. The Laws are not to be broken, not even by mercy.

God is kind. He is friendly, a good friend, an ally. He is loving. He is loved.

God is the guide. He is the teacher. To him all ultimately return.

God is mighty. He is the mightiest. He is the greatest. He is powerful, most powerful. He is ruling-at-will.

In short, God is Mazda Ahura, the supreme Wise Being. It is, to repeat a point, the name given by Zarathushtra to explain God in two meaningful words. God is super-wisdom personified, and God is The Being. Every other conceivable attribute is but a part of these two wondrous words.

The Gathas do not present God as wrathful, awful, dreadful, vengeful, resentful, jealous, or, on the contrary, merciful, because these aspects would render God personal and are also in violation of the very pristine laws he has ordained. The “awful” theory makes one dread God, and the “merciful” theme encourages one to commit evil acts and feel sure of “amnesty”. God is just loving and a loved friend; that is enough.

Mankind on this earth has a high position. He is a companion of God in mind and action. A progressive person is associated with God. One who promotes and develops a house, settlement,

district or land with righteousness becomes godlike. In fact, as a progressive teacher, he is godlike.

Personally Impersonal

God in the Gathas is the impersonal Supreme Being. Nevertheless, one comes across poetic expressions such as “for my enlightenment, teach me to speak the thoughts of Your mind and the words of Your mouth,” He “watches with sharp eyes through *asha*,” and “You help with Your own hands.” Zarathushtra conceives God by beholding him with his eyes of thoughts, words, and deeds. He befriends him and falls in love with him. He is in communion with God as any other person can rise to be. It is the inner voice, *seraosha*, that leads to God, the ultimate goal.

Although these few references to mouth, eyes, and hands are clearly allegorical, they bring closer to the human mind an abstract God and make him a personal being, giving one the warm feelings of a relationship, the close, cordial relationship between the created and the Creator. A God so impersonal and yet so personal! Perhaps this a very beautiful side of “God in the Gathas”.

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 7 – *DIVINE EMANATIONS*

Zarathushtra uses some twenty abstract terms to prescribe the way of promoting mental and physical faculties of the soul to achieve perfection and immortality. He calls them “the primal divine laws of life”. They are described as “divine names” in Haptanghaiti, the “Seven Sections” in the Gathic dialect. In the Farvardin Yasht, it is “the progressive thought-provoking message, the very spirit of God,” which gives these abstracts “beautiful, active forms”, and God the Creator is their “guardian and guide”. The context of the Gathas shows them as divine emanations, which are sometimes poetically personified. They are the universal laws of nature, the natural way of living.

Of these *asha*, ‘precision’, has been mentioned more than 150 times and *merzhdika*, ‘compassion’, only once. We shall only briefly define the ones mostly mentioned in the Gathas:

- *Spenta Mainyu*, the ‘progressive mentality’, stands for the creative faculty of God. It creates, sustains, and promotes the creation. It leads to perfection and immortality.
- *Vohu manah*, the ‘good mind’, is the source of all that is good and wise. It was through his own good mind that Zarathushtra discovered, understood, and reached the Godhead. Good mind leads to refined speech, which, in turn, turns into noble actions. Zarathushtra's doctrine rests on three pillars: *Humata*, *Hukhta*, *Hvarshata* ‘Good thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds.’ Good mind helps one to discriminate between good and bad. It defines the sources of happiness and sorrow. In fact, it is the bliss some call “heaven”. Two other cognate abstracts are *khratu*, ‘intellect’, and *chisti*, ‘comprehension’ which enhance one's knowledge for better work.
- *Asha*, or *arta*, is the old Indo-Iranian law of ‘truth, precision, righteousness’ that governs the universe—sun, moon, earth, seasons, and all. It is precision and order in the universe that points to the Creator, Maintainer, and Promoter. It has been enacted to maintain the creation. It is the road to perfection. In human society, *asha* is the right thing, done at the right time and right place, and with the right means to obtain the right result. This promotes a society to perfection. It ensures justice for all. It safeguards the rights of every member of society. It provides every individual with what he or she has contributed to society. *Asha* in a society sees that neither the society nor any individual exploits any person. And, above all, *asha* gives freedom of thought, word and deed to every member.
- *Seraosha* is the divine voice one gets in tune with after one is fully in conversant with good mind and righteousness. It is the guiding inner self of a person. It is divine inspiration.
- *Âthra*, ‘fire’ in the Gathas, is mental light, warmth, and energy, three qualities that help one become as creative as one can. The physical fire, used as the best of altars, represents

the mental *âthra*, a sublime object to observe and mentally to see the light, feel the warmth and enjoy the energy to translate Good Thoughts into Good Words and Good Deeds.

- *Ushâtâ* is enlightenment that comes through meditation, concentration of mental faculties. It is the true happiness that radiates happiness to others without any discrimination, social or otherwise.
- *Daênâ* is clear conception. It is ‘conscience’ in an individual and ‘religion’ for a fellowship of individuals who actively join to promote the living world in accordance with the Primal Principles of Life.
- Good mind, precision and other principles create perfect order. Zarathushtra calls it *khshathra*. It means ‘sovereignty, rule, settlement, and dwelling’. It is the “desired”, the “good”, and the “chosen” government of the righteous, yet it belongs to God. It is the “ideal” order on the earth established by human beings who are wise, enlightened, experienced, sincere, and above all devoted to the promotion of the living world.
- *Âramaiti*, serenity and tranquility, thrives under a good order. A tranquil order promotes health and happiness, and mind and body grow together evolving to:
- *Haurvatât*, wholeness, perfection. Evolution to wholeness means continuity, and continuity stands for immortality—*ameretât*. Wholeness and immortality make human beings **godlike** and make them live in eternal bliss, the ultimate goal of the Zarathushtrian doctrine.

Zarathushtra uses more principles among abstract qualities that could help mankind to make the world an ideal place to live in peace and harmony with every living being, and to achieve the divine eternity ordained by God.

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 8 – “SPENTA MAINYU” and GOOD AND EVIL IN THE GATHAS

Almost all Zoroastrians and those who are well acquainted with Zoroastrianism know the term *Spenta Mainyu*, and since the days the Avesta was translated by the early Christian scholars—who happened to have the “Holy Ghost” and the “Holy Spirit” in mind—into English and other European languages, the term has conventionally come to mean ‘Holy Spirit’. The general notion about it is that it has an adversary Anghra Mainyu,¹ the Evil Spirit pitched in a life-and-death battle against.

Spenta is derived by the majority of philologists from an Avestan/Sanskrit root *spi-/shvi-*, meaning ‘to fatten, expand, swell, increase’. It is, therefore, rendered by many as ‘incremental’. The Pahlavi rendering of *afzunik*,² meaning ‘increasing’ clearly supports the translation. There are a few more renderings such as beneficent, bounteous, bountiful, virtuous, and even white. Yet the familiar and convenient Christian term of “Holy” has been taken for granted.

Mainyu is derived by every scholar from *man-* ‘to think’. Although many know that *-yu-* is an agentive and instrumental suffix, none has bothered to translate it as ‘an instrument, a way, a mode of thinking, mind, mentality’ and have taken the early rendering of ‘spirit’ as quite suitable to their interpretation of a perpetual war between the so-called “twin spirits”. Many present Ahura Mazda as “Spenta Mainyu” and consequently elevate Anghra Mainyu to make “him” the adversary of the “God of Good” and thus create a continuous fight between the two. As a result, Zoroastrians have been characterized as people who believe in dualism. The Gathas provide us with an entirely different picture:

Here the context shows that *spenta* means ‘incremental, increasing, expanding, progressing, and progressive’. *Mainyu* means ‘means of thinking, faculty of thinking, mind, and mentality’. The term “Spenta Mainyu” is an attribute of Mazda Ahura, literally ‘Super-wisdom Being’. Mainyu stands for the divine intelligence with a continuous creative, sustaining, and promoting function.

