

# The Gathas Forever

*Ali A. Jafarey*

The Zarathushtrian Assembly  
Anaheim, California, U.S.A.

Religion, in its true literal meaning, “binds together”. People of a religion are bound together in belief, worship, conduct, practice, rituals, and ethical values.

Most of the religions have their mystic myths, long legends, short stories, timed creation, flat geography, fantastic astrology, elementary astronomy, rich rituals, elaborate customs, and above all, hundreds of prescriptions and still hundreds of more proscriptions as the fundamentals of the creed. People are “bound together” to believe, obey and observe all these tenets, or to be more correct, “commandments” without any questions. No questions, no reflections, only follow the “prescriptions”. They are, what a dear friend of mine has rightly termed, “Prescriptive Religions”.

Perhaps this is a major reason why some religions call God or a religious leader as “Shepherd”, “Pastor”, “Father”, and other similar names, and the followers as “flock”, “fold”, “sheep”, and “children”. A shepherd is a driver and not a guide. A child is taken and not led. There are followers who fully act like the sheep do. They are driven every inch from the fold to the pasture and back. Others are “children”. They do things just because Dad/Mom tells them or does so. No initiative, no quest.

Any question, relaxation, or disobedience had/has its repercussion. This could range from excommunication to banishment, physical punishment, torture, mutilation, and/or death. History has all these on record, and media reporters and historians are at this very moment reporting current forms of religious atrocities in many places of the globe. Inquisition, holy war, massacre, atrocity, assassination and other brutal acts have all been committed in the name of religion. Those who fall short of applying physical force always resort to repeated rumors, lies, distortion, uproar, and blasphemy. In spite of all the claims of “love”, anger accompanies such creeds.

There are some religious “authorities”, especially from the newly founded religions, who have their own passive way of controlling their followers. They call it “moderation”. Questions and inquiries are moderated, and only those are answered which fall within the prescribed framework of “religion”. Any other reaction and the questioning person is silently “excommunicated”. Some are boycotted to their social and economic downfall.

The “commandments” of prescriptive religions belong to the period of their respective institutionalization. That period could date back from the time the religion was founded to the time it took its institutionalized form—the early few decades to several centuries. This makes possible that with the passage of time, many of the early formalized “commandments” become outdated and impractical. Once impractical, they are not observed by every follower. While

many continue to obey them, some come out to disown them. Open defiance would mean “disobedience”.

What makes one person openly disobey a prescription and the other to blindly obey a proscriptio? Knowledge and lack of knowledge, science and ignorance. One comes to know the impracticality of the prescription, and the other never thinks of any such possibility. One sees that it has been antiquated by science. The other does not bother to open their eyes to see the situation.

Yes, it has been the progressing science that is challenging religion. Science has cast doubts or proven contrary to what religion, or to be more correct, religiosity has in its myth, legend, story, prescription, and/or proscriptio.

The Christian Europe of the “Inquisition” fame practiced its brute suppression since the founding of the Byzantine Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE. I need not go into the atrocities committed over centuries in the name of religion. Yet Europe has put up with what it calls the Greek philosophy and has seen scientists, from Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) to Charles Robert Darwin (1809–1882), rise and challenge religiosity. In fact, Galilei's astronomy and Darwin's evolution have posed the greatest challenges for many major religions. And now the Big Bang is banging at their doors!

The war by Religiosity against Science continues but in a silent way. No more persecution of scientists. No more media outbursts against them. Religious fanatics have discovered that uproar only exposes the outdatedness of their tenets because it makes people, otherwise indifferent, inquisitive to reflect and know the facts.

How long can the laity be kept in suspense? How long would indifference help? How long would science take to awaken every human being to think for him/herself? May be long, may be not. Long or short, the writing on the wall reads that one day the people would rise to see the discerning light and would consider and reconsider the religious relics and the scientific up-to-dates.

Meanwhile, what should the faithful do? Keep away from science? What should the sciential do? Shun religion? Should there arise an order that is both religious and scientific? New religions appearing during the last century and half have proved by their very scriptures that they are faithful followers of the older “prescriptive” religions. They are equally challenged by science so much so that some dare not come out with the entire collection of the writings of their founders although these have been “revealed” in modern languages and also have had the first editions published many decades back. The faithful see only the careful selections made only to show the faith's modernity!