The term “Spenta Mainyu” occurs for fifteen times in the Gathas and twice in the Hantanghaiti.³ These seventeen references are the only instances in which the term “Spenta Mainyu” is mentioned in the entire Gathic text. And in them, there is no trace of any adversary of

¹ The spelling *anghra* appears in certain manuscripts (usually Pahlavi Yasna) and is closer to the original form of the word *anghra /ahra/* coming from a similar origin as *ahreman*. – CG

² The Pahlavi word can also be spelled *abzōnīg*. – CG

³ Gathas Song 1.1; 6.12; 8.2, 8.6, 8.16; 9.7; 10.6; 12.1-6; 16.7; Hantanghaiti Song 2.1-2 (Yasna 28.1; 33.12; 43.2, 43.6, 43.16; 44.7; 47.1-6; 51.7; 36.1-2)

God, or any struggle, battle, or war between the so-called “good and evil forces”. The question of Good and Evil is NOT related to the divine “Spenta Mainyu”. It is a separate subject of human behavior and lies outside the scope of this subject.

The Gathas depict “Spenta Mainyu” as the subtle divine faculty of the continuous creation and expansion plan of God. Zarathushtra, in quest for truth, discovers that it is the “Spenta Mainyu” phase of the Super-wisdom Being that creates and promotes the universe, including our earth with its waters, plants, and living beings. God generated “spenta mainyu” so that the “joy-bringing world” is created. The entire quest yields to Zarathushtra that God is *spenta*, in fact, *spenishta*, the ‘most progressive’. That is why Zarathushtra also “chooses for himself” *spenishta mainyu*, the ‘most progressive mentality’, so that a new life is breathed into the physical body, serenity prevails throughout “the divine kingdom”, and perfection and immortality are achieved. It is the progressive mentality that separates the two parties of mankind on earth—the righteous who promote the world and the wrongful who retard their living. It is again the progressive mentality which “enlightens” the wrongful to seek truth and ultimately become righteous. This enlightenment is called fire, symbol of light, warmth, and energy, by the Gathas and the Haptanghaiti.

It is this light, this warmth, this energy that Zarathushtra prays that every benevolent person has. He sings:

“Moreover, may the best of blessings come to the person
who gives blessings to others.
Wise One, may his knowledge grow,
throughout the days of his long life of joy,
through Your most progressive mentality,
the wondrous wisdom of good mind
You created by means of righteousness.”
(Song 8.3⁴)

Zarathushtra wants every person to be godlike, to choose “Spenta Mainyu”, the enlightening light, the invigorating warmth, and the vitalizing energy, in fact the intuitive mind to be creative, promoter, and progressive in our joy-bringing world. “Spenta Mainyu” is, the Gathas tell us, the guiding inspiration, the enlightening intuition, the constructive promotion in our good lives. It is the divine spark in us. Let us maintain and brighten it more by joining Zarathushtra in a meditative prayer:

“Lord Wise, rise within me,
grant me courage through serenity,
good gifts of prayers through the most progressive mentality,
full vigor through righteousness,
and felicity through good mind.
To support me, Wide-watching Lord,
reveal to me the force of Your sovereignty,

⁴ Yasna 43.3

the blessings of good mind.
Show me through progressive serenity, righteous conceptions.”

GOOD AND EVIL

Because of the sufferings in what appears to be a hostile world of natural disasters and human cruelties, the existence of “evil” has all along posed a perplexed problem. Intellectuals of all ages and lands have tried to solve it. Most of them have acknowledged it as a stubborn fact of life.

People's attitude towards evil ranges from optimism, pessimism, and cynicism to skepticism. There are those who do not believe in evil and state that it does not exist; those who argue that just as darkness is nothing but the absence of light, evil darkens where good does not shine; those who say that one cannot fight evil and therefore should submit to it; those who want to escape evil and retire from the world by leaving behind all human wishes and desires; and those who acknowledge shortcomings and want to overcome them by facing them. People necessarily do not belong strictly to one of these broad classifications. Many share a little of each theory and have mixed philosophies or express different ideas at different times.

People are divided again on the source of evil. Those who believe in a strict patriarchal/matriarchal divinity (or divinities) and see suffering as punishments for wrong deeds. Those who think that just as there are good and bad chiefs and kings, there are good and evil entities who bring happiness or misery. Those who believe that the gods have created human beings as their toys and enjoy playing around with them. Those who believe in a rebel divinity who is causing all the trouble. Those who are dualists and maintain that both good and evil are primal and co-existing. Those who see the two as positive and negative poles that meet to create energy and existence. Those who see the world as imperfect or in its infancy, and that its sufferings are the experiences toward perfection. All have their logic, philosophy, stories, legends, or myths to elaborate. Many believe that evil exists in the universe and many confine it, some in vague terms, to the human world.

Zarathushtra observes the universe as a good creation of God and sees no evil in it. It is a cosmos—an orderly harmonious system. However, there are indications that he sees the universe in its infancy, complete in every form but growing to perfection and immortality.

As regards good and evil, he confines both to the human mind, not outside, not in the cosmos. Man thinks and thinks constantly. His thoughts are either good or bad, beneficial or harmful. When translated in speech or action, they yield the result—good or bad.

The Gathic term for mentality or mind is *mainyu*. In his songs, he calls the good once *spanyo*, meaning ‘more increasing, more progressive’, and once *vahyo*, meaning ‘better’. He terms the evil once *angra*, meaning ‘retarding, twisting’, and once *aka*, meaning ‘bad’. The two represent the duality only in the human mind and within the human society. The dualism in the Gathas is pure ethical in nature.

The criterion for “better” or “more progressive” thought, word, and deed is the beneficial effect on the human society in particular and the world in general. If not, it is “bad” or “retarding”.

THE HUMAN SOCIETY

The Gathic dualism lies only in *asha* ‘righteousness’ and *druj* ‘harmful lie’. The human world is divided into two camps: the righteous, truthful and progressive, and the wrongful, retarding and destructive. The Gathas advocate a free, peaceful, prudent, and progressive society, both in spirit and matter. Spirituality makes people realize the divine in creation and conceive the force and order—the wisdom—behind it. It makes them conceive God. It promotes them to commune with God and be godlike. Materiality makes people understand their social environment and the living world. It teaches them the philosophy of living and letting others live, and of living in harmony with nature.

Only responsible men and women make up the Gathic society. Carefree and parasitic people have no place in it. A person, be he or she wise, naive, strong, or weak, has his or her responsibilities in society. Zarathushtra stands for freedom of thought, word, and deed, and stands against suppression and exploitation. He condemns all “wrong done by evil power, deeds, words, conception, and mind.” He repeatedly reminds people that good has a good reward, and bad has a bad consequence. And to be good is to be selflessly good.

In a true Zarathushtrian society, all are free to work for a better world without harming others. Every person receives in reward what one does in renovating human life. Every task is undertaken by fully qualified persons, the better the qualifications, the higher the position. Society is led by the very wise. Men and women are equal, and their superiority lies in their wisdom and righteousness. The smallest unit in society is the family, then the community, next the fellowship, and last the world.

HEAVEN AND HELL

Zarathushtra speaks very little about a world from which no one has returned to tell us the tale. He never indulges in speculations. He does not thrive on speculations but on conclusions from what one discovers and understands. He mentions certain terms which give one an idea of a higher and sublimer spiritual life. They are the “House of Song”, “House of Good Mind”, and the “Eternal Best Existence of Good Mind”. Only once, he uses the term “future existence”.⁵ It is where one lives with God. The language is so that one understands that such a sublime state is both mental and physical in this world but only mental when the soul attains its perfection and immortality.

But if a person lives a life of “harmful lie” in a human society, promotes an evil and deceitful government, sows seeds of discord among people, disregards social rules and regulations, and takes pleasure in harming the living world, he or she suffers the consequences of his or her actions and teachings, and remains in the “House of Wrong”. He singles out bad rulers and evil priests as the foremost among such persons. Another term for this is the “House of the Worst

⁵ Y 46.19, where the word is /para-ahūm/. – CG

Mind”. The soul of a wrongful person returns from the “sorting bridge” back into the world of deceit. This bridge separates the righteous from the wrongful. The righteous progress but the wrongful remain in the world to perfect themselves. Does this mean reincarnation or that the soul lingers on without a physical body until it is perfected? Perhaps, but only a thought-provoking hint without any speculations.

This does not mean that there is no salvation for the wrongful. Their souls suffer the consequences of their words and deed until they realize the divine truth and choose to turn righteous and work for their own perfection and immortality. This life is but a refinery in which the souls are refined to perfection. To sum up, the pristine doctrine of Zarathushtra's “heaven and hell” is more of a mental bliss and torment than the two physical places reserved for ultimate sensual enjoyment or suffering.

The resurrection with all its details of how the dead would rise for the final judgment is again absent in the Gathas. The consequences of people's words and deeds in this world and the progress toward perfection and immortality are a continuous process. There are no pauses, no waiting.

God's creation moves forward and we, souls and bodies, are a part of it.

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 9 – *DEATH IN THE GATHAS*

The general idea about death in the Zoroastrian religion is that it is evil and has been introduced in the divine cosmos by Anghra Mainyu, the so-called “Evil Adversary of the Godhead”—and so are all those causes which bring death: disease, destruction, harm, pestilence, and many more harmful ills which plague the human society and its environment. This would mean that the Gathas of Zarathushtra, the fountainhead of the divine doctrine, should be plain and precise on death as an evil product. Let us see if it is so.

The root in Avesta and Sanskrit for death is *mar/mr* ‘to die’. The causative *mâr* means ‘to kill’. Derivatives include *merethyu/mrtyu*, death; *mareta* and *maretan*, ‘mortal’ and therefore, ‘man, human being’. The Avestan *mashya*, Old Persian *martya*, Sanskrit *martya*, Persian *mard* also mean ‘mortal’ and therefore ‘man’. A point to note for those who know Persian, *mard* and its derivatives meaning male, manly, stalwart, generous, etc. are all later and conventional meanings. Another cognate root is *marech/mrch* ‘to injure, inflict, destroy’. It supplies the abstract *maraka*, injury, destruction. In Pahlavi and Persian *marg* has come to mean ‘death’. *Mered/mrd* is yet another cognate root. It means ‘to crush, pound, ruin’.

Incidentally, the Gathas use all the above derivatives. We find the abstracts *merethyu* ‘death’; and *maraca* ‘destruction’; nouns *mareta* and *mashya* ‘mortals, mankind, human’; and verbs *marech* ‘to injure, destroy’ and *mered* ‘to crush, ruin’. The words for mankind are used five times. Good mind (*vohu manah*) is asked if it knew “any person who can help mortals” (Song 2. 7¹). “Seekers of false gods... afflicted the human existence” (S 3.6²). The distorters of the doctrine of good life “try to distract mortals from excellent deeds”: (S 5.12³). The divine word “is the best to be heard by the mortals” (S 10.5⁴). Zarathushtra blesses the person “among men who pleases him with care” (S 11.13⁵). These instances do not shed any light on death. They simply stand for the physically mortal man with no slighting sense attached to it. In fact, the human being called by any term stands exalted in the Sublime Songs.

The verb *marech*, which means ‘to injure’ in Sanskrit, seems to have acquired a stronger notion—‘to destroy’ in Avesta, or perhaps later in Pahlavi. The author is of the opinion that it means ‘to damage, to impair’ in the Gathas, but to lessen the chances of an argument, it is translated here as ‘to destroy’. Here are the quotations:

“Keeping the two principles (of good and evil) in mind, we shall teach the hitherto unheard words to those who destroy (*vi-merechaite*) the righteous world by their wrongful doctrines. No

¹ Y 29.7

² Y 30.6

³ Y 32.12

⁴ Y 45.5

⁵ Y 46.13

doubt, the two principles will prove the best to those who are devoted to the Wise One” (S 4.1⁶). “... Let not the evil teacher, the wrongful, with his evil choice and perverted tongue, destroy (*merânshyat*) the life for a second time” (S 10.1⁷). “The priests and princes yoke people under duress to destroy (*meregeidyai*) life with their evil actions...” (S 11.11,⁸). “Now, Wise One, the person who wants to destroy (*merekhshaite*) us, is indifferent to this doctrine...” (S 16.10⁹). “... With these (wrongful actions), you shall destroy (*merengedye*) your mental life” (S 17.6¹⁰). The Avestan word rendered as ‘life’ in the above passage is *ahu*, which, in the Gathic context, means ‘existence or life in this world’.

Two other derivations *maraka* and *marakhâr* are used only once each. “Therefore, let none of you listen to the messages and teachings of the wrongful, because he brings danger and destruction (*maraka*) to house, settlement, district, and land...” (S 4.18¹¹). “It is because of such power (of wealth) that the destroyers (*marakhtâro*) of this life wish to gain their spoils in the house of worst mind...” (S 5.13¹²).

The Gathic *maraka* is pronounced *mahrka* in the Later Avesta. It has been used a number of times. In Yasna 57.25, Sraosha, intuition personified, is asked to “protect us for our lives, both in physical and mental existences, against wrongful death, wrongful wrath, against a wrongful army with uplifted bloody banners...”

But noteworthy are the two quotations from the Yashts. Mithra (Mehr), Yazata of Covenant, when offended and not satisfied, declares: “To whom shall I, in my might, impart disease and death? To whom shall I impart poverty that brings misery? Of whom shall I, at one stroke, cut off the noble progeny?” (Yasht 10.110). Verethraghna (Bahram), Yazata of Victory, who accompanies Mithra and Rashnu on a warpath against covenant-breakers, also wants to know “To whom, in my might, shall I impart disease and death?” Surprisingly enough, death and disease are given here, not by the so-called Evil Spirit, but by two major yazatas, both pre-Zarathushtrian deities, evidently, as a punishment for offenses against them.

Whatever the case, this is in contrast to the Gathic spirit of benevolence. Furthermore, contrary to the punishing actions of the two yazatas, the Vendidad says that death and disease, and other calamities, are brought by heretics and those who do not practice purification rites (9.47, 51; 20.1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10; 21.2), and never by God. In fact, the Vendidad is explicit: Death is evil and Anghra Mainyu is *pouru-mahrka*, full-of-death, the very cause of it.

Mered ‘to crush, pound, ruin’ occurs four times in four consecutive stanzas in the Gathas: (1) “The evil teacher ruins with his teachings the doctrine of the wisdom of life...” (2) “Indeed, he ruins the doctrine who considers it the worst to look at the world and the sun with plain eyes, who sets the just against the wrongful, who devastates settlements, and who throws a deadly weapon at the righteous.” (3) “Also, they ruin life who highly regard the wrongful as lords and

⁶ Y 31.1

⁷ Y 45.1

⁸ Y 46.11

⁹ Y 51.10

¹⁰ Y 53.6

¹¹ Y 31.18

¹² Y 32.13

ladies, rob the people of their property, and try hard to distract the righteous from their best mind.” (4) “... They ruin worldly life in luxury. It is for this reason that the grabbing priests have chosen the wrong dominion of the wealthy instead of righteousness” (S 5.9–12¹³).

Merethyu, the only word which truly means ‘death’, is used once in the Gathas: “Let... killing and wounding be prevented and peace be brought to homes and settlements. Let affliction be gone. He is the greatest who restrains death (*merethyaosh*). And let it be soon!” (S 17.8¹⁴). Here, good control of violence brings about greatest restraint on death by violence. *Merethyu* occurs thrice in the Later Avesta, all concerning the legendary Yima Khshaeta (King Jamshid) who prays and consequently succeeds in removing cold, heat, thirst, hunger, old age, and death from the living world of fauna and flora during his ideal reign (Yasna 9.5, Yasht 9.10, Yashts 15.16, Vendidad 2.5). Here death, due to old age and other natural causes, obviously means a natural death.