Is there a solution at hand? There certainly is. Europeans have their reasons to look to Greece for inspiration. But the Greek philosophy appeared, flourished and vanished among a handful of men—Thales, Pythagorus, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—between 600–322 BCE, a period of rise and fall of the Iranian empires of the Medes and Achaemenians. This period brought the

peoples of the region between the Indus and the Nile, including the Greek habitats, to share their thoughts for the first time history. The Medes and Achaemenians were Zoroastrians by faith.

That takes us way back—3,700 years—into history to understand the founding of the Zoroastrian creed. Here we see the earliest historical person who rose against religiosity. He is Zoroaster, or to correctly pronounce his full name, Zarathushtra Spitâma. He did not found a religion to bind people together. He found *Daênâ*, meaning ‘contemplation, conscience’ to unite them in a fellowship of “consciousness”. He made mankind to reflect. He founded a “reflective” religion. He called it “Daênâ Vanguhi –Good Conscience”, a way of life based on clear thinking, conspicuous consideration, and plain reflection. He is the first scientific thought-provoker.

His Gathas, a pocketbook of 17 songs or 241 stanzas, are free from “mystic myths, long legends, short stories, timed creation, flat geography, fantastic astrology, elementary astronomy, rich rituals, elaborate customs, and above all, hundreds of prescriptions and still hundreds of more proscriptions as the fundamentals”. The Gathas do not impose anything. They propose certain measures. They are a good guide to prompt a person to use, utilize, operate, exercise and exploit his/her mind for positive purposes—to think good, speak good, and do good—*Humata, Hûkhta, Hvarshata*.

In his Gathas, Zarathushtra presents a progressive monotheism. He helps people to know and realize God, the Supreme Wisdom (*Mazdâ*), the Being (*Ahura*). *Mazdâ* is the “continuous” creator, sustainer, and promoter of the universe. He is the “most progressive”. He is also transcendental and impersonal, and therefore without any pantheon at all. Yet he is so close that one can easily commune with him without any mediation.

*Ahura Mazda* has created and creates the universe by his progressive mentality (*spenta mainyu*). It is a good creation. Among his creations, he has fashioned the “joy-bringing” living world of ours on the Earth. It is guided by the “Primal Principles of Life”. The Gathas present these guidelines in a beautifully intertwined, inseparable pattern to provide one with a well-blended, progressive way of life. Here they are given separately with the sole view of giving a glimpse of the most important of them:

*Vohu Manah* ‘good mind, good thinking’. It stands for the discerning wisdom and thorough thinking required for leading a useful life. It is the generator of Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds.

*Asha* stands for ‘truth, order, righteousness’. It is the universal law of righteous precision. It may best be explained by stating that it means “to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right place, and with the right means in order to attain the right result”. It should result in constructive and loving good not only for oneself but also for one’s fellow creatures and for God. It is the positive, beneficial and unselfish precision par excellence.

*Khshathra* denotes the “power” to settle in peace. Used with the adjective of *vohu*, ‘good’ or *vairya* ‘to be chosen’, it stands for benevolent power, good rule, and the chosen order. It is chosen by free and wise people as their ideal order in spirit and matter. It is the divine dominion. It is the mental, physical, ethical, and social democracy.

*Âramaiti*, means ‘tranquility, stability and serenity’. It is peace and prosperity. When used with the adjective *spenta*, it means the “ever-increasing serene peace” achieved by adhering to the Primal Principles of Life.

*Seraosha* means “listening” to the divine voice within us to guide us on the right path. It means inspiration, divine enlightenment, and communion with God.

*Daênâ* is a person’s inner perception, the conscience. It also stands for one’s chosen religion. Zarathushtra named the religion he founded as the “Good Conscience”.

*Chisti* is “perception”, the attainment of thorough understanding.

*Ushtâ*, radiant health and happiness through enlightenment that enlightens all without discrimination.

All the above and more Primal Principles of Life given in the Gathas, when followed precisely, lead to:

*Haurvatât*, wholeness and completion. It is the perfecting process and final completion of our material and spiritual evolution. In fact, this word should be translated as “evolution” in its subtle sense.