But there remains the question of Gathic dualism (See *Good and Evil*—Ali A Jafarey). For the Gathas, it is an ethical dualism and the entire problem of good and evil does not exist outside the human mind and society. But what about the much-spoken creation of life and death by the so-called two “spirits”? The Gathic term *mainyu* actually means ‘mentality’. The only occurrence in the Gathas states: “When the two (mentalities, the better and the bad) got together, they created life (*gaya*) and ‘not-living’ (*ajyâiti*). Until the end of existence (*ahu*), the worst mind shall be for the wrongful, and the best mind shall be for the righteous” (S 3.4¹⁵). While *gaya* stands for ‘life, the vital force’, *jyâiti* and its variants mean ‘living, way of life, condition of being alive’.¹⁶ Its negative *ajyâiti* is not death but a “lack of living”. In other words, it means a person who righteously does not live his life on this good earth. His or hers is a life wasted. That is what a bad mentality does.

We have given thirteen quotations from the Gathas and all of them speak of death and destruction through violence by the wrongfully powerful people—priests, princes, and pillagers. It is the destruction of human life on this earth by cruelty and brutality. Death as a natural process of human life is not mentioned. Zarathushtra does pray for a long and happy life, but he is not interested in a deathless life in this world. He wants strength, endurance, progress, perfection, immortality, and the final life with Ahura Mazda in the “House of Song” for himself and for all. But death does not occur as a disrupter in this course to finality. In fact, natural death does not hunt and haunt or scare and scar the people of the Avesta, whether they belong to the Gathic period or not. The life, in the Yasna, Vispered, Yashts, and other existing parts of the Avesta, with the exception of the Vendidad, a later priestly addition to Zoroastrian scriptures, is not interrupted by death.

It is the ills of society that challenge the Gathic people and make them determined to eradicate them all. What they aspire for and practice is a happy progressive life, both mental and physical or, to use the current terms, spiritual and material, with Ahura Mazda, God Wise, as the

¹³ Y 32.9–12

¹⁴ Y 53.8

¹⁵ Y 30.4

¹⁶ Song 4.15, 5.5, 5.11–12, 5.15, 6.10, 11.8, 17.9 (Yasna 31.15, 32.5, 32.11–12, 32.15, 33.10, 46.4, 46.8, 53.9)

final goal. To them every righteous person is “progressive, eternal, ever-gaining, and ever-growing... because he or she lives a life of good mind” (Haptanghaiti 4¹⁷).

The Gathic and relevant Avestan texts speak of the soul as if it were in a living body and not of a departed person. Life is continuity. Perhaps that is the reason why the ancient Zarathushtrians celebrated their birthdays but did not mourn the death-days of their dear ones. The birthday of Zarathushtra is eulogized in the Farvardin Yasht (88–94). His death is not eulogized at all. The Gathas recommend one to extol persons during their lifetime and after (S 16.22¹⁸). The Avesta advises one to hold a memorial service for a departed person (Yasna 26) and also to collectively commemorate the dead for their services to the advancement of righteousness at the end of the year, the origin of the present-day *panjeh*, or *muktad* memorial rites (Farvardin Yasht).

Yasna 55, a fine eulogy, dedicated to the Gathas, puts it beautifully: “... The Gathas are our guardians and protectors. They are food for our minds, in fact, food and clothing for our souls. May they be, after the parting of the consciousness (*baodhah*) and the body, a good reward, much reward, true reward for the existence beyond.” The parting of consciousness and body is repeated in the same phrasing in the Vendidad (8.81–96, 9.43). It is worth noting that instead of *gaya* ‘vital force’ or *ushtâna* ‘glowing energy’, two Gathic terms for life, or what one would have expected, the word of *urvan* ‘soul’; another Gathic word meaning ‘consciousness, awakening’ (*baodhah*) has been used to denote the departure from the physical form.

The Gathas and the prayerful parts of the Avesta state that **fury** (*aeshma*) is the root of all violence and that violence must be stopped in all its forms, mental and physical—attack, assault, injury, murder, injustice, suppression, subjugation, aggression, and annihilation, and this includes untimely death. At the same time, they assert that life does not part with death. It is indeed a continuity. And death, a natural process, is not evil but is surely a transitory passage, perhaps in an anesthetic state, to eternity, finality, to both *haurvatât* and *amaretât*: wholeness and immortality of soul.

¹⁷ Yasna 38

¹⁸ Yasna 51.22

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 10 – *RITUALS IN THE GATHAS*

*Mazda, Wise God, with a bow and uplifted arms,
I pray. First, I ask for support
through the “progressive mentality.”
Then, I pray that I perform all my actions,
based as they are on the wisdom of “good mind,”
precisely according to the laws of righteousness;
so that I please You and the living world.
(Song 1.1, Opening stanza of the Gathas)*

Prayer is an expression. It is either a request or a gratitude. When a person or an animal needs something from an elder, he makes a request. When granted, he gives thanks. Animals have their own ways to request and thank. Humans have their own.

A major requirement in life is security. Lack of it generates fear. Fear for life has been very instrumental in making requests and offering thanks, and consequently in shaping rituals. Going back thousands of years, we find the weakling of the primitive human being surrounded by hostile forces in the shape of ferocious animals and natural disasters. With his superior intellect and acquired skills, he could save himself and his kindred from animals. Natural disasters, which he could not understand, caused him to imagine them as the works of unknown superior powers, who, he thought, would listen to his entreaties and spare him the consequences. This led him to gods. Gods were far superior than his parents and elders. To them he ascribed his woes and weals. He pleaded them to help him enjoy happiness, and also thanked them for the good days he enjoyed his life.

His requests and thanks took certain forms. Further elaborated, they became institutionalized into rituals. In them, he was inspired by how he entreated his elders, and how he offered them his gratitude. Elaboration warrants specialization. Thus, the priestly class was born. The human being loves beauty. Beautifying colors kept on adding more color, consequently more intricacies to the rituals. The elaborate Aryan rituals with burning and smoking fire (Avesta *Âtar*, Sanskrit *Agni*), the instant intoxicating *Haoma/Soma* juice, milk and water libations, *baresman/barhis* twigs or grass, animal sacrifices, food offerings, and invocational or devotional songs addressed to favorite deities, speak for themselves.

Elaborate or intricate, ritualistic prayers gave eloquence to the tongue to communicate with, and wings to thoughts to fly to contact higher beings. Prayers led humans to God. He, in the sublimity of these prayers, discovered that God is above requests and thanks. It is man who needs to make the request and then feel overcome by love and say: Thanks!

This was a new turn in prayers. A prayer just for love's sake. A prayer without requesting or thanking a personal favor, a prayer just to communicate, just to serve. The Gathic prayers are based on this principle. They are, however, more than devotional prayers. They act as the guide in life to the prayerful. They are both prayers to a loving and beloved God and guiding principles to righteous men and women in their mental and physical life.

Zarathushtra cleansed the human mind of illusions and superstitions and simplified the rituals to give them both the meaning and the power they had lost in their superfluity. Zarathushtra uses different words to express himself to his God. Zarathushtra uses different words to express himself to his God. Yasna (veneration), vahma (esteem), namah (bow), sravah (chant), staota (praise), yas (implore), zava (call, invoke), and gerez (cry) have been used as nouns and verbs for some 60 times, all addressed to God.

PRAYER

In his rituals, he sings ever-new songs to Mazda Ahura (Gathas: Song 1.3)¹. He bows and at the same time he lifts up his hands (S 1.1, S 15.8)². As against the old Indo-Iranian Zaotar/hotra priest, who “invoked” gods by offering sacrifices through fire and smoke, Zarathushtra, as a “straight INVOKER”, pays his homage to “Ahura Mazda’s fire”. He offers his thoughts on righteousness (S 8.9)³. Here the master-poet Zarathushtra beautifully portrays that he is not the ritual-ridden priest zaotar, (literally ‘invoker’) whose invocation and offerings go up in smoke but a true invoker whose invocation and offerings are simply subtle and sublime. The divine fire is strong through righteousness and its warmth gives one clear thinking and good mind (S 7.4, S 8.4, S 11.7)⁴. The divine fire is, furthermore, bright and related to the “progressive mentality” (S 4.3, S 4.49, S 12.6, S 16.9; Haptanghaiti Song 2.1–3)⁵. All Gathic texts make fire a center of mental concentration, a light for spiritual meditation. It symbolizes light, warmth and energy for clear thinking and better judgment. The Aryan priest poured butter or fat in fire while presenting his invocations (âzuiti/âhuti), but Zarathushtra unites his conscience with good mind through his “aspirations and invocations” (îzhâ châ âzuitish châ) (S 14.5, Y 49.5). While others before his era offered animal and agricultural sacrifices to their deities, he gives body, soul, and the first fruits of his good mind to God, and dedicates his deeds, words, attention, all the strength to righteousness (S 6.14, Y 33.14).

His simple prayers, if at all termed as a ritual, are so absorbing that they cannot be put into an elaborate ceremony that would divert one's attention to making certain material preparations and performing some physical movements. Fire, as already said, provides an object of concentration. Also, other objects of nature, sun, moon, stars, wind, water, and trees inspire him to break into new songs in praise of the Wise One.

¹ Yasna 28.3

² Y 28.1, Y 50.8

³ Y 43.9

⁴ Y 34.4, Y 43.4, Y 46.7

⁵ Y 31.3, Y 31.19, Y 47.6, Y 51.9, Y 36.1-3

From the Haptanghaiti, seven songs by his close companions who survived him, we gather that the people gathered in an enclosure and stood around the blazing fire, or in day time, faced the sun only to praise God alone (Song 2, Yasna 36). Incidentally, this is the first time we hear of *âthrê-verezena*, a fire enclosure, the prototype of the open altars of the Achaemenian times. This supersedes the hearth fire invoked in *Âtash Nyâish*, a post-Gathic prayer. Fire temples did not exist during the Gathic period. They were adopted long after from aborigines—the Elamites, the neighboring Babylonians and other orders that coexisted during the Achaemenian period.

Therefore, the only prayer rituals mentioned in the Gathas and other texts in the Gathic dialect, are that a blazing fire was lighted within an enclosure, the prayerful stood around it, sang songs from the Gathas to God with bowed heads and uplifted hands. There was no priest who led the laity and there were no lay persons who were led. It was a collective prayer, a collective devotion.

This is beautifully attested by some of the reliefs left by the Medes and the Persians in the 6th century BCE and after. They show a fire altar, persons standing and praying with uplifted hands. They have also the sun and the moon as symbols of the divine light.

None of the texts in the Gathic dialect⁶ mention any of the objects and implements, liquid or solid, or the actions essentially required in performing rituals. This absolute lack of attention cannot be interpreted as accidental. Two terms, *mada* (intoxicant) and *duraosha* (death repeller), used for the *haoma* drink in the Younger Avesta, are found in a manner that shows complete rejection of the substance and as well as the cult connected to it. Haoma stands condemned in the Gathas (S 5.14, S 13.10)⁷. The priests who performed these elaborate and intricate ceremonies are all called *Karapans*, murmurers and moaners. Had there been an exception and had he and his “house” belonged to a special priestly order, such as the reported “*Âthravans*”, he would have mentioned it and would have praised them for their piety and purity. He knows no priests other than the *Karapans*.

The Gathas and other texts in the Gathic dialect are the only prayers specifically prescribed in the Younger Avesta⁸. No other prayer has been mentioned to be included in a Gathic ritual, a sign that the Gathic texts continued to be the only recital part of the institutionalized rituals long after Zarathushtra. Although we find an innovation of conveniently dividing the day and night into five “Gatha” times for chanting the five Gathas and Haptanghaiti, neither the Gathas nor any other text state that the Gathic prayers are to be chanted only in ceremonial prayers at specific times. On the contrary, the *Nirangistan*, the Avestan book of rituals, makes it clear: Any wise person man, woman, or minor, who has his or her girdle girded, may sing the Gathas and Haptanghaiti, whether the entire text or a line, while walking, running, standing, sitting, lying down, riding, driving, or tying the girdle at any time of the day and night, provided one puts his or her heart into it. The book recommends that if one hears a person or persons singing the sublime songs, he or she may join the chorus.

⁷ Yasna 32.14, Y 48.10

⁸ Yasna 19.5,7,21; 20.5; 55.6-7; Vispered 13.1, 2, 3; 14.1, 4; 16.0, 4; 18.0, 3; 19.0, 3; 20.0, 3; 23.0, 2; 24.0, 2; Yasht 10.92, 122; Vendidad 10.4, 12; *Nirangistan* 19 to 51; etc.

INITIATION

Fravarti or Conviction (Yasna 11.17 to 13) is the declaration of one's choice of religion. It depicts the "initiation ceremonies" in which the adult initiates renounced their previous beliefs and professions polytheism, superstitions, sorcery, arbitrariness, robbery, and other "mental and physical illnesses", each for his or her self, and join the Zarathushtrian Fellowship. It must have been quite interesting to see persons of diverse beliefs and practices come to share with those present by telling them of their past and how sorry they were for it, and how glad they felt to give it up, only to choose the Good Religion which "overthrows yokes, sheaths swords, promotes self reliance and is righteous." The main part of *Fravarti* which concerns the declaration of the choice of religion is also known as *Aastuye*, meaning "appreciation". It is this initiation for adults that has been elaborated as well as contracted into the modern "navjote" for minors among Parsis. Among Iranian Zoroastrians, the age does not matter.

MARRIAGE

Gatha Vahishta Ishti gives a glimpse of the marriage of Pouruchista, the youngest daughter of Zarathushtra. The girl was given the freedom to choose her partner. She did it with the sole aim of serving the noble cause of the Good Religion. Tradition says, it was Jamaspa, the sage, who later succeeded Zarathushtra as the Teacher. Zarathushtra found the opportunity to immortalize his marriage sermon addressed to all uniting couples: "The reward of the Magnanimity Fellowship; shall be yours as long as you remain united in weal and woe with all your in wedlock... May each of you win the other through righteousness."

BIRTH AND DEATH

The Gathic texts are silent over the birth ceremony. Similarly, they do not mention any rituals for the dead or prescribe any mode of disposal of corpses. Zarathushtra says, "The Wise God knows best every person of mine for his or her veneration done in accordance with righteousness. I shall, on my part, venerate such persons, passed away or living, by their names and shall lovingly encircle them" (S 16.22)⁹. This shows that he always remembered those who worked for the cause of righteousness. A sublime way to show respect to the dead and the living. It is this extraordinary respect and love shown by him that created the beautiful tradition of commemorating outstanding men and women for their services on the Memorial Day, the ten days at the end of the year, called *Farvardagaan* in Persian and *Muktad* in Gujarati.

In fact, the Gathic texts, followed by many liturgical pieces in the Vispered and the Yasna, are not concerned with death. To them every righteous person is "progressive, eternal, ever gaining, and ever growing... because he or she lives a life of good mind." (Haptanghaiti Song 5)¹⁰. The texts speak of the soul as if it were in a living body and not of a departed person. Death does not scare or haunt the Gathic righteous. It appears that the Gathic texts have left the birth and death ceremonies to the discretion of the people to wisely act as time and place warrant.