*Ameretât* means ‘deathlessness’ and ‘immortality’. Together with *Haurvatât*, it is the ultimate goal and represents the completion of our evolutionary development and the final achievement of our life on the earth and our graduation for the life hereafter.

In short, the Primal Principles lead one and all to become “godlike” and to live with God in an eternal bliss. The blissful state is called *garo demâna*, the abode of songs, or one may as well call it “the house of music”.

The Gathas speak about *urvan*, soul, and its final destiny to “live where the Wise God lives”. but there exists no fanciful eschatology. All it says is that the soul of a wrongful person “returns” to stay in the “house of wrong” or “house of the worst mind” until it realizes the truth to progress to wholeness and immortality. Yet, this “return” does not feed one with the elaborate doctrine of “reincarnation” and “transmigration of soul” as it is found in other religions and beliefs. It is a fair deduction that a soul must evolve to become righteous to continue to live in bliss.

Every individual is explained and educated to understand that “good” or “right” is what benefits the creation around, and “bad” or “wrong” is what harms it. Good/right has better and progressive rewards and bad/wrong has bad and retarding results. Yet every individual has the full freedom of choice. Look well, consider clear, and go for your choice—right or wrong. And see the consequences—“better for good and bad for bad”—to improve yourself sooner or slower accordingly.

Ahura Mazda has endowed mankind with a powerful mentality—one which can discriminate between good and evil. Human beings are free to choose between a better or more progressive

mentality (*vahya* or *spanya mainyu*) and an evil or retarding mentality (*aka* or *angra mainyu*). The reward for the choice of the better mentality is eternal bliss, and the consequence of choosing the evil mentality is a long suffering by the soul until it is refined to achieve wholeness and immortality. Every person receives the reward for every righteous act or suffers the bad consequence for every wrong deed one does. The dualism of the Good Conscience is purely ethical and confined to human behavior only.

Everything in nature, the entire environment, is a good creation and should be looked upon as such. Light and darkness, day and night, water and plants, in fact, the very world alive with life, should be promoted according to *asha*, the universal law of nature. Mankind is not on the earth to interfere in its evolution to perfection but being creative and “godlike”, he and she should increase its pace to progress. The Gathic doctrine is a progressively ecological order. Zarathushtra stands high in protecting and promoting the environment in a happy scientific way.

Man and woman enjoy equal status. The religion of Zarathushtra is a universal religion, which knows no sex, race, color, or national barriers. It is historically the first missionary movement, a moderate movement.

Rituals, if not cumbersome, lend color to religious ceremonies. 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. These ceremonies 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 Gathas and their supplements in the Gathic dialect 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. They are modernly meaningful.

The Gathas guide us to a progressive life based on advancing systemized knowledge—science. Progressing science helps to understand the Gathic Principles better. Physics and biology, in fact, from the “a” of archeology to the “z” of zoology, every field of beneficial science strengthens the Gathas. Ignorance, lack of knowledge and blind faith, have no place in the Thought-provoking Message of Zarathushtra. All are encouraged to acquire knowledge, gain wisdom and have confidence. The Gathas work for a world of wise men and women who “rationally” follow the Principles of Life.

The Good Religion guides good to God and a good life here and beyond. It is renovating, refreshing, and promoting. It is *Daênâ Vanguhi*—Good Conscience. It is the progressive way of good life. It is rational. It is scientific. It is a scientific religion. It is both—religion and science, science and religion. The two are one in the Gathas, the Guide to “the Primal Principles of Life”.

To conclude, the Gathas, composed by Zarathushtra Spitama in 17 songs some 3700 years, are prayers to the only god realized by Zarathushtra through his contemplation, Mazda Ahura, the Super-Wisdom Being, the Creator, Maintainer and Promoter of the Universe. At the same time, they are guiding principles to lead a life of piety, progress, promotion, productivity, and prosperity to perpetuity. These basic principles activate good thinking, promote sound wisdom, advance science, give freedom of speech and action, explain good and evil, show the right path,

teach tolerance, promote activity, encourage creativity, renovate social living, rehabilitate the uprooted, unite humanity, protect environment, and establish peace. The Gathas dispel ignorance, dissolve superstitions, expose evil, and end aggression. The Gathas have steered the human race in the past, they are guiding the human race at present and they will light the human race into the future. They are the **Guide** for all times and in all climes. The Gathas are for ever.

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