⁹ Y 51.22

¹⁰ Y 39

Zarathushtra, enlightened and progressive as he was, did not present a **ritual-less** religion. He also did not give a **ritual-ridden** cult. As such, his Gathas focus on teaching us the Primal Principles of Life, and yet, as sublime songs, inspire us to offer our prayers to God and to begin every new turn in our life in a ceremonial way. They do offer adaptable guidelines to ceremonies, because, as beautifully put by the late Dastur Dr. Maneckjee N. Dhalla, the Zarathushtrian sage of our times: “Ritual is not religion; but it is a powerful aid to religious life. It feeds the emotional nature of man which plays the most prominent part in religious life. It inspires devotional fervour and purity of thought.”

Rituals, in and of itself, are neither good nor bad. If our rituals are true to the teachings of Zarathushtra, if they are beautiful and inspiring, leading us to a deeper understanding of and commitment to the Good Religion, then they are good. But if they are unintelligible, if they are devoid of meaning, if they do not impart the truths of the religion to the faithful, if they are a monopolized performance by a certain class of privileged persons, and if the laity have to sit silent and understand nothing, then they are worse than useless.

The Gathas do not prescribe rigid rituals but show us the way to sublime ceremonies in every walk of our life, from birth to death; ceremonies which are flexible enough to undergo changes to suit times, climes, and cultures, and yet raise our souls to greater heights, give us the encouragement we need, and help us to enjoy the commitments we make.

The ceremonies performed by the Zarathushtrian Assembly are reconstructed on a Gathic basis. They have values and meanings that give joy, satisfaction, and above all, lasting inspiration. Many of the current ceremonies among the Zoroastrian community have some roots in the Gathic tradition. Therefore, with an eye to our long past, as much as possible of the traditional ceremonies have been retained without violating Gathic principles, and at the same time endeavoring to speak in a clear voice to a new generation and a new age. While the Gathas continue to be our Guide in all our thoughts, words, and deeds, the model ceremonies, Gathic and in the Gathic traditions, will maintain for us one more living link with the pristine past, the progressive present, and a fruitful future.

The Gathas and their supplements in the Gathic dialects depict plain prayer rituals, a sincere marriage ceremony, interesting initiation rites, and honoring the living for their services, and remembering the dead for their deeds. Above all, they impart a thought-provoking message, **Māñthra**, to humanity at large. Simple, sublime and suited to all times and climes!

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 11 – *THE GAHANBARS AND THE GATHAS*

SEASONAL FESTIVALS

Zarathushtra, himself born in an agricultural environment, preached and spread his Good Religion among people engaged in crop cultivation and animal husbandry. His dynamic message introduced a completely new order in spiritual, or better as he put it, “mental” sphere and purged out all evil and superstitious thoughts, misleading words, and harmful deeds, but helped to strengthen and promote all the then-existing constructive activities of a good living.

The agricultural people were in tune with nature in their day-to-day life. They fully knew the solar and lunar movements and the changes in the seasons. They had timed their activities to suit the climate in which they lived. This timetable kept in step with *saredha*, the tropical solar year of 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 45.5 seconds, but differed a little on certain points. Their activities were scheduled to correspond with various phases of their agricultural life. It was divided into six phases. The end of one phase and the beginning of other were celebrated as a special time of festivity. The six festivals were known as *Yâiryâ Ratu*, the rightful yearly rite. *Yâiri* means ‘year’, solar or not, perhaps because the festivals were not precisely based on regular seasonal changes, but as said, to suit the particular climate of the people concerned. And this is a particular point to note. The six seasonal festivals were:

- (1) *Hamaspathmaidhaya*, meaning ‘vernal equinox’, the 1st day of Farvardin, the beginning of spring, on or about 21st March, was to celebrate the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. It was, according to the Avesta, the time to “properly set” everything and prepare for the new year.
- (2) *Maidhyoi-zaremayâ* (‘Mid–spring’), 14th day of Ardibehesht, on or about 4th May, was the time to celebrate the occasion for the cattle having delivered their young and yielded “abundance of milk” and also for appraising the crops sown in late winter or early spring.
- (3) *Maidhyoi-shema* (‘Mid–summer’), 12th day of Tir, on or about 3rd July, was the beginning of the harvesting season.
- (4) *Paitish-hahya* (‘Grain–reaping’), 25th day of Shahrivar, on or about 16th September, marked the end of harvesting.
- (5) *Ayâthrima* (‘no–travel’), 24th day of Mehr, on or about 16th October, was to enjoy the end of trade caravans and the time to mate cattle before the winter set in.
- (6) *Maidhyâyryâ* (‘Mid–year’), 15th day of Dey, on or about 4th January, heralded the passing of the winter peak and for making preparations to meet the spring with agricultural activity.

It may be noted that the seasonal quarters and semi-quarters fall the 1st and 16th days of *Fasli* or “seasonal” months, on or about 4th May, 22nd June, 7th August, 23rd September, 7th November, 22nd December, and 5th February. Only the first two festivals coincided with the solar seasonal changes. The others were purposely put off to meet the living conditions. They were not “calenderically” or traditionally bound but were very practical people, a point to note.

Most probably the festivals were celebrated by pre-Zarathushtrian people with sacrifices to gods and goddesses and by indulging in a joyous festivity.

CHANTING AND FEASTING

Avestan evidences, particularly the book of the *Vispered*, show that the early Zarathushtrians turned the seasonal festivity into an occasion to fit into their new pattern of life. Each festival was traditionally celebrated for one and later for five days. They were devoted to reciting, chanting, explaining, understanding, and holding questions-and-answers on each of the five Gathas of Asho Zarathushtra. The festival was rounded up with a feast prepared by collective participation and efforts, and merrymaking. A piece in the Avesta directs that all participants should bring whatever they can afford—meat, vegetables, legumes, grain, other food ingredients, and firewood. If one was not in a position to contribute in kind, one might put his or her labor in preparing the food in a common pot, or just join the prayers. The food, with a large variety of ingredients, was a tasty stew, resembling today's more sophisticated *âsh* or the Parsi spiced *dhansâk*, both relished on the occasion. Merrymaking was the fold music and dances still observed among Iranian tribes all over the Iranian Plateau and beyond.

GÂHÂNBÂR

The word *Gâthâ* was eased into *Gâs* and *Gâh* in Pahlavi or Middle Persian. *Gâsân* or *Gâhân* is the plural form and in Pahlavi and Zoroastrian Persian, it always means the ‘five Gathas’ and nothing else. *Bâr* in Pahlavi and Persian means ‘occasion, time, turn’. The Persian name for the festival is *Gâhânbâr*, the turn (to turn to) the Gathas. The folk etymology of *gâh-anbâr* (timestack), which should grammatically be *anbâr+gâh* (stack-time), is of only recent interpretation by persons either not knowing Pahlavi and Zoroastrian Persian or not understanding the significance of the festival in connection with the Gatha recitation. *Ghambâr* is Parsi Gujarati.

Why was so much importance given to the Gathas? The answer is provided by the Yasna (chapters 55 and 58) and the *Vispered* (chapters 13–14, 16, 18–24). They say: The Gathas “are the Primal Principles of Life, [and] we wish to maintain our lives fresh as is the will [of Ahura Mazda]... They are our guardians and protectors. They are food for our minds, in fact, they are food and clothing for our souls... We recite, sing, learn, memorize, chant from memory, practice, and teach them... We esteem each and every word, line, stanza, and song—the entire bound (book) of the Gathas... We also esteem all the questions and answers exchanged in regards to them.”

The Gathas, as said earlier, are prayers to God and guidance for humanity. They are communion with God, and at the same time, they impart an eternally modern message. The Gathas lead humanity, with all its modern science, to Mazda Ahura, the Super-Wise God. With the Gathas as the guide in thought, word, and deed, one may devote one's good life to learning, practicing, teaching, and preaching the divine doctrine.

The Zarathushtrian Assembly has revived the true Gâhânbâr spirit. It celebrates the Gâhânbârs by an opening prayer appropriate to the Gâhânbâr concerned; the recitation, explanation, and questions-and-answers of one Gathic song; an enlightening talk; collectively provided stewed dish (both *âsh* and *dhansâk*), potluck, and refreshments; and music and dance.

THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Part 12 – *RELIGION AND TRADITION*

BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR

Religion, as defined by Webster's Dictionary, is, among other things, “any specific system of belief, worship, conduct, etc., often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy; an institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices”; and also “a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held with ardor and faith.” It is derived from the Latin *religio*, meaning ‘reverence’, which in turn is derived from *religare*, ‘to bind back’. It is, in fact, a bond. Tradition is defined to be “the delivery of opinions, doctrines, practices, rites, and customs from generation to generation by oral communication. It is an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom).” It is in theology, an unwritten saying, action or a code of laws attributed to the founder and the earlier promoters of a religion. It is derived from the Latin *traditio*, meaning ‘action of handing over’ from *tradere* ‘to deliver’.

The difference between a religious practice and a social custom is rather a new concept. In ancient times—times, during which most of the existing religions were founded—every social custom was, sooner or later, accepted as a religious practice. Therefore, Religion and Tradition are almost taken to belong to each other, so much so that some would take the two as synonyms. That explains why the zealous are so zealous to maintain traditions as a religious obligation. To them, every tradition is but a religious tenet.

GOOD CONSCIENCE

Turning to the Zarathushtrian religion, the conscientious term, most probably coined and used first by the founder, Zarathushtra, is *Daênâ*. It is derived from the Avestan root *di-* or *dai-* (Sanskrit *dhyai-*), meaning to ‘see, view, perceive, contemplate, ponder, mediate’ with a participle suffix *-nâ-*. *Daênâ* means ‘conscience, discernment, insight’ and, of course, ‘religion’. It is, according to Zarathushtra, one's discerning insight that forms one's religion, in fact, conviction. The Indian term *dhyana*, the ‘focusing of thoughts to comprehend a fact, meditation,’ is a cognate.

But while the Indian *dhyâna* helps an individual to concentrate to promote his or her own individual mental faculty, the Zarathushtrian *Daênâ* unites all those who think, discern, and choose alike in one great fellowship of conviction—the religion of Good Conscience, *Daênâ Vanguhi*—founded, preached and promoted by Zarathushtra. Zarathushtra uses the term *Daênâ* for a total of 26 times in his sublime songs, the Divine Gathas.

The gist: Daênâ is thinking and awakening. It goes with one's intellect. It is wisdom and enlightenment. It is proper knowledge. It promotes precision and righteousness. It encourages one to turn to work to make a better life. It grants true happiness. It gives peace and stability. It purifies one's mind; so much so that one engaged in good thoughts, words, and deeds, becomes godlike—creative, maintainer, and promoter of the world one lives in. Says Zarathushtra: That religion (Daênâ) is the best for the living, which promotes the world through righteousness, and polishes words and actions in serenity. (Song 9.10¹) Daênâ, or religion, to Zarathushtra is the straight path of truth that takes coordinating people ever forward to improvement in their mental and physical, spiritual and material life until they reach their ultimate goal Ahura Mazda, God Wise. Daênâ is a conscious forward march to perfection. It is the march of a perfecting life to eternity and divinity.

INHERITED PRACTICE

Tradition, on the other hand, is an inherited religious practice or a social custom, which was, in the near or far past, introduced first by certain circumstances and then perpetuated by following generations. An urgent need to meet an exceptional event may linger long, a human experience over a length of time may turn into a custom, a social behavior in face of a particular event may continue; and a practice, born of a belief in an abnormal occurrence or an extraordinary experience, may turn into a tradition with the passage of time. Invasion, conquest, occupation, captivity, slavery, forced labor, forced marriage, and socialization as well inter religious rivalry also help to introduce, innovate, change, transform, hinder, stop, erase, or kill a tradition. It has many a cause to fall into a firm form. Created, adopted, borrowed, or imposed, once it becomes a tradition, people practicing it develop a kind of attachment to it. That makes them bound to it so much so that sometimes it becomes hard to introduce a change in it, leave aside abandoning it. In the ancient past, this attachment generally gave the tradition a religious hue, a hue that made it a part and parcel of religion.

Once a part and parcel of religion, the origin of the tradition is, often with a touch of miracle, attributed to a popular religious celebrity. It is here that all practices concerning various phases of life, from birth through initiation into the society, marriage, parentage, and death, take a religious form. Even eating, clothing, waking, walking, working, running, resting, sleeping, and socializing have their religious ways of performing them. Tradition, religious or not, is present in every movement one makes, private, personal, or otherwise. It becomes the *prescription* for life. The terms religion and tradition are, as earlier stated, used not only as cognates but also as synonyms.

WIDENING GAP

A tradition, when originally born, could have been fully justified and useful. But the passing time brings changes into a society. Furthermore, a tradition, however simple in origin, is

¹ Yasna 44.10

generally elaborated, supplemented, and even complicated by the following generations practicing it. With the social changes on the one hand and the elaborations on the other, the gap between the practical social life and the complicated, often mute, religious practices widen. In other words, every tradition does not go hand in hand with the changes in society.

There arises a conflict in adhering to the tradition or keeping pace with the changes. The conflict hinders the smooth running of the social order. And if the conflict takes a sad turn, those hotly involved in it hardly think that it is the gap of time between the tradition and the progress made by the society that started the conflict. The conflict divides the society between those in favor of maintaining the tradition and those in favor of a change.

Names are labeled: Orthodox, traditionalist, fundamentalist, liberal, reformist, progressive, etc. Some are used in a sarcastic and derogatory way and others, on the contrary, in a dignified, respectful, or complimentary way. Even disrespectful words and abusive language are used. Those attached to a tradition, which appears to have outdated itself, try their best to justify its continuance. They generally turn to interpretations, which turn an ordinary old custom into a highly symbolized, rather mystified rite. Some go to extremes to show that the practices introduced by ancient “sages” are much more advanced than the present practical changes, and therefore are incomprehensible to modern minds. Occult definitions may not confound every intellectual, but they do make many a layman feel too simple to comprehend the “transcendental” interpretations. Interpretations, particularly by vociferous zealots, do work—sometimes with miraculous effects among the laity.

PRESERVATIVE RESERVATION

The zeal shown by the traditionalists is quite understandable. It is religious ardor, rooted religiosity. But what is surprising is that nowadays one comes across persons outside a religious order who favor not only the adherence of traditions by its followers but advocate strict observations of traditional rites even under unfavorable and unpractical circumstances. Scholars of religion, although themselves professing another religion or following their own schools of thought, write treatises and give lectures on the importance of keeping the customs they feel are in danger of extinction. The smaller a community and the older the customs, the more the emphasis on turning the “endangered” community into a closed-door “reservation” in order to help the faithful to preserve and practice their traditional rites.

These scholars would go to great lengths in explaining the highly “symbolic” values of the practices, which they see as being abandoned by younger generations because the youth, rightly or not, consider them outdated and therefore, unwanted. It is odd enough to witness a person who personally does not believe at all in a doctrine take quite an interest in indoctrinating the believers in preserving the doctrine. An unconscious faith, a latent belief, a hidden love, an elderly advice, a scholarly sympathy, an anthropological interest, a disparaging intention, a mischievous motive?

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However, this does not mean in the least that every custom or practice outdates itself and therefore, becomes unwanted. Those attached to humanity appear eternal. Worship, festivity, initiation, matrimony, fellowship, hospitality and other occasions warrant traditional customs. They have their places in a society. And they have their true values.

Zarathushtra uses Daênâ 26 times but does not mention tradition even once. The reason: That divine foreseer knew well that while Daênâ is a living truth, tradition is but a custom, always subject to changes under changing circumstances. It is obvious that he wanted the religion to last. Binding it with the customs and practices of his days would have numbered the days of the religion too. He had to choose between the two for the survival of his message. And quite naturally and of course dutifully, he chose to perpetuate his message. This does not mean that he did not favor maintaining useful traditions. His guiding Gathas and other texts in the Gathic dialect composed by his companions and immediate successors as well as other parts of the later Avesta provide us with good hints on traditions.

WORSHIPING TO WORK

The discovery of igniting and maintaining fire was the prime cause that separated man from other animals and firmly put man on the express road to progress. Fire was, but naturally, worshipped as a deity by many peoples, including the Aryans. As an altar for worship, many religious orders and cults offered their sacrifices to it. Solid and liquid foods were fed to fire to turn them into smoke and send them up for the “beings on high”.

Zarathushtra purified it of all its smoking and seething elements—meat, fat, butter, grain, fruit and other eatable sacrifices. He turned it into a bright blaze (Song 4.19, 15.9²) to face and concentrate his thoughts on Mazda (The story of him carrying a smokeless fire vase to King Vishtaspa need not be a legend). For him fire, much more mental than physical, symbolized light, warmth and energy for a good guidance to steer clear through difficulties to peace and progress in soul and body (Song 4.4, 7.4, 8.4 & 9, 11.7, 12.6³).

His companions had an open fire enclosure, much as the later Achaemenians did, for congregational prayers where they worshipped only and only God Wise (Haptanghaiti: Song 2⁴). Still later, in an older part of Âtash Nyâyesh, we learn that all that the “hearth fire”, called divine, expected as an offering was words of praise, greeting, and triumph and no fuming food. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra prays with his head bowed in homage and hands raised in request to God. He composes fresh songs to adore God and pour his love for Him. He has the brightly burning and warming fire on the altar; sun, moon, and stars in the sky; and water and any other inspiring objects in the beautiful nature around him to face and break into devotional songs to perform his

² Yasna 31.19, 51.9

³ Yasna 31.3, 34.4, 43.4 & 9, 46.7, 47.6

⁴ Yasna 36

prayers. The Haptanghaiti and other sections of Yasna show, as already said, that congregational prayers were held in communal enclosures and the Gathas by Zarathushtra and the supplement songs composed by his companions were sung in solemn company.

The Iranian Plateau, situated between 25 and 55 latitudes north of the equator, had and has all the four seasons. As farmers and cattle raisers, the Iranians had their agricultural seasons—six of them. They celebrated the end of each season. The Vispered shows that the early Zarathushtrians—most probably since the days of Zarathushtra—turned the six festivals into thanksgiving occasions. They are, what we call, the “Gâhânbârs”, each lasting for five days. The thanksgiving ceremony was performed by singing the five Gathas, and studying and explaining them, most probably one Gatha per day. A feast, collectively arranged and prepared, followed to everyone’s delight. Worship and work, work and worship, the two went well together.

SERENE CEREMONIES

Initiation or Navjote is another tradition kept alive and lively by Zarathushtra. He speaks about it as the great event of decision (Song 3.2⁵), and mentions the initiation of King Vishtaspa, Ferashaoshtra, Jamaspa, and his own cousin Maidyoi-maha (Song 11.14–15, 14.9, 16.16–19⁶). His companions have an initiation ceremony in their fire enclosure and call it the greatest event (Haptanghaiti Song 2⁷). The Fravarti (Yasna 11.17 to 12.9) provides a vivid description of early initiation of adults into the Good Religion. The Nirangistan supplies us with more information on Navjote, koshti, and sadreh (Book III, Chapters 1–6). The Initiation ceremony’s “Choice of Religion” formula—*Mazdayasno ahmi...* and other pieces in the Gathic dialect—supply the core of the koshti prayers.

The marriage of Pouruchista, Zarathushtra’s youngest daughter, forms a touching scene and a future marriage guide in Gatha Vahishta Ishti. The tradition of having marriages solemnized in the language spoken by the bride and the bridegroom, lasting as long as Persian remained the common language of the population in Iranian and Indian regions, shows that it beautifully changed its languages from the Gathic dialect of 3700 years ago to Neo Persian almost 200 years ago. Today it is again because of tradition that marriages are performed in an archaic, unintelligible language, although some do augment it with a translation in the language the marrying couple and the audience understand.

Birth of a child is hailed in the Avesta, but no rite is mentioned. However, the Farvardin Yasht shows that Zarathushtra’s birth anniversary was eulogized for celebration (stanzas 93–94). Greek historian Herodotus speaks of Persians celebrating their birthdays at a time when other nations are not reported to do so, a sign that birthday celebration is an Iranian innovation and a contribution to world festivity. The names given to early, new Zarathushtrian-by-Choice and their children—Paourutkaesha and Nabanazdishta—in the Farvardin Yasht have none of the old

⁵ Yasna 30.2

⁶ Yasna 46.14 & 15, 49.9, 51.16–19

⁷ Yasna 36

deities, not even those who later emerged as Yazatas, attached to them. This significant point reveals that good care was taken to rename newcomers and name children in the spirit of the dynamic message of Zarathushtra void of older traditions. At the same time, it shows that there was a birth and naming ceremony.

Zarathushtra introduced the practice of eulogizing people during their lifetime and after their death. He venerates them by mentioning their names and by “lovingly encircling them” (Song 16.22⁸). The remembrance of the good is echoed in the *Yenghe Hatam* prayer in which respects are paid to men and women for their righteous services. The Farvardin Yasht is an outstanding tribute to the memory of those who chose and served the Good Religion in its initial stages, from Zarathushtra and companions to three or more generations after. The Gathas and supplements do not mention any funeral rites but pay full respects to the memory of the departed. It is the memorial service they *emphasize* and not the method of disposal of the dead body.

All these and yet we do not see the Gathas prescribe: “What to eat and what to reject. What to wear and what to tear. What to build and what to burn. What pollutes and what cleans. How to wash and how to dry. When to work and when to retire. When to celebrate and when to mourn. What is the disease and what the cure. What the dead and what the corpse...”

Was Zarathushtra unconcerned with the daily life? No, never! Could he not prescribe in detail all walks of life? Could he not put taboos? Of course, he could. But he lived a physical life of his age—almost 4,000 years ago. He divinely knew well the changing world. Any prescription on daily living would grow old and out-of-date, and if it became a tradition to be adhered to, it would prove an obstruction. Zarathushtra believed in continuous and constant renovation of life. He says: “May we be among those who make this life fresh! You lords of wisdom, and you, who bring happiness through righteousness, come let us be single-minded in the realm of inner intellect” (Song 3.9⁹). He has left the job to the “lords of wisdom” of every age to unite in mind through righteousness and inner intelligence and continue refreshing and renovating the life on earth. Time does not stop, why should “social life” stop and stagnate.

GAINING TO LAST

Thus, we see that all the good traditions were kept by the earliest of Zarathushtrians. Some were simplified, some streamlined, and some changed to suit the new spirit. It was only the magical, superstitious, superficial, superfluous, intoxicating, and bloody rituals performed in the names of gods and goddesses, which were totally renounced and discarded (Yasna 12). Later, as always has been the case, all the ceremonies, performed by the early generations and many more introduced by following generations, were elaborated. Institutionalization of a practice constitutes a part of the process of a tradition. In fact, traditions are maintained by their institutionalized forms.

⁸ Yasna 51.22

⁹ Yasna 30.9

Nevertheless, Daênâ as religion has its own place in the Gathas. It is the guiding insight to a progressing life. While the sublime songs mention worship with a bowed head and raised hands, and a blazing fire and allude to initiation, marriage, and memorial ceremonies, other Avestan texts describe various rituals maintained as tradition in the forms given to them by the Good Religion during the early Avestan period. The difference between the eternal principles of Daênâ and the temporal customs of tradition are evident. In no place in the Avesta, rituals and other practices have been termed as the “principles” of the religion. Traditions live and leave, practices veer and vary, and rituals wax and wane, but Daênâ , the religion of insight, the conviction by reason, lasts and lasts—“ever gaining, ever winning.